

In: **Washington Post, Critic Review for the exhibition On the Lakeshore...and Other Stories,**
Goethe Institut Washington DC, Dec. 2011

Capturing a moment and much more by Michael O'Sullivan

To say that Iris Janke's photographs have a snapshot aesthetic isn't quite right. Some of them actually *are* snapshots. What's the difference? In the young German's haunting show at the Goethe-Institut, it's not always easy to tell.

"On the Lakeshore . . . and Other Stories" features several diaristic photos from Janke's ongoing series on friends and family members, mixed in with older photos (several of which the artist clearly didn't take herself, based on the date or the fact that she's in some of them). They're all pinned to the walls in haphazard fashion, much like the pictures in German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans's 2007 exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. One entire wall is filled with photos of Johannes Schmelzer, a close friend of the artist's, that were shot from 1998 to 2011. Another corner is devoted to Polaroids of objects and drawings made or found by Janke's now 7-year-old son, Nicolas. The artifacts in them are nothing special; you can barely tell what they are. But the photos, which feel as if they should be hanging on someone's refrigerator, have a powerful, almost uncomfortable intimacy, despite their lack of visual punch. The awkwardness you feel isn't that of a Nan Goldin exhibition. Janke's photos feel almost shockingly private at times, but there's nothing tawdry about them. They're warm and slightly motherly, though Janke's affection for her subjects never clouds her eye. She's a true artist. Why show work in this scrapbook fashion? Though several of Janke's images are arresting - one of her daughter Milena in a field is particularly mesmerizing - the show is less about individual images, or the individuals in them, than it is about the connections between those images, and those people. The show's title refers to "stories" for a reason. By showing photos of Nicolas as he grows up, or by juxtaposing a picture of Milena with one of the artist at the same age - Janke's mother is also a photographer - Janke creates a kind of narrative that spans time and generations. The story that she's telling - one whose ending is still being written - maybe less than epic, but it's about much, much more than moments.

Along with Janke's work, the exhibition includes photographs by Kaitlin Jencso, a student at the Corcoran College of Art and Design, and Sara J. Winston, a recent Corcoran graduate. The work of both artists fits nicely with that of Janke, who helped select Jencso's and Winston's images. Jencso picks up on Janke's theme of narrative. Though they are clearly staged - most of her photographs feature an anonymous young woman in a checked dress, doing household chores - they work well as scenes from some quiet, domestic drama.

Winston's photos are thematically closer to Janke's Polaroids. Images of a shower curtain, hair in a soap dish and other visual "documents" align well with Janke's private but potent memorializing of the mundane.



Milena Gheorghiu, Uckermark 2010