

## **AICA JAPAN CONGRESS 1998**

Symposium "TRANSITION: Changing Society and Art"

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### ■ Colloquium I *Memories and Visions: From Tradition to a New Identity*

Session 4: *Western Identity*

#### **Mette SANDBYE(Denmark)**

##### ***Photographic Amnesia and the Longing for the Real***

Among contemporary artists using photography or photographic material, themes such as memory, time, tradition, identity and history are in focus. One experiences a desire for 'the real life', although it does not exist as a definable entity. It is an art that claims an authentic experience built on memory, and that claims a subjective position in connection with 'universal history', at the same time as having a socially oriented point of departure. Several contemporary artists make museum-like piles of different sorts of materials in an 'anamnetic strategy', where photography plays a central part because of its specific referential relation to the past. The talk is organized around works by Shimon Attie (USA), Larry Sultan (USA), Igor Savchenko (Belarus), Pia Arke (Denmark/Greenland) and Tal R. (Denmark). Here History, identity, memory and tradition are (re-)constructed by principles of montage where the photographs are blown out of the historical continuum of the past, being confronted with the experience of contemporary time. These artists realize the extreme vulnerable position of the subject in the contemporary hypermodern world as an inevitable fact. They seem to ask how one can recuperate an identity in connection with history and tradition. Here the specific temporality of the medium of photography becomes crucial. In this process photography is revitalized as an index of something that existed, of memory or even of 'the real'. The specific realism tied to photography is not a conventional and iconic realism, but rather a realism *on a mental level*.