

MILJA LAURILA

Persons  
Projects

In her work, Milja Laurila questions the ability of a photograph to forget what it once was proof of — does an image detached from its context still remain related to the original semantic field, or transform into something else? A characteristic trait of Laurila's work is using borrowed image materials, in particular, taken from old medical books. By detaching the images from their original context, the artist places them in a challenging position; she lets them speak on their own — in their own voice. It is the editorial power of collage that allows the found photographs to project a new meaning and message. The alterations Laurila makes to the images undermines and usurps the social and political structures that underpin the original photographs. Memory, feminism, and the relationship between knowledge and unconsciousness are recurring themes

in her work. Milja Laurila was born in 1982 in Helsinki, Finland, where she lives and works today. After spending a study year at Musashino Art University, Tokyo, in 2008, Laurila graduated from the Aalto University School of Arts, Design, and Architecture in 2010.



# UNTITLED WOMEN, 2022

Laurila's series, "Untitled Women" (2021-22), comes from her discovery of a 1930s book, titled "Woman. An Historical Gynæcological and Anthropological Compendium". The book, originally published in Germany in 1885, was one of the most influential texts in the field of sexual science at the time. The book describes the female physiology from an anthropological viewpoint. It is illustrated with hundreds of photographs of naked women and children from all over the world, primarily colonized countries. The bodies are stripped from their personality, presented as exotic specimens, and referred to as mere objects. In her work, Laurila is looking to change the purpose of the original photographs and to present the women from a different perspective. By using translucent pa-

per to hide the original scientific photograph, except for the women's eyes, she is shifting the focus from the detailed assessment of the female body parts to the eyes and the power of their gaze. "Now it is them who are looking at you. How does it feel to be looked at?"



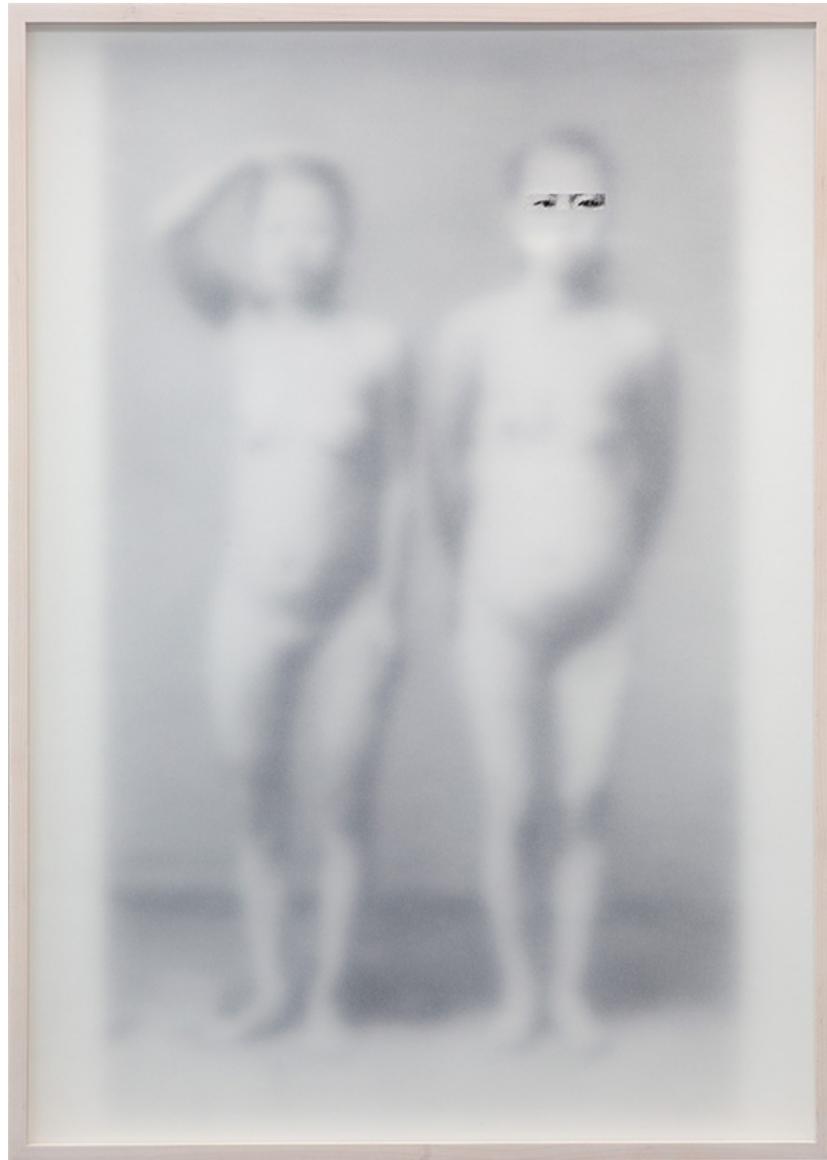
*Untitled Women, 2022, exhibition view, Persons Projects, Berlin*



