

# JH Engström

For the past two decades, JH Engström has been creating poetry with images and words. Drawing on his life, memory and environment, JH Engström's work articulates the rural and the urban as a metaphor for many other relationships: reflection and impulse, security and vulnerability, youth and adulthood, self and other, nature and civilisation.

His work is based on the experience of an artist on the move - JH Engström has lived in Sweden, the United States and France - and questions the role of private memory, the relationship with our origins and the modes of representation and domination in our contemporary societies.

His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at the Värmlands Museum (Sweden, 2017 and 2009), FOAM Amsterdam (Netherlands, 2014), the National Media Museum, Bradford (UK, 2010) and the Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg (Sweden, 2005). His work is included in the collections of the Fotomuseum Winterthur (Winterthur, Switzerland), the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (USA), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (Sweden) and the Musée Nicéphore Niépce (Chalon-sur-Saône, France). He is the author of critically acclaimed books that have won international awards, including the trilogy *Trying to Dance* (published by Journal in 2004), *Tout va bien* (Aperture, 2015) and *Revoir* (Akio Nagasawa Publishing / Journal, 2017).

# *JH Engström*

by Jean-Kenta Gauthier

Jan Henrik Engström, known as JH Engström, was born in 1969 in Karlstad, in the Swedish region of Värmland, to a mining engineer father and a schoolteacher mother. After the birth of a sister in 1975, the family moved to Paris in 1979. It was here that JH Engström learnt French, a language he would use fluently throughout his life, as well as Swedish and English. In 1982, the family was forced to return to Värmland. At the age of 19, JH Engström did his military service in an administrative department in his home town. He spent a semester studying film theory at Karlstad University. In 1991, JH Engström returned to Paris where, introduced by a friend, he assisted the fashion photographer Mario Testino, with whom he learned how to work with images. Back in Stockholm in 1993, he contacted the photographer Anders Petersen with the aim of working for him. Petersen initially declined the offer, but at Engström's insistence, who wanted to leave the world of fashion, agreed to take him on as an assistant. It was during this period that Engström met Christer Strömholm, of whom Petersen had been a student, and visited him at his home in Stockholm to show him various photographic works. Strömholm/Petersen/Engström have become the trinity of contemporary Swedish photography. Between 1994 and 1997, JH Engström was officially enrolled in the Department of Photography and Film at the University of Gothenburg, but he was often already elsewhere: in Stockholm, in the women's refuge that was to become the subject of his first documentary book, *Härbärke (Shelter)*, published in 1997; in Paris, where in 1995 he shared a flat on rue de Belleville before staying in a number of hotels around rue des Pyrénées.

In 1999, JH Engström went to live in the United States with Terese Andrén, whom he married the same year; they lived in a loft in the Williamsburg district of Brooklyn. Engström had already been to the United States on several occasions, notably to spend time with the photographer and filmmaker Robert Frank, whom he met for the first time in 1996 in Gothenburg when he was awarded the Hasselblad prize, and who would go on to preface *Härbärke*

in *JH Engström*, Photo Poche, Actes Sud, Arles, 2021

(*Shelter*). In 2001, Engström divorced Terese and returned to Sweden, where he rented a house in his native Värmland. While teaching at a preparatory photography school, he continued the long work he had begun in New York: printing the many photographs he had taken during his repeated stays in Sweden, France, the United States and elsewhere, in order to complete *Trying to Dance*, a project he published in 2004 with the publisher Gösta Flemming (Journal) and the graphic designer Patric Leo. *Trying to Dance* is the first volume in a series of projects in which Engström delves into himself and articulates his relationship with his memory and his own archives at different levels: this is followed by *Haunts* (2006), with the artist's tattooed left forearm on the cover, and whose title - 'Hantises' - points to those places, situations and atmospheres that don't leave us alone; then *Tout va bien* (2015), with its many new photographs and ironically optimistic title; then *Revoir* (2016), like a parade against a possible reissue of *Trying to Dance* and made up of photographs included in, or contemporary with, the initial project, in other words an update of the photographer's archives. This tetralogy includes numerous photographs of moments in the artist's life, notably his relationship with Swedish actress Amanda Ooms, whom he met in 2006 and with whom he had two children, born in 2008, and his life with French photographer Margot Wallard and their child, born in 2014.

