

# NILS STÆRK

## TORBJØRN RØDLAND

### DEAREST KITTY

Western critics are used to seeing cuteness as a lie – a lie told in order to sell a product. It's been an integrated part of my project since the 90s to look for a more nuanced understanding of cuteness. To my surprise, this search led me to photographic sadism. It was in Tokyo that I first saw the link. In Japan there is an acceptance of cuteness and a history of sadism much stronger than here, but I've recently noticed a shift in American culture as well. The last decade gave us *Inglourious Basterds* and the Bush Doctrine but also incredibly cute viral videos.

It's been reported that Walt Disney begged the American Air Force not to bomb Schloss Neuschwanstein during the 1945 air raids. He modeled his *Sleeping Beauty* castle on the building, which less than eighty years earlier had been inspired by scenography from Wagner operas. I traveled to Bavaria to photograph this fantasy castle in front of snow-covered mountains, only to find that its best angle was inaccessible. I would have needed a helicopter or a small mountain expedition to make the picture I wanted and ended up buying a poster. They say Schloss Neuschwanstein is the most photographed building in Germany.

Two summers ago I photographed four watercolors signed «A.H.». For years they'd been hidden in a small frame behind one of the many watercolors Adolf Hitler painted of traditional German houses. We know Hitler owned a copy of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Disney's first feature-length animation film. Private screenings were arranged for Hitler's inner circle.

The skulls are photographed in cremation ovens. I longed to deal with reality in a more direct way. What can be more real than a person on fire?

One hundred years ago the New Testament was still our main story of evil and sacrifice. The World Wars changed that. The Holocaust is now our culture's main mythological story of evil and sacrifice.

Anne Frank was fifteen when she died in Bergen-Belsen. Kitty is the name of her Amsterdam diary, our Gospel.

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