

Bastienne Schmidt: A Sense of Place

By Elisabeth Biondi

Bastienne Schmidt's artworks appear, at first glance, to be the work of a chameleon. She is a photographer, a painter, and a multi-media artist who moves easily from one discipline to another. But the thread that connects her work is the Greek island of Samos, which is the inspiration for all of her artistic endeavors.

Schmidt was born in 1961 in Germany and moved with her family to Greece when she was nine. Her father, who was an archaeologist, worked in Athens, where she went to the city's German school, and the family spent summers on the island of Samos. Schmidt lived in Greece until she went to university in Italy, where she studied art, and then moved to New York, where she and her family still live. She thinks of herself as German, culturally speaking, though she's been living in America for 20 years. But Greece is her spiritual and emotional home, and she returns to her house on the island of Samos every year.

Schmidt started her career as a photojournalist, but her photographs gradually became more personal. Every year when she returns to Samos, she takes pictures – of the sea, of the surrounding landscape, of her children, her house, and herself. A picture of her son when he was a young child, lost in sleep in a sea of white sheets, or a recent photograph of Schmidt herself, blurred by movement, are just two of her stylistically varied images, taken in different visits years apart. Like her father, the archaeologist, she is a collector, except that she collects memories, in photographs that register the emotional and physical changes in her life.

Her quiet, gentle pictures – which include landscapes, still lifes, and portraits – reflect her past and present, a life in flux. With every passing year, they incorporate the changes to her family and home – her sons grow older, various family members visit, rooms are redecorated. Schmidt herself expresses it best: "I am documenting what was, what is, and what remains, weaving my personal history into the Greek land."



Bastienne Schmidt, *Max Sleeping, Samos*, 2006. All images courtesy the artist



Bastienne Schmidt, *The Mosquito Net, Pagondas, 2013*



Bastienne Schmidt, *The Place My Father Used to Work, Samos, 2010*



Bastienne Schmidt,
Moving Silhouette,
Samos, 2004