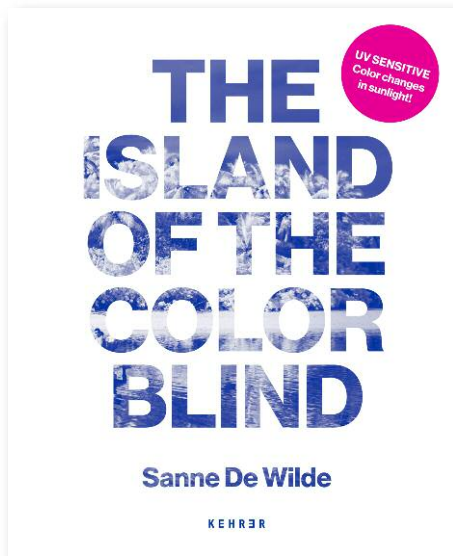


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The Island of the Colorblind

Sanne De Wilde

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Stunning and enchanting visualization of the vision of the colorblind

In Pingelap and Pohnpei, islands in Micronesia, an extraordinarily high percentage of the inhabitants suffer from the rare genetic condition achromatopsia or 'complete color-blindness'. In the late 18th century a catastrophic typhoon swept over Pingelap, a tiny atoll in the Pacific Ocean. One of the survivors, the king, carried the achromatopsia-gen. The king went on to have many children and as time passed by, the hereditary condition affected the isolated community and the islanders started seeing the world in black and white. This phenomenon was first described by neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks.

Color is just a word to those who cannot see it. Portraying the mythical island and the achromatopic islanders – who are referred to as »blind« by their fellow Micronesians – resulted in a selection of images that mask their eyes, their face, and empower their »vision«, inviting the viewer to enter a dreamful world of colorful possibilities.

Artist and photographer Sanne De Wilde experimented with black and white and infrared photography, in a metaphorical attempt to envision how people with achromatopsia see the world. A third series within the project are the achromatic picture-paintings – De Wilde had asked members of the Dutch organisation for achromatopsia to paint in color on her black and white images (without knowing the colors of the paint they were using). Flames light up in black and white, trees turn pink, a thousand shades of grey, a rainbow revisited.

Belgian photographer **Sanne De Wilde** (Antwerp, 1987) graduated as Master in the Fine Arts at KASK in Ghent (BE) with great honours in 2012. Her work was awarded the Photo Academy Award 2012, the International Photography Award Emergentes DST in 2013, and the Nikon Press Award 2014, among others. The British Journal of Photography selected De Wilde as one of 'the best emerging talents from around the world' in 2014. She recently received the Firecracker Grant 2016. Her work has been internationally published (The Guardian, New Yorker, Le Monde, BBC, CNN, Vogue) and exhibited, e.g. at Circulations (FR), LagosPhoto (NG), Pingyao Photofestival (CN) Kolga Tbilisi Photo (GE) Athens Photofestival (GR) Format Festival (UK) Lodz Fotofestiwal (PL), Brakke Grond (Amsterdam, NL), Evans Contemporary Gallery (Peterborough, CA), Le Petit Espace Gallery (Paris, FR), Encontros da Imagem (Braga, PT). Since 2013 De Wilde works as a photographer for the Dutch newspaper and magazine De Volkskrant in Amsterdam.

Exhibitions

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Press images



1. A Pingelapese child is playing with fire. On the island they burn all the trash. At the same time, holding and moving around a burning branch is good to keep the mosquitos away. An achromatopic picture-painting, filled in with watercolorpaint by someone with achromatopic vision.
© Sanne De Wilde



2. Jaynard (achromatope) climbs a tree in the garden, to pick fruits and play. I took the picture while he was climbing back down. The sun comes peeking through the branches; bright light makes him keep his eyes closed. Sadly local people are often not growing their own food. But the trees around them naturally grow coconuts, breadfruit, bananas and leaves used to chew the betelnuts.
© Sanne De Wilde



3. Eric (achromatope) is posing for a flashlight-portrait. On Pingelap there is only solar electricity, at night everyone walks along the one, main street with a torch. I asked him to hold still and look at the light. Naturally, because of his sensitivity to light, his eyes turn to the back of his head while looking into the light.
© Sanne De Wilde



4. A pile of fishing nets in the shape of a mountain close to the domestic airport in Pohnpei from where the tiny airplane (carrying 4-6 people) sets off to Pingelap.
© Sanne De Wilde



5. Jaynard (achromatope) plays with a disco-light-torch I brought from Belgium. I asked him what he saw. He answered 'colors' and kept staring into the light.
© Sanne De Wilde



6. On the way back from a picnic to one of the uninhabited small islands around Pingelap with the colorblind Pingelapese and all the children of the one school of the island. The bay is now protected, islanders are no longer allowed to fish for turtles. Because of the infrared colors the scene looks very romantic, at the same time there's the visual connotation of the boats full of refugees setting off for a better future.
© Sanne de Wilde



7. The parrot with its squinting eye half open was the beginning of the project; a 'tropical' symbol for colors. It was later colored by an achromatope not aware of which colors she was using (yet applying them quite correctly).
© Sanne De Wilde



8. Jaynard (achromatope) is playing in the garden with the branch of a banana tree that had to be cut down. He's wearing the mask I made for him for Halloween. He loved it so he kept putting it on the days after.
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