

## Esa Ylijaasko



### Biography

“When I first met Esa Ylijaasko, I realized immediately that he had a different voice, a unique way of seeing the world and telling stories with images. The perseverance, patience and tenderness of his approach are rare gems in this industry, and he is devoted to continuing to do it.”

*Sebastián Liste*

#### An Illusionist of The Existent

Despite his young age, through his career Esa Ylijaasko has been rather an explorer of minds than a documentary photographer of a concrete event. In his working method, a very straightforward approach in camera work continues with a thorough and often slow process of something that could be described as “tuning”.

The beginning of Esa’s independent photography is in a pack of snowboarders, where he was shooting his friends in action. After his studies in photography, he got into photojournalism and worked for Finnish and International newspapers. By accident he placed himself between the action/intuition-based snowboarding and the expectations of elaborate news documentation. Ylijaasko mastered them both and received his first rewards in photojournalism, of which internationally best recognized was the Magnum Photos Showcase award in 2012. At the same time he still struggled to conceive himself as a photographer.

Ylijaasko continued to soothe his anxiety and curiosity towards the photographic expression he was after by exploring different techniques, mainly in black and white photography. The changes in both of the major genres in Ylijaasko's work reveal the distillation of the essence in photographic expression that later became his personal style. A radical turning point in his career is the three trip long project in Syria between 2012 – 2015. Relevance of the Syria project resulted in him reaching behind the documentary expression to understand and to create a dialogue that reveals something unspoken and essential about people living through all that cruelty and the extraordinary.

The crystallization of identity also unfolds through the aesthetic. Ylijaasko urges us to get closer; physically closer but also to infiltrate the theme to understand something substantial. His explorations in different technical options transform into style that he can best explain himself: "When the pictures were developing in my pocket they got scratched and dirty, and all the rain and weather is there," he says. "The people who I photographed would always want to see them, so their fingerprints are on the prints too, all their DNA. But I started to think that was better, because I had captured something from the environment."

By putting aside the premises of actuality in documentation, Esa Ylijaasko finally fulfilled his ambition to capture something salient in a phenomenon he is working on. The result is a timelessness, a presence of existing conditions of nature and mind. Ruthless temperatures of the Snow Castle in Kemi, gentle touch of the heat in steaming hot sauna during the Finnish Summer, or the merciless living conditions of a refugee family, they all find their particular and deeply human relevance in Ylijaasko's photography.

Intuition and exploration have brought Ylijaasko to new areas, such as in game photography. There the documentation of the real is challenged by augmented reality and virtual spaces, and where the concepts of presence and aesthetic are embodied in a user experience. Devoted to his style Esa continues and challenges different genres in photography, he adds smartphone applications in his aesthetic and returns back to the essence of portraiture, landscape photography etc. Because for him in photography there is so much more to come – in Ylijaasko's own terms.

*Dr Kimmo Lehtonen / Porvoo, Finland August 2019*