Ea Vasko – Defining Darkness

The scientific definition of darkness is that the sun is 18 degrees or more under the horizon.

-Wikipedia

The main themes of my work are the perception of space and the different ways of looking. The pictures I make are often nearly abstract. I try to remove all the easily recognizable visual elements from them, so that the perception of the image becomes uneasy. By doing this I examine viewing as an act and also how the way of seeing can be affected trough the photograph. People tend to read photographs as documents, but with my work I try to question this by using different methods. I often mix real and staged situations together by using so called real places and scale models as my objects.

The starting point for making this work is a visual experience of a dark bedroom by night, with myself lying in bed sleepless, looking at the dim space around me. This experience creates a strong feeling of uncertainty. As a child, this uncertainty was caused by imaginary figures in the room: Ghosts, spies, and monsters formed by dark shapes of the curtains and the piles of clothes lying on the floor. Being in a dark place is causing a sense of insecurity due to the fact that we cannot see everything clearly. Without light we cannot be sure what we are actually seeing. This feels uncomfortable because we are used to trust our eyes.

In a dim space there is not enough colour or light for the eye to clearly perceive it. In a way, a picture taken in a clear light is a fact. It doesn't leave any room for imagination. When the object is clearly recognizable, it's also easily ignorable. Darkness instead is comparable to some sort of uncertainty. People become insecure in the darkness, because of all our senses, we trust 80-percently in our vision. So what happens when the capacity of the most powerful of our senses is disturbed? Restriction of the vision increases the intensity of looking and through this the intensity of concentration. The viewer cannot be sure of what he is seeing, so he has to fill the gaps left outside of the capability of vision with his imagination.

After dark we are dependent of the artificial light. The artificial light creates guides for us to navigate, and through that, security. By night a city is full of systems depending on lights, the traffic lights for instance. What we see after the dark is based only on artificial light and the shape created by it. The shapes look different than in the daylight: We cannot see the details, we can just make conclusions of what there is there. The absolute darkness does not exist in any place where there is people around: We need at least a little of light for the society to function after the sunset.

Looking from far above, a city seems like a chaos formed by artificial light-spots. Inside the city we are able to find the rules and the meanings of the lights and find the order in them. And in a smaller scale, in a room, the feeling of security disappears when the lights are put out. After being in the dark for a while, even a smallest glow of light in the darkness becomes very strong and significant.

Not being able to see could be interpreted as a symbol of not knowing, of not being in control. In this work I have photographed four different themes of trying to control the darkness. Through abstraction the places in the images become insignificant. By using abstraction and unsharpness to make the place disappear from the photograph, I try to imitate the experience itself that is always abstract and unrepeatable.