

Johnannes Frandsen Touch Me

Touch me – a clear invitation. But we don't know each other? In the end, curiosity prevails. With a resounding 'yes', you accept the request and help the mute person opposite to undress. That is the prevailing feeling as I pull the book out of its slipcase. As if the one across would simply drop its cloak to the ground.

But that leads to an unexpected, intimate moment that gets me on the wrong foot. On the cover is something off a pair. The place is lonely, I do not like to be here, above all I do not like to be the observer of the scene. The couple do not care if anyone is watching, they are totally immersed in themselves. His tight hug looks like he is clamouring, which irritates me. I release myself from the clasp of the scene and open the book, whose photos immediately evokes its own distinct sound.

These bands were born in the 70s, playing at dance venues across Sweden. The genre, 'Dansband music', is a fusion of styles ranging from schlager music to rock. Dansbands are still drawing large crowds of both young and old to city hotel ballrooms or amusement parks during the weekends.

All Swedes are aware of these dance nights. And Johannes Frandsen dives headfirst into the turmoil. One might easily evoke images of musicians garbed in sequin suits, playing away in front of an excited audience: scenes that we find amusing in a comical and ironic way.

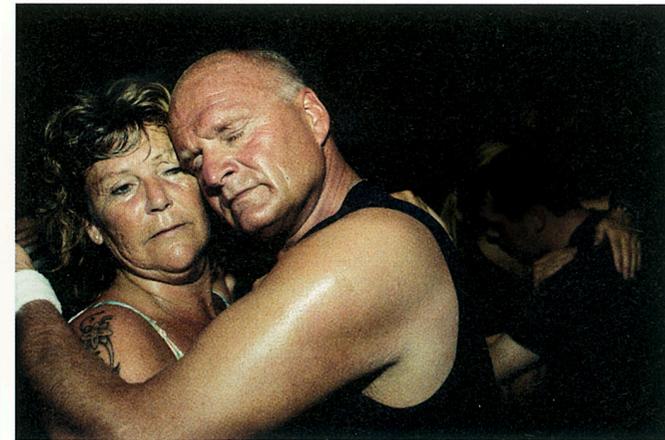
Frandsen's narrative is different. You never see a band playing, and the sounds that are emanating from the background is far from being as hilarious as one might presume. The book opens with skin glistening with sweat. You draw the other person close, eyes turned away, eyes closed.



© Johannes Frandsen, aus „Touch Me“

This is because of concentration; to keep the rhythm and to fade out everything that surrounds you. Then you see an elderly gentleman who falls to his knees. Is it alcohol or a sudden attack of faintness? Older couples are sitting down on a bench. The outward display of amusement is a veneer that hardly covers up the tiredness that has taken hold. A woman sits singly at the edge of the bench. With head in hands, she gazes into the

One is reminded of the photo that has just been leafed through: a plant container, carelessly thrown into a corner. Lastly, there is a photo of a young woman. Her hair falling across her gaze. On her arm a lettering is tattooed. Fight for Life / Live for Love. These well-known longings of humans are ever present, but how can they be satisfied? If not dating sites, maybe dance nights? The opening scenes are photographic miniatures, and throughout the book there is not much going on. And the emotional stirring of the passing



scenes is so peculiar that one is unsure if one should be grateful for the triggered reactions or not. Frandsen uses a compact camera, his scenes are partly illuminated by the flash, and he is up close with the dancers. In between, he constantly varies the scope: he often regards people at a distance, when they are in front of or outside the venue.

The lighting conditions are difficult, the results coarse-grained, out of focus, disturbing in a certain way. Seldom have this stylistic expression seem more fitting than for what is being displayed here. Rarely do one feel that someone could look so deeply into the interior of the human being to find out her desires, longings, privations, failures.

And then we encounter winners and losers. Couples who have found each other forever, or certainly at least for the evening. We observe lonely people on the fringe. Those who are not asked, and those who are too shy to ask. Young men, driven by hormonal bursts, pull women behind the trees to snog.

Those who are more mature keep up a façade of serenity, but underneath there is a hint of longing. Someone goes to the woods to urinate. Alcohol is a consoling mood enhancer for those who went away empty-handed. The certainty of the next Dansband evening. Frandsen is an extremely close observer, a moralist, one might say, who does not pull down the pants of his characters, but looks at them seriously. Touch me! Dance with Me! I do. But I stumble rather than slide through the book. It's exhausting. But in a curious way it also convey a good feeling. It is hard to ask for more in a work: I am touched.

Peter Lindhorst

Johnannes Frandsen. Touch Me. Kerber Verlag. ISBN 978-3-7356-0504-7. 112 Seiten mit 70 Farbfotos. Pb., 40,- €.