

2014

Exposed

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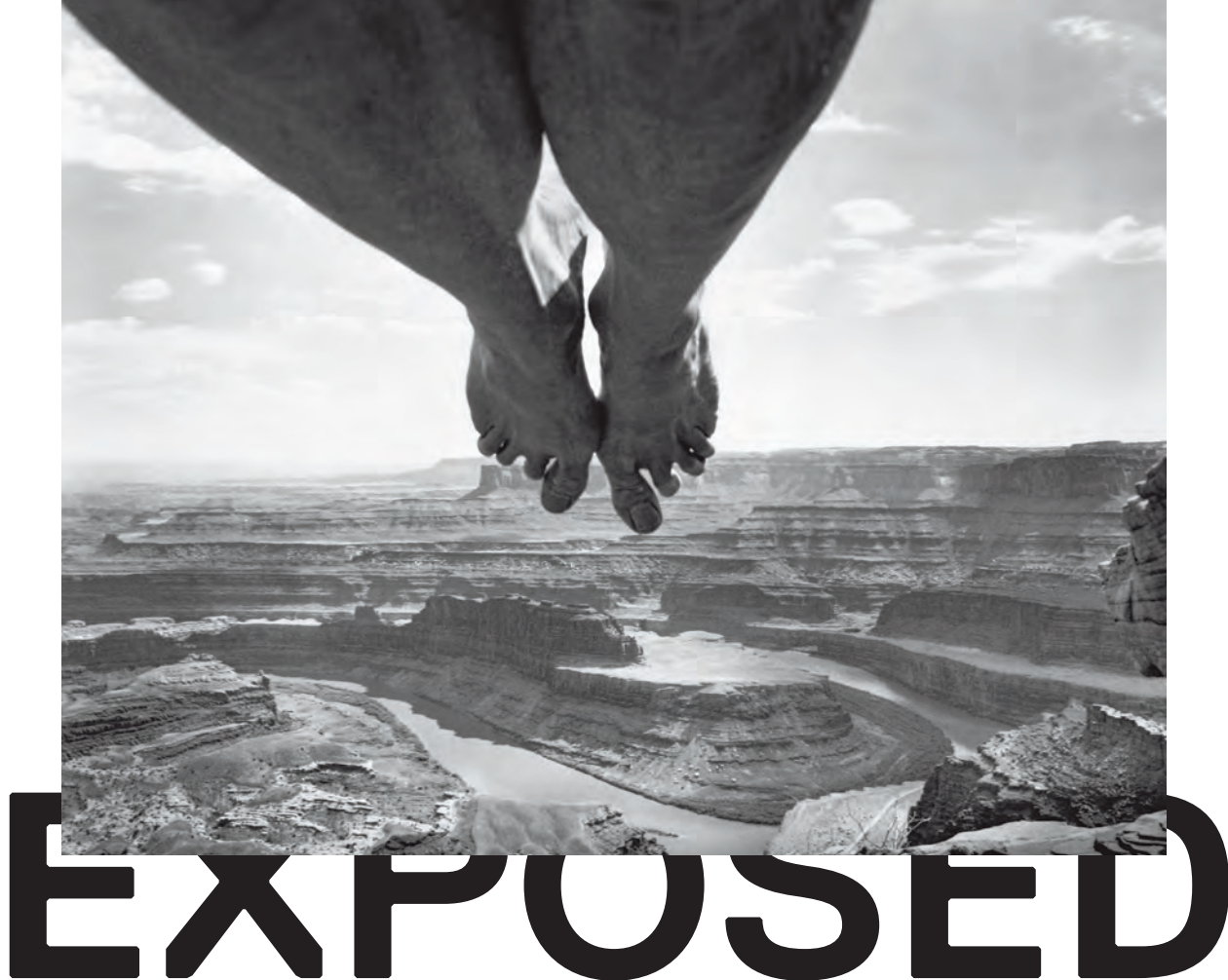


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Recommended Citation

Silander, Liisa and RISD XYZ, "Exposed" (2014). *RISD XYZ Fall/Winter 2014/2015: The Body*. 4.
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by Liisa Silander

FOR ALMOST 45 YEARS, Arno Rafael Minkkinen MFA 74 PH has been photographing his own body, dedicating his practice to an intensive series of black-and-white self-portraits. The Finnish photographer—who has lived in the US since he was a boy—uses his physical presence as a means of melding with the natural environment. In his self-portraits, portions of his body—generally photographed without his face in view—become one with nature.

“Create an equal sign between nature and nudity,” Minkkinen tells his students at the University of Massachusetts/Lowell, where he has taught since 1987. And, he adds: “Aim for timelessness every now and again.”

The timeless allure of Minkkinen’s very human work has been attracting viewers worldwide since the 1970s. With gallery representation in Boston, Beijing, Brussels, Helsinki, Paris, New York and Torino, he has exhibited in a mindboggling 100-plus solo shows and almost 200 group exhibitions. His work is included in permanent collections at MoMA, the Pompidou Center, RISD and the Musée d’art Moderne in Paris, among many other museums. To date his work has been published in seven monographs and has earned international



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recognition from everyone from the Finnish government, which awarded him the State Arts Prize in Photography in 2006, to the Lucie Foundation, which honored him with the Lucie Award for Achievement in Fine Art in 2013.

"Fortunately I began making photographs years before Photoshop was invented," Minkinen says, remembering the period when he studied with the late photography legends Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind at RISD. "What the camera sees at the moment of exposure is what I try to envision in my mind, which is the magic of photography for me. It's why it's always Christmas in my darkroom."

This fall Minkinen's photographs took on a new sort of magic when this one, *From the Shelton, Looking East*, and several others were monumentalized for the *Images Festival des Arts Visuels de Vevey* in Switzerland, an open-air photography festival where the works of influential photographers are printed on tarpaulin, with immense installations exhibited on the sides of buildings throughout the city.



on pages 42 and 43:
Dead Horse Point,
Utah, 1997 and *Grand*
Canyon, Arizona, 1995

previous spread: *From*
the Shelton, Looking
East, 2005

right: *Käsi ja Kivi (Hand*
and Stone), 2007,
Hirvensalmi, Finland
and left: *Self-Portrait*
with Coralie, 2009,
Fort Foucault, Niort,
France



“My pictures might look simple but ...they can test the limits of what a human body is capable of or willing to risk.”

“My pictures might look simple but many are difficult to make,” Minkkinen says of his work. “They can test the limits of what a human body is capable of or willing to risk. I title them self-portraits so the viewer knows who is in the picture and who made it.”

In making his unmanipulated self-portraits, Minkkinen has covered the world, photographing himself in both natural and urban settings in Finland, Norway, Sweden, France, Italy, China and the American West. Yet some of his most memorable images have been made close to home—on Foster’s Pond in Massachusetts, where he lives in typical Finnish style, with a sauna next to the lake. Among the many self-portraits he has made with women is an intimate series of works with his wife, Sandra, and an extended series of father-son portraits with his son, Daniel, begun just weeks after he was born in 1979.

Minkkinen’s work is reaching into other corners of Europe this fall, too, on view at *Le musée d’art contemporain Les Abbatoirs* in Toulouse, the Oxford Photography Festival in England and at Galerie Camera Obscura during *Paris Photo* in France.

“Artists who believe they control everything control what they know,” Minkkinen says. “If you allow outside forces to intervene, you’re like a canoe going down rapids. The rocks are there, and if you fight them, you fly off the bow. But if you allow the current to take you, you can pass through swimmingly. And you’ll find a rare gift at every bend.” ■