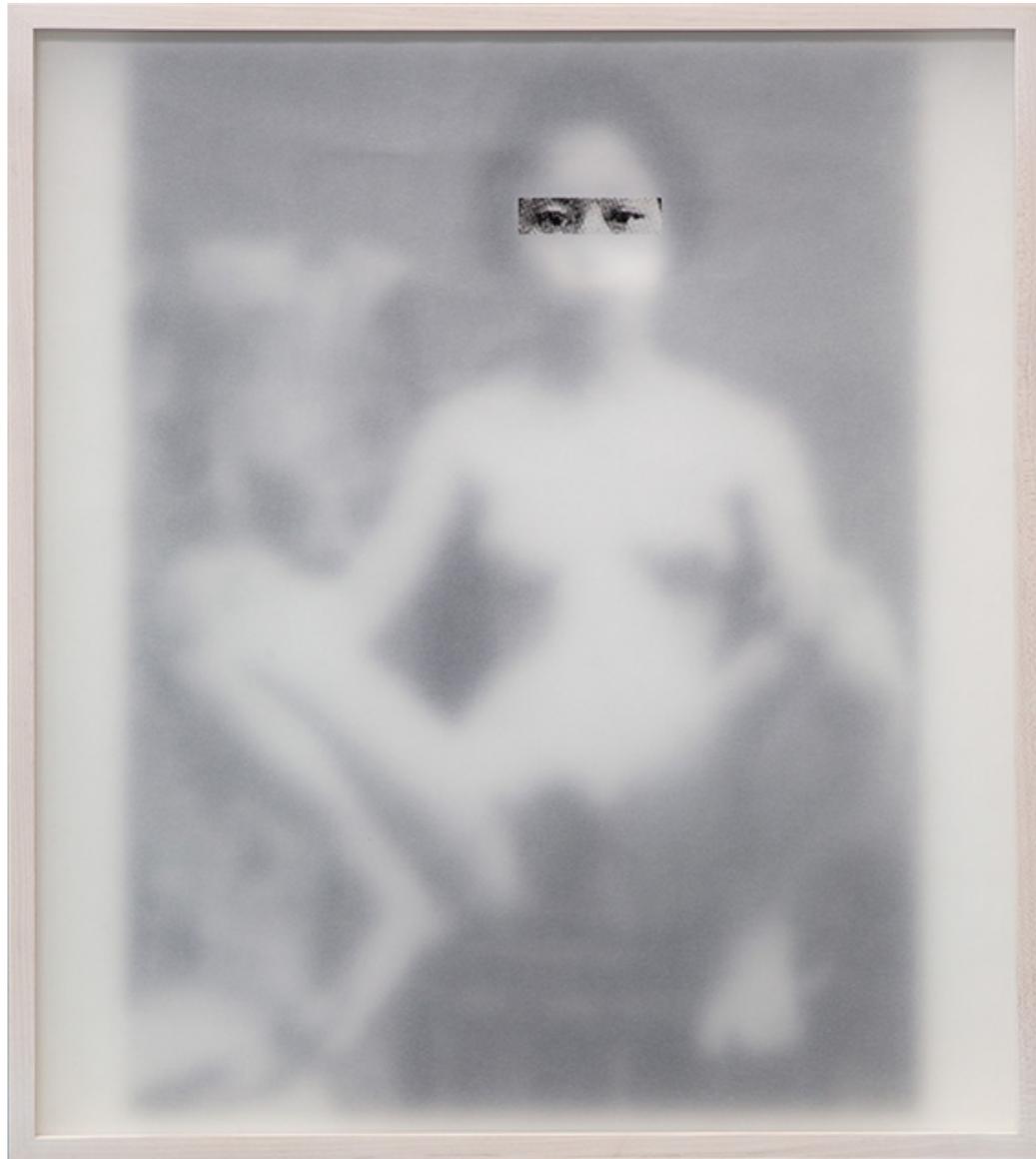
*Untied Women*, 2022, exhibition view, Persons Projects, Berlin