When JH Engström was in his twenties, his father fell into a depression that destroyed the relationship between father and son for two decades. This traumatic ordeal for the artist can go a long way towards explaining his obsessions with human vulnerability and the power of nature, uprootedness and the link with the land of his birth, the imprint of the passing of time and the quest for freedom. In 2008, with the Swedish graphic artist and publisher Greger Ulf Nilson, JH Engström published *Sketch of Home*, the fruit of his research into the traces of his youth and memory in his native Värmland, where he has lived again since 2001. Then, in 2009, Engström published *From back Home* with Anders Petersen. Petersen had also spent his adolescence in Värmland, and this was a common thread that he often evoked with Engström, to the point of becoming the subject of *From back Home*. That same year, the project was premiered at the Värmlands Museum in Karlstad, and the book was awarded the Livre d'auteur prize at the Rencontres d'Arles. It is this same question of childhood territory that appears in several of JH Engström's films, including *Här/Ici/Here* (2018) - again through the filter of his own children.

In 2013, Engström published two books. *Långt från Stockholm* (Far from Stockholm) [Mörel Books] is a continuation of *Sketch of Home* and *From back Home*: a research project in the rural region of Värmland, "far from Stockholm", far from the big city. *Ende und Anfang - Early Trips* (André Frère Éditions) contains photographs taken before the year 2000 during the artist's travels, and the title - "The End and the Beginning" - raises the question of the advent and completion of an era, or when the twentieth century experienced by the young Engström will become the old world. The artist senses that the break with this pre-Internet world will be greater than that between, say, the 1960s and 1970s. This prescience is also the subject of *Crash* (2016), a quasi-expressionist work that is the fruit of JH Engström's reaction to the profound changes taking place at the moment: the advent of a new right-wing in the United States, the peril of democracy, the environmental emergency. In this context, JH Engström photographs what he knows well - Värmland, his body - and turns these images into a negative. He himself recognises that, at almost 50, the world he has encountered, the world in which he has grown up, is in danger of disappearing. These weighty projects are interspersed with numerous publications that he produces spontaneously, almost like a fanzine, with his partner Margot Wallard: *Foreign Affair* (2011), *7 Days, Athens, November* (2011), *Karaoke Sunne* (2014). The same is true of *October 2016 (The Fear of Leaving)*, which he made alone, in a few days, with the London publisher Aron Morel: his two eldest children have to leave their home in Värmland and move to Stockholm with their mother; Engström takes Polaroid photographs of this feeling of anxiety, this fear of missing out, in his region.

After this departure, JH Engström kept his home in Värmland, in the village of Smedsby (hence the name 'Atelier Smedsby', the travelling long-term workshop he co-founded in 2012 with Margot Wallard), while at the same time moving to Montreuil, on the outskirts of Paris. This move, followed by the necessary acclimatisation, led to his first project, *Day by Day* (Bessard, 2020). *Day by Day* is like a gradual reappropriation, a method for coping with change and its challenges. In 2021, in addition to this volume in the 'Photo Poche' collection, JH Engström will complete *The Frame*, an ambitious project that will have lasted thirty years, which he has already presented as a foretaste in the form of an installation at Jean-Kenta Gauthier, Paris (2018) and then in Lisbon (2019), and which the Portuguese publisher Pierre von Kleist publishes in 2021. *The Frame* is about the renegotiation of the masculine, which the artist sees

as historic. Hundreds of portraits of men and transgender people, made over the last three decades, sit alongside dozens of self-portraits that punctuate the artist's life, amid monumental photographs of the moraines of Värmland, the thousand-year-old piles of rocky debris that have always populated the artist's native region. Here we find a new question that runs through all JH Engström's work: the relationship between nature and civilisation.

— Jean-Kenta Gauthier, February 2021

# JH Engström

Born in 1969 in Karlstad, Sweden. Lives and works in Montreuil, France.

