

LITTLE LANDSCAPES began with a forced stop at Gjerstad train station while traveling to Risør during the summer of 2008. I had crossed the train tracks and was taking a stroll along the platform on the other side, with a view across the lake towards some scattered houses, a farm or two, and a church – what I assumed was actually Gjerstad. Risør is situated half an hour by bus from this inland train station, on the south-east coast of Norway. The bus was not in operation on this particular Saturday, and we had already waited for quite some time for a taxi the Norwegian Railways had promised us that never seemed to arrive. It was a forced stop in the daily flow of time, a sort of temporal lacuna that was not without a quiet, urgent delight. Across the water, the summer light fell with mild warmth upon the village. The water and the sky looked like a calm water surface and a slightly clouded sky usually do. There was really nothing particular about this landscape as it appeared to me there across the water, but it certainly had some bearing on the present situation, stuck as we were in the middle of nowhere. Or maybe it was the other way around, that the situation had forced this landscape, in all its general appearance, into a new perspective. Either way, it was not exactly the Epiphany I may have implied. We were on our way to Risør because I had been commissioned to do a workshop there on the theme of everyday photography. During the couple of weeks prior to this, I had, for the first time, been forced to put my thoughts concerning this matter in some kind of order, creating slideshows with examples from art history and the history of photography. Having worked with medium format cameras in a strictly documentary manner over the last several years, the snapshot that I took there with my digital compact Leica became an inspiration to continue in the same general direction, shooting landscapes in a similarly relaxed, commonplace mode, composed in roughly the same way. In fact, as I well knew, the search for the commonplace in a pictorial form was no novelty, either in earlier visual art or later photography. The situation at the Gjerstad train station quite simply crystallized my thoughts about this and literally put my experience from past practice in a novel light.

Even so, there were a couple of things that seemed new to me about the image from Gjerstad, which I have brought into the work with the rest of the pictures. Although the subject and the location was Gjerstad, the topographical and documentary elements really did not play any particular role in the picture. It is a generic landscape picture: the composition is as standardized as a postcard picture and follows conventions as old as landscape painting as a separate pictorial genre. The subject is the landscape in all its ordinariness: a situation, a specification, no doubt, but in a general sense. (During a quick search online to check if the working title LITTLE LANDSCAPES was current English at all, I found that in the U.S., it is used for a special kind of amateur painting, meaning unassuming standardized landscapes in a small format.) Another thing is the use of the digital compact camera as a tool, which allows for the camera to be brought along virtually everywhere and to take pictures quickly, easily, and evaluate them on the spot. Obviously, this also involves certain technical limitations regarding the final product. In fact, the image so achieved is in many respects closer to the traditional drawn sketch than the finished painting. And as many people today often find more joy in the spontaneity of these old painter's sketches than in the elaborately finished paintings, I have come to think that this kind of straightforward use made possible with digital technology may encompass something similar in photography. In line with this, I have not kept myself quite strictly to commonplace themes, but have also let the images move slightly in the direction of the more unique and spectacular when this has seemed natural. To the extent that these images do, in fact, work, it is probably on account of

sticking to a tight line between the general and the particular, the commonplace and the unique.

All cities of a certain size have a small shop where they pander old postcards. The majority are postcards with prospect landscape pictures of renowned places. Some of the prospects are standard topographical views, often taken from a well-established view point. Others are more picturesque and seek to shape the landscape in their own image. Both of these image types have long histories. The topographic view can be traced back to at least the 1500s and culminates with the Italian *vedute* painting of the 1700s. The picturesque landscape is somewhat younger and is often associated with William Gilpin (1724-1804). Gilpin wanted, simply put, just enough shape to flirt with the ideal landscape he knew from French and Italian art, but no more than that which would allow the picture to maintain the more commonplace feel he knew from his travels around the English countryside. The picturesque form is thus akin to the beautiful form of the classic landscape picture, but is of a more structural, underlying nature, open to the variety and charm of the "natural" landscape. The picturesque is, in short, a pictorial mode that can make any landscape into a picture because the charm of variety does not, in principle, depend on what is pictured. The only condition is that the variation manifests itself within a mode that is simultaneously structurally solid and open. Take Stephen Shores now classic images of the American everyday landscape, *UNCOMMON PLACES* (1982), which in this manner, in a somewhat mutated form, is fundamentally picturesque. (The title is, of course, a bit ambiguous, as the commonplace he depicts is, in fact, uncommon only in so far as his places are not commonly depicted.) In *LITTLE LANDSCAPES*, the picturesque mode is reduced to a kind of essence, visible in the stable horizon line drawn with all clarity in the sea views or in the plane of an arable field that extends out under the hills behind, towards the vanishing point.

The images in the book follow each other in a fairly strict chronological order. They are therefore not without a certain autobiographical character, centered around the Norwegian landscape found around Oslo and in Telemark. This is where I usually spend my time, and where I mostly limit myself to shoot photographs. Yet this time, I have extended my motifs quite considerably, including photos from Tromsø in the north to Istanbul in the south. For those who will find a special pair of oblique-glimpse images slightly out of context, they may illustrate how a new country, for me, not always lend itself so easily to photography. In this instance it was Croatia, which nevertheless, two years on, opened itself up for me in a pair of very straightforward sea views. The last dozen pictures are from a trip to Ålesund on the western coast of Norway, in conjunction with the 6th Norwegian Archive Congress in the spring of 2013. Mostly in order to shorten the wait for my return flight to Oslo, I took an extended stroll towards Roald, further out on the island from Vigra Airport. Whereas the images in the series from the beginning are rather hesitant and sporadic, the last pictures from this trip are probably more devious, characterized by the fact that the pictorial mode now is so familiar to me that it has entered my bones. Maybe it's time to stop now. Maybe there will be a Part II in five years' time. In any event, I thought it best to put in a full stop at this moment.

KSB, June 2013