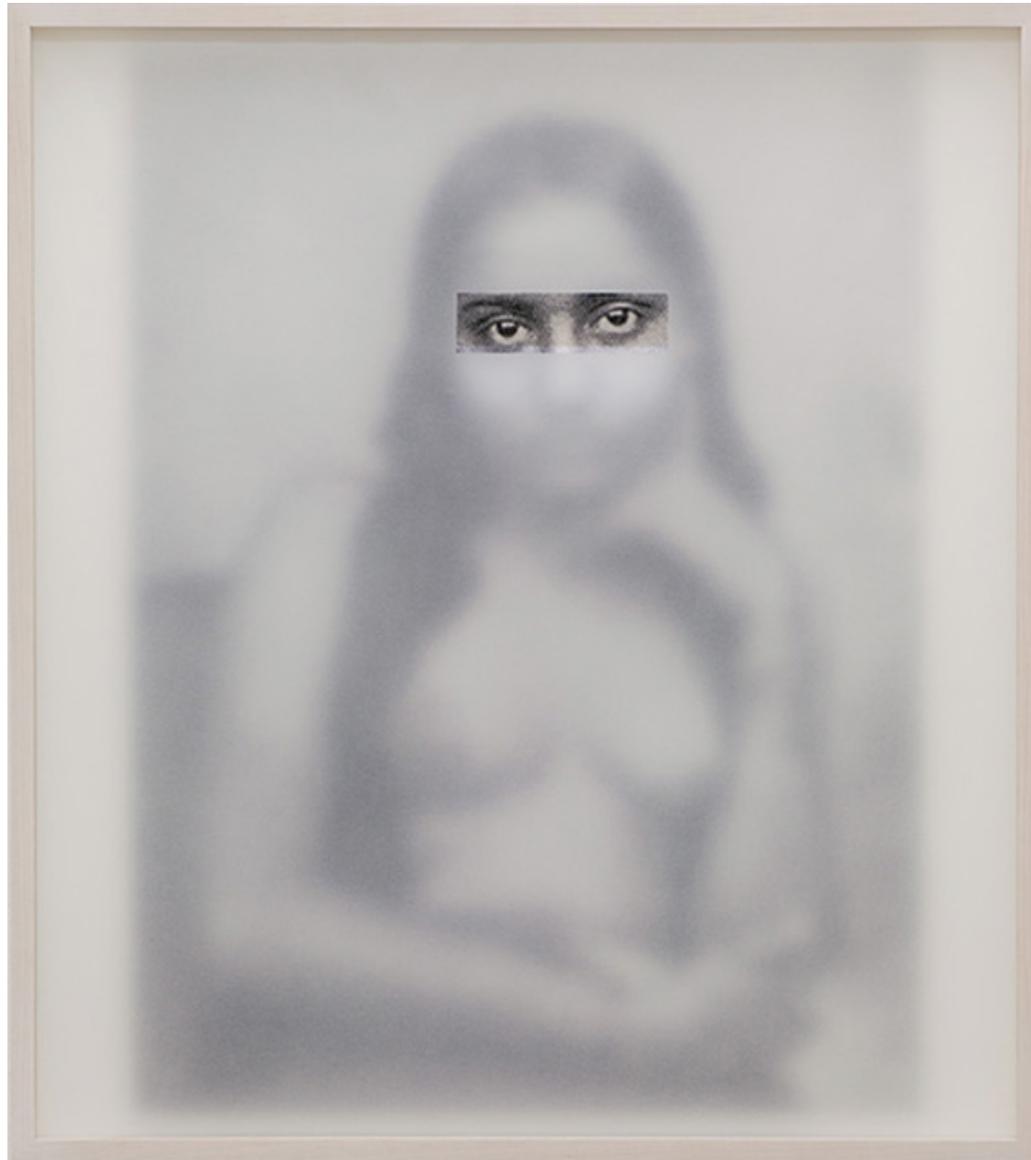
*New Perspectives Through Photography – 25 years of the Helsinki School, 2021, exhibition view, Taidehalli Helsinki*



*Untitled Woman II*, 2021, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, cut paper, 86,5 x 62 cm