## EDUCATION

- 2005 Graduate of the Swedish Institute of Dramatic Art, advanced course in documentary filmmaking, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1997 Graduate of the Department of Photography and Film at the University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden
- 1993-94 Anders Petersen assistant, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1991-92 Mario Testino assistant, Paris, France

## GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2015 Winner of the Leica Oskar Barnack Prize for his book *Tout Va Bien*, Germany
- 2012 Winner of the Goldene Letter Prize for his book *La Résidence*, Deutsche Buch Stiftung, Germany
- 2011-16 Grant from the Swedish Art Council, Sweden
- 2009 Winner of the Prix du Livre Photo at the Rencontres d'Arles for his book *From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), Arles, France
- 2008 Grant from KW Gullers fund, Germany
- 2006-10 Grant from the Swedish Art Council, Sweden
- 2005 Shortlisted for the Deutsche Börse Photographic Prize, Germany  
Grant from the Swedish Authors Foundation, Sweden
- 2004 Art residency, Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône, France  
Grant from the Swedish Authors Foundation, Sweden
- 2004 Grant from the Hasselblad Foundation, Gothenburg, Sweden
- 2003 Art residency, Contretype, Brussels, Belgium
- 2000 Grant from the Swedish Arts Council, Sweden
- 1999 Grant from the Swedish Arts Council, Sweden
- 1998 Stockholm Cultural Prize, Sweden  
Grant from the Fondation Andrea Frank, United States  
Winner of the Photographic Book of the Year Award in Sweden, Svenska Fotografers Förbund (Swedish Association of Photography)  
Grant from the Swedish Authors Foundation, Sweden

## COLLECTIONS

- Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland
- Hasselblad Center, Göteborg, Sweden
- Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France
- The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, USA
- Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
- Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône, France
- The Nordic Museum in Stockholm, Sweden
- Noorderlicht Photogallery Foundation, Groningen, Netherlands
- Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- Värmlands Museum, Karlstad, Sweden

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS (selection)

2022

*Banquet*, Jean-Kenta Gauthier, Paris, France

2020

*Anknytningar / Correspondances / Correspondences*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Photographique - Villa Pérochon (CAPC), Niort, France

2019

*The Frame*, Apleton, Lisbon, Portugal

2018

*Häriifrån*, The Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki, Finland  
*The Frame*, Jean-Kenta Gauthier, Paris, France

2016

*Crash*, Värmlands Museum, Karlstad, Sweden  
*JHE*, Riga Photomonth 2016, Latvian Museum of Photography, Riga, Lituania

2015

*Close Surrounding*, Hôtel Fontfreyde Centre photographique, Clermont-Ferrand, France

2014

*Close Surrounding*, FOAM Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2013

*Tout Va Bien*, Galleri Final, Malmö, Sweden

2011

*From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), Flinxo Photo Gallery, Gand, Belgium  
*La Résidence*, GUN Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden  
*Trying to Dance*, Konsthallen, Gerlesborg, Sweden

2010

*From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), National Media Museum, Bradford, United Kingdom

2009

*From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), Artothèque Galerie de Prêt, Angers, France  
*From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), Galerie VU', Paris, France  
*From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), Värmlands Museum, Karlstad, Sweden  
*Trying to Dance, Haunts*, Centre Atlantique de la Photographie (CAP), Brest, France  
*Trying to Dance, Haunts*, Galerie Le Lieu, Lorient, France

2008

*Sketch of Home*, GUN Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

2007

*Trying to Dance/ Haunts*, Huarte Art Center, Huarte, Spain

2006

*Je suis où*, Contretype, Brussels, Belgium  
*JH Engström*, Milliken Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden  
*Haunts*, Fotografins Hus, Stockholm, Sweden  
*Haunts*, Galerie VU', Paris, France  
*JH Engström*, Quinzaine Photographique Nantaise (QPN), Nantes, France  
*Trying to Dance*, Nantes Photofestival, Nantes, France

2005

*Haunts*, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden

2004

*Trying to Dance*, Galerie VU', Paris, France

2003

*Je suis où*, Contretype, Brussels, Belgium

2002

*Shelter*, The Nordic Museum, Stockholm, Sweden  
*Trying to Dance*, Artothèque Galerie de Prêt, Angers, France  
*Trying to Dance*, Contretype, Brussels, Belgium

2000

*Entreacte*, Gallery F48, Stockholm, Sweden

## COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS (selection)

2024

*Shashin Ron (On Photography)*, presented by Another Magazine, Dazed Space, London, UK  
*Rémi Coignet, Trait d'union*, Daniel Blaufuks, Raphaël Dallaporta, JH Engström, Jean-Kenta Gauthier, Paris, France

