



**ARTIST**

Tone Stockenström

**TITLE**

Nino, from the series 'Picolino Circus'

**DATE**

2002

**DIMENSIONS**

17.5 in H x 17.5 in W

**MEDIUM**

Chromogenic Color Prints

**IMAGE NOTES**

sheet 24 x 20"

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

2005.016

**CURRENT LOCATION**

NA 09

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**STONE STOCKENSTRÖM**

**BORN**

1970

**BIRTHPLACE**

Uppsala, Sweden

**GENDER**

Female

## CITIZENSHIP

United States

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Swedish-American

## LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2004

## LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 132

## BIOGRAPHY

Tone Stockenström lives in Chicago, Illinois, and is an Adjunct Faculty Member at Columbia College in Chicago. She also teaches Photography and New Millennium Studies. Stockenström participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in September 2004.

## ESSAYS

"A place can be peopled by ghosts more real than living inhabitants. The lure of the local is not always about home as an expressive place, a place of origin and return. Sometimes it is about the illusion of home, as a memory. If place is defined by memory, but no one who remembers is left to bring these memories to the surface, does a place become no place...?" --Lucy R. Lippard, *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1998). *Where Is Home?* Her calling card is red and spells Tone with the "O" in the shape of a suitcase. The photo reproduced on the back is one of a large suitcase placed in front of a pair of feet, with tips of blue-jeaned legs peeking over the frame. One presumes this to be Tone. The message invoked by Tone's business card is the same one at the heart of her work; it reads I'm packed, I'm ready, Where am I going? In Tone Stockenström's most recent work, she goes home. "Where is Home?" is a visual exploration of exactly where that is and precisely what it means. As a Swedish immigrant to the United States at the age of six, Tone has been moving fluidly between and through cultures ever since. Stockenström starts her journey with the notion of home as a place of origin that she can return to. But Home is a trickster that morphs and transforms into many personalities with many disguises. The photographs become visual labyrinths that map her attempt to find her way to the mythical center of home, the place of her creation. Inside and outside, belonging and stranger, out there and in here, center and margin, knowing and not knowing. Her photographs invite us to walk beside her, to become both travel companion and collaborator, as she encounters distant relatives, her mother as a young newlywed, and family skeletons long hidden, now uncovered. Stockenström avoids the cool distance that typically defines the photographer-as-observer documentary stance. Through her photographs, the past and present are interchangeable. Like a loving, determined archaeologist, sifting through hundreds of photographs, both historic and of her own making, she excavates truth. But then she has a lot at stake—her own identity. The suitcase as metaphor weaves its way through Stockenström's life and story. In one historic photograph, a young woman in a white coat and matching pillbox hat stands in front of a high-rise apartment building, on the edge of a parking lot full of cars. With one foot ever so slightly raised, about to take a step, she holds a striped bag, coat unbuttoned and open, smiling gently at the photographer. A small distance from her, resting on the ground, is a white suitcase, and equal distant from that is a dark suitcase. It is the unusual individuality, the presence, afforded the suitcases, that lends this photograph—Tone's mother on her wedding day—its particular poignancy, a crystal ball image of her life to come. In another photograph, recently made, we are sharing a meal with Stockenström and her Aunt Monika. Monika looks at us with startled dismay as she brings a long white napkin to her mouth, her cheek covered by a large square flesh-colored bandage. Gold rimmed cups, saucers, and plates litter the foreground of the frame, and behind her on the wall hangs a ceramic plate of Jesus and a framed photo of white flowers. She looks at us as if, at the very moment the photograph was made, there is a flash of recognition, her face registering her surprise, perplexed by our presence. Stockenström understands that photographs are fragments of experience that easily lose their identity. Photographs, like people, when removed from their context, blur the lines that define who they are. The who, what, where, when, why gets distorted, like memory, through time, lost histories, neglect, and reconstruction. They are like pottery shards that must be meticulously pieced back together to reveal their story, despite gaping holes, hairline cracks, or blatant reconstructions that, unknowingly or unwittingly, alter original histories. In her ongoing extended series "Where is Home?," Tone Stockenström pieces together her family history and, in the process, herself. Judy Natal (c)2005 Tone Stockenström lives in Chicago, Illinois, and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in 2004. Her Web site can be found at <http://www.tonephoto.com/>. Judy Natal lives in Chicago, Illinois, and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in 2003. Un/Common Threads In organizing the exhibition "Un/Common Threads: Selections from the Light Work Collection," curator Kaylen Williams went beyond a superficial perception of diversity that has become pervasive in the United States. As a 2007 study by the sociology department at University of Minnesota revealed, many Americans happily endorse diversity as a nebulous concept; however, many are still at a loss to discuss the specifics of diversity and its related sub-topics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, economic status, and sexual orientation. (1) "Un/Common Threads" harnessed the power of photographs, using a visual language to voice these all-important specifics of diversity. Williams used the visual language that coalesced among the various images to stimulate dialogue about the complex challenges of a pluralist culture in ways that addressed both broad and personal implications. Exhibiting together the work of artists such as Myra Greene, Dawoud Bey, Clarissa Sligh, Yuri Marder, Hank Willis Thomas, and Binh Danh, among others, certainly highlighted the individuality of their concerns and aesthetic choices. Yet this varied grouping also served a common goal by giving voice to specific, possibly contentious topics surrounding diversity. To emphasize this unity of purpose, Williams combined the "Un/" in the exhibition title with "Common Threads," acknowledging the connections that can occur between diverse artists and the viewers of their work. Many of the photographs in "Un/Common Threads" manage to evoke the idea of connections and also simultaneously turn it on its head by asking viewers to re-examine preconceptions that they may bring with them into the gallery. Ellen M. Blalock's photograph, "Jermame," a portrait of a black teenage father pictured full-frame in an intimate embrace with his baby daughter, may provide a good example of this phenomenon. Those who find themselves jarred by the tender presence of emotion displayed by the young African American father must question and explore the sources of any biases regarding age, race, and gender. This is the inherent power of such photographs—when a viewer accepts involvement in questioning such preconceived connections, he or she is more inclined to get involved in talk of answers that can lead to a deeper understanding of identity and diversity. Many of the artists whose work curator Kaylen Williams, a graduate student of Museum Studies in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Syracuse University, selected for "Un/Common Threads" engaged the topic of diversity from a personal perspective. Regarding her impetus for organizing the exhibition, Williams explains, "This project

was of particular interest to me because of my own ethnic background of Japanese and Western European ancestors. Many students on campus are, like me, a mix of