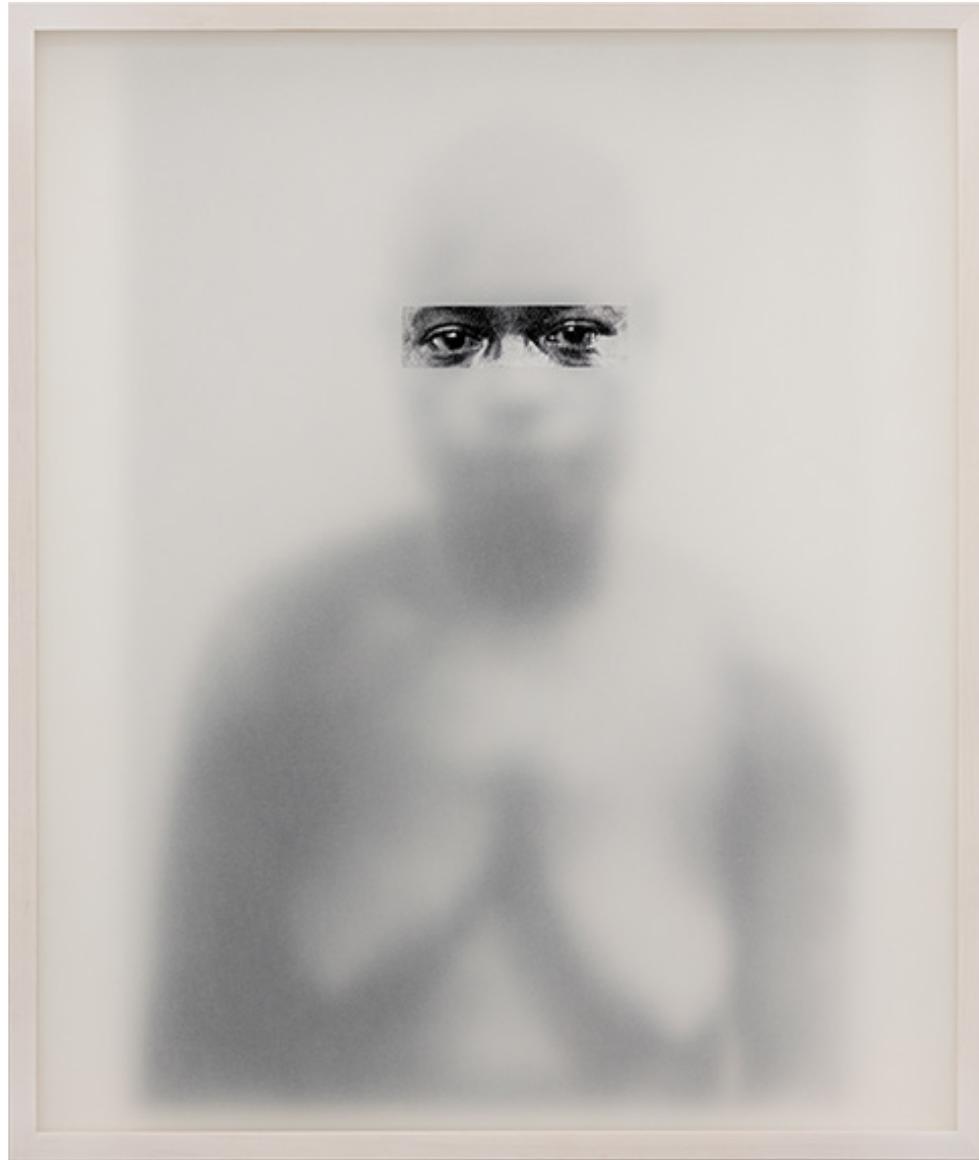
*Untitled Woman IV*, 2021, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, cut paper, 64,5 x 58 cm