2023

*Perdre aussi nous appartient*, Jean-Kenta Gauthier, Paris, France

2022

*Love Songs, Photography and Intimacy*, JH Engström, Margot Wallard, Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP), Paris, France

2017

*From Back Home*, Jean-Kenta Gauthier, Paris Photo, Grand Palais, Paris, France

2012

*Out of Focus*, Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
Liege Photobienale, Liège, Belgium

2009

*Darkside II*, Winterthur Fotomuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland  
*Das Porträt-Fotografie als Bühne*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Autriche

2009

Rencontres d'Arles, Arles, France (curated by Nan Goldin)

2008

*Darkside*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland

2007

Cohan and Leslie Gallery, New York City, United States

2006

Mois de la Photo, Paris, France  
Caprice Horn Gallery, Berlin, Germany  
*Genre Humain*, Contretype, Brussels, Belgium  
*Face à Face*, Fotografins Hus, Stockholm, Sweden  
Noorderlicht Photogallery, Groningen, Netherlands  
D-Foto, San Sebastian, Spain

2005

Milliken Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell, United States

*Instable*, Bildmuseet, Umea, Sweden

Deutsche Börse Photography Prize, Eschborn, Germany

Photographers Gallery, London, United Kingdom

*Der Traum vom Ich, der Traum von der Welt*, Winterthur Fotomuseum, Switzerland

Deutsche Börse Group, Frankfurt (Main), Germany

Gooroom project, South Korea

Langhans Galerie, Praga, Czech Republic

2004

*Instable*, Stockholm Cultural House, Stockholm, Sweden

2002

*Stockholm too Close*, Stockholm Cultural House, Stockholm, Sweden

*Inspiration Strömholm*, Gallery CFF, Stockholm, Sweden

*Swedish Photography*, Théâtre des Images, Nice, France

1998

Photographic Fair, Gothenburg, Sweden

Tempo, A documentary Festival, Stockholm Cultural House, Stockholm, Sweden

*JH Engström et Anders Petersen*, Gallery Prinsen, Stockholm, Sweden

1994

*Territory*, Stockholm Cultural House, Stockholm, Sweden

## PUBLICATIONS

2022

*The Frame*, Pierre von Kleist editions, Lisbon, Portugal  
*L'Écart*, Le Bal, Paris, France

2021

Photo Poche, vol. 167, introduction by Urs Stahel, Actes Sud, Arles, France

2020

*Day by Day*, Éditions Pierre Bessard, Paris, France

2017

*Crash*, Akio Nagasawa Publishing, Tokyo, Japan

2016

*Revoir*, Akio Nagasawa Publishing (Tokyo, Japan) & Journal (Stockholm, Sweden)  
*Fear of Leaving*, Mörel Books, London, United Kingdom

2015

Random, Mörel Books, London, United Kingdom  
*Tout va bien*, Aperture, New York City, New York, USA

2014

*Karaoke Sunne*, JH Engström and Margot Wallard, Superlabo, Tokyo, Japan

2013

*Sketch of Paris*, Aperture (New York, USA) and Max Ström (Stockholm, Sweden)  
*Ende und Anfang - Early trips*, André Frère Éditions, Marseille, France  
*Långt Från Stockholm (Far from Stockholm)*, Mörel Books, London, United Kingdom

2011

*7 days, Athens, November*, JH Engström and Margot Wallard, Superlabo, Tokyo, Japan  
*FOREIGN AFFAIR*, JH Engström and Margot Wallard, Superlabo, Tokyo, Japan

2010

*La Résidence*, Journal, Stockholm, Sweden

2009

*From Back Home* (with Anders Petersen), Max Ström, Stockholm, Sweden

2008

*Sketch of Home*, text by David Neuman, GunGallery, Sweden  
*CDG / JHE*, Steidl, Göttingen, Germany

2006

*Haunts*, Steidl, Göttingen, Germany

2004

*Trying to Dance*, Journal, Stockholm, Sweden

1997

*Härbärge/Shelter*, Bokförlaget DN, Stockholm, Sweden

## FILMS (selection)

2022

*TIDIGT/TÔT/EARLY*

2020

*DJURET/L'ANIMAL/THE ANIMAL*

2018

*HÄR/ICI/HERE*

2006

*A Film About / With Anders Petersen*



JKG

Jean-Kenta Gauthier