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A NORWEGIAN ARTIST'S MEMORY DISTURBANCES

By Max Campbell, JUNE 12, 2016



TORBJØRN RØDLAND / COURTESY MACK

We can find signs of a narrative in the images collected in the new book "Confabulations," by the Norwegian photographer Torbjørn Rødland. Symbols of childhood and adolescence, of marriage and death, and visual motifs—bent silverware, grasping hands, loose hair, wedding cake—seem to imply connections among the scenes. But trying to trace any clean story line through the photographs would result only in a messy sketch. Rødland told me that he allowed the title of the book, a psychiatric term for memories that are made up or distorted, to guide him in his editing. "There's a pleasure in perforated narratives," he said.

"Confabulations" includes photos from last year, from 2003, from time in between. Some were taken in Los Angeles, where Rødland now lives, others in Oslo. Many of the images have a tactile allure: socks on carpet, mesh on skin, skin on skin. Goopy substances, blue and black, are leaking and being poured. Punctuating many scenes is a sense of proximity to bodily pain: fingers wrap around the blades of white figure skates; a razor lies against a pregnant stomach, not cutting but matching its curve under a protruding belly button. The ingredients here are often mundane, but their arrangements are harsh and unexpected. Like a horror-film director who can shock without a drop of blood, Rødland creates disturbances of mood that linger from one scene to the next. The revulsion of seeing dentures lodged inside a cinnamon roll cannot be forgotten when we turn our eyes to a young girl looking down from a tree, pigtails hanging in her face.