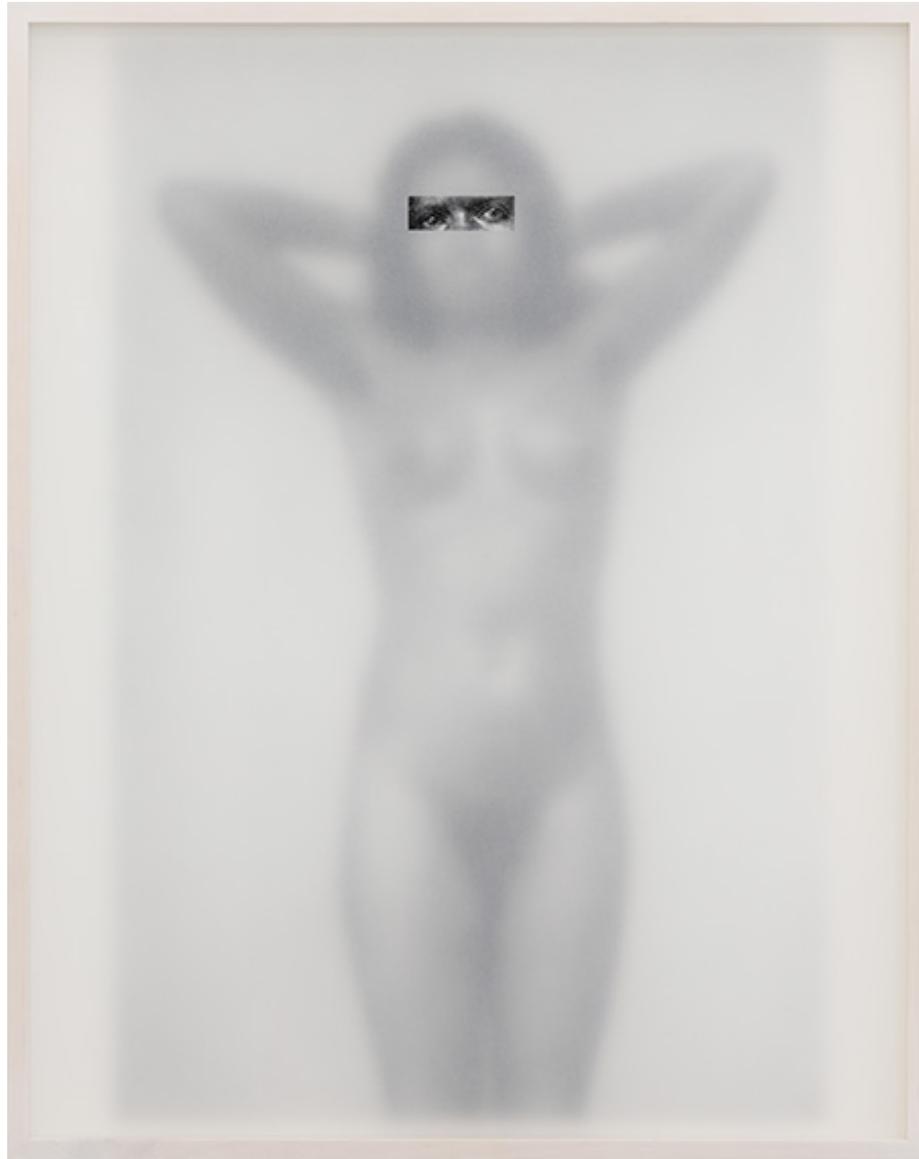
*Untitled Woman IX*, 2022, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, cut paper, 68,5 x 61,5 cm



*Untitled Woman V*, 2021, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, cut paper, 87 x 54 cm



*Untitled Woman X*, 2022, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, cut paper, 62 x 53 cm



*Untitled Woman XIII*, 2022, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, cut paper, 78,6 x 63 cm

# IN THEIR OWN VOICE, 2016

In her series “In Their Own Voice” (2016), Laurila finds the need for an explanation to be particularly strong when looking at an archival image: “You want to place it somewhere, to give it a context.” Thus, Laurila removes the captions from the archival photos in attempt to give the patients a chance to speak for themselves. Laurila’s interest in pictures of patients stems from a personal experience, where she was observed through the eyes of science. She reflects: “As I was standing naked in front of a doctor and her camera, I felt myself disappearing — I was mere flesh and blood, not an individual with thoughts and feelings. Even though the doctor was photographing my body meticulously, it felt as if she was looking right through me — as if I wasn’t there.” The images in this series are printed on transparent acrylic

glass, which makes the portrayed figures translucent, almost weightless.

The vitreous prints, which can be associated with the glass plates used in photography, work as a metaphor for the fragility of the portrayed subjects. Placed on wooden shelves facing the wall, the transparent material enables the figures to be formed through chiaroscuro as three-dimensional reflections on the walls. These soft shadows are bound to the movement of the viewer. In some of the works, the glass plates are placed on a pedestal or on the floor, facing each other. When the viewer walks around these sculptural pieces, the image changes constantly depending on the viewpoint of the observer. Laurila says that “with the help of archival imagery, this series continues my research into the perception of femininity.”



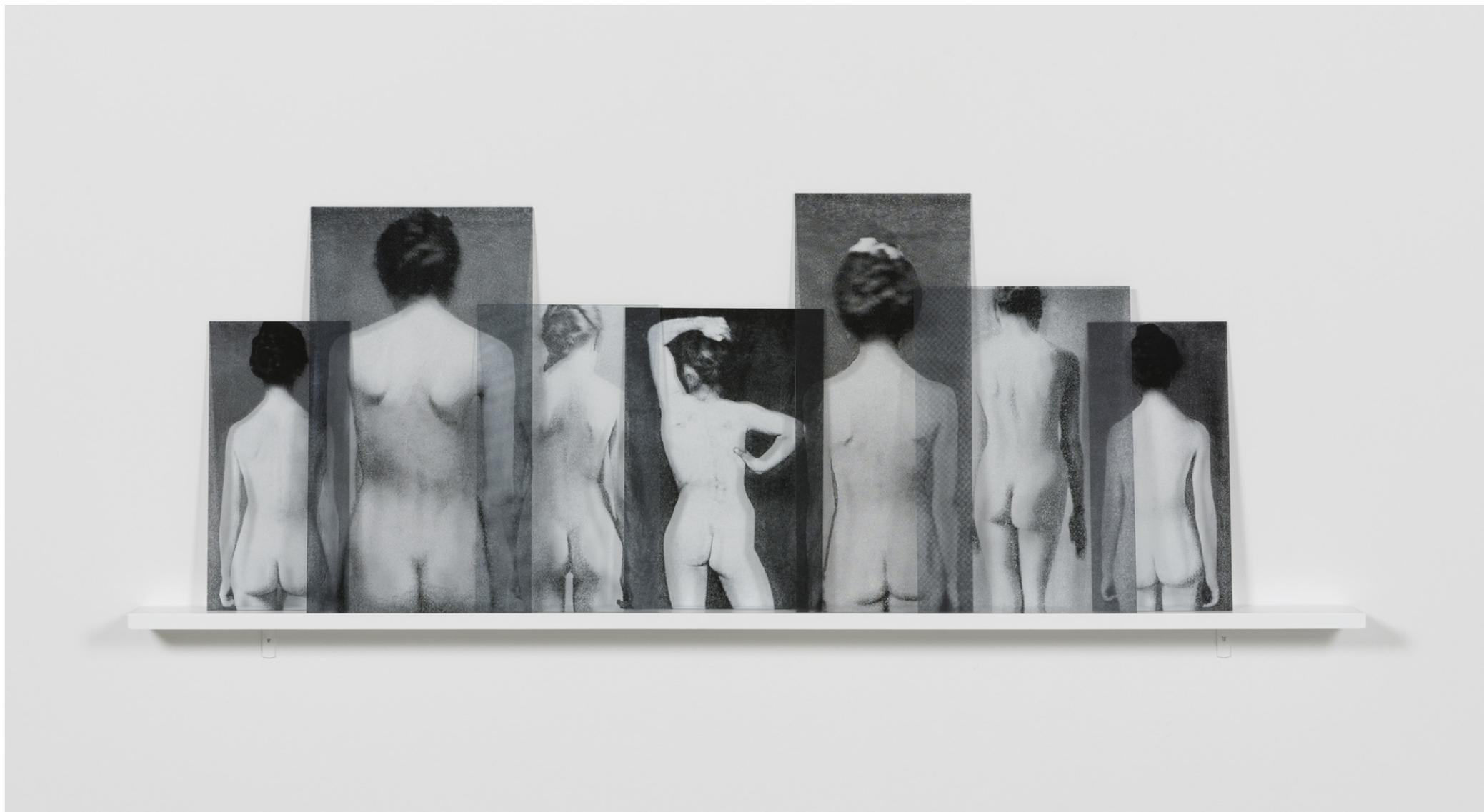
*In Their Own Voice*, 2016, exhibition view, Gallery Taik Persons (now Persons Projects)



*In Their Own Voice*, 2016, exhibition view, Gallery Taik Persons (now Persons Projects)



*Art in Medicine*, 2016, exhibition view, exhibition view at MOCAK Krakow



*Sisters*, 2016, 7 UV-prints on acrylic glass, 68 x 200 x 12 cm



*Observatory*, 2015, UV-prints on acrylic glass, 57 x 190 cm



*Echo*, 2016, UV-prints on 15mm acrylic glass, 136 x 98.5 x 98.5 cm



*Book (Woman)*, 2016, UV-prints on acrylic glass, 32 x 21,6 x 25 cm

# ATLAS UND GRUNDRISS DER PSYCHIATRIE, 2013

“They say that I am insane, but I am merely contemplating”, wrote Amanda, a patient at a mental hospital in Finland, in her diary in the late 19th century. Amanda, a vagrant and a sexually active young woman, was diagnosed with “menstrual insanity”, and was taken to Seili Island, a former leper hospital that was transformed into an institute for the mentally ill. Like most of the patients– or inmates – at Seili, Amanda spent the rest of her life there. The series “Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie” (2013) is inspired by a German psychiatric book from the year 1902. The book not only describes different types of mental diseases, but also attempts to visually demonstrate them in the form of photographic images of patients. However, the symptoms, diagnostics, and treat-

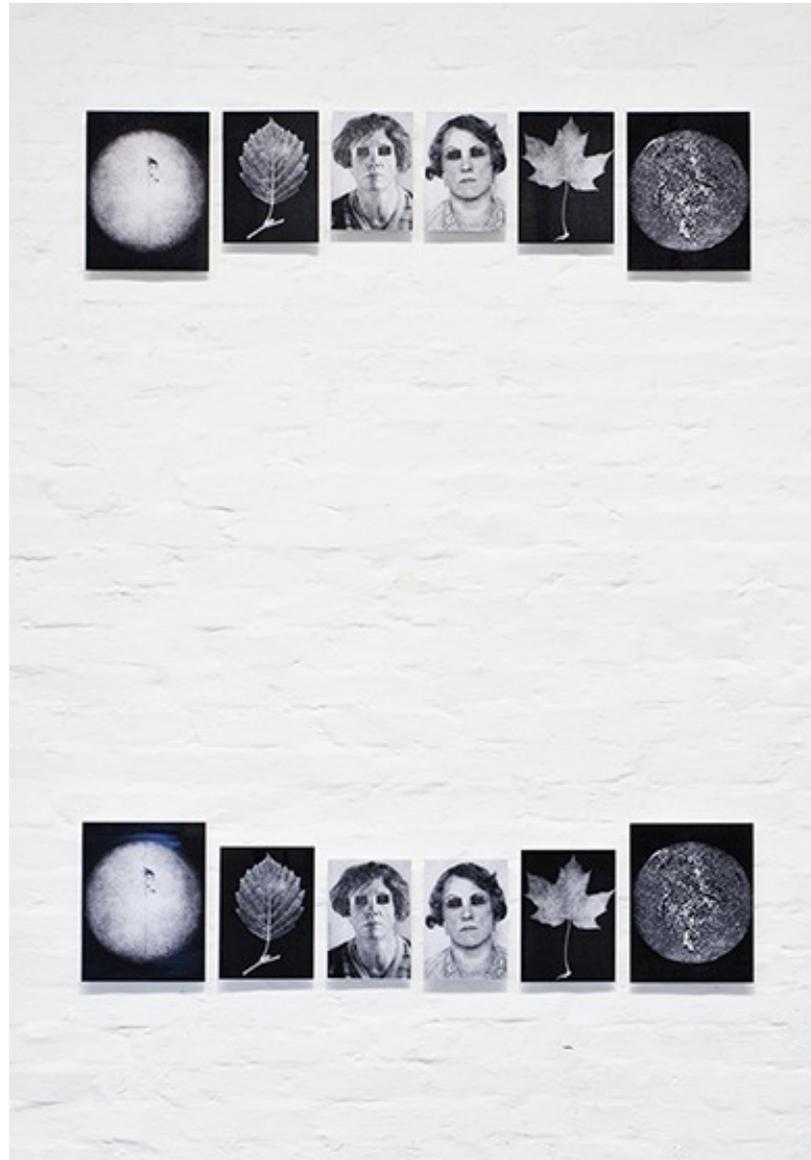
ment of mental illnesses reflect the views of their time. What is regarded as “normal” or stated as a scientific fact changes during the course of time: At the turn of the century, the hereditary of mental illness as well as degeneration was a topical issue. It was believed that mental illness manifested itself as physical signs, meaning that it could be seen. Common practice was to describe the appearance of the patients meticulously. What could be a better way to do this than photography, which had lent itself to the use of science ever since its invention? The photograph was taken as evidence, as proof. A photograph of a mental patient showed you what a mental patient looked like.



*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie* , , exhibition view "Inconsistent Ways of Seeing" at Persons Projects, 2021



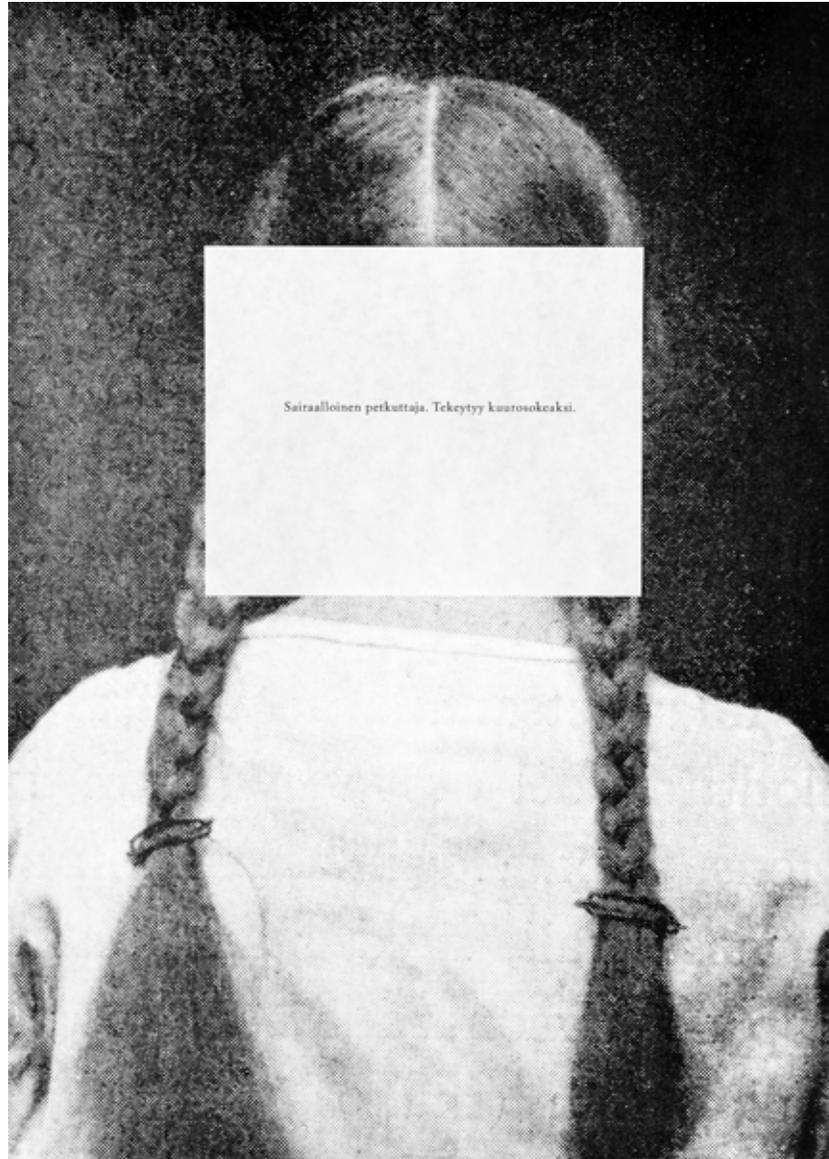
*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie* , 2013, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 12 works: variable dimensions



*The latest knowledge*, 2012, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 35 x 150 cm, Total height approx. 190



*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie (5-year-old-child)*, 2013, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 47 x 34 cm



*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie (Swindler), 2013, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 47 x 34 cm*



Astiutilassa ei muutosta. Rytmiä tie-likkeitä,  
tikuja päihin, aivan kuin ennen leikkautta.

*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie (Blows to the head)*, 2013, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 60 x 90 cm



*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie (Hand #1)*, 2013, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 47 x 34 cm



*Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie (Hand #3)*, 2013, Archival pigment print, Diasec, 22 x 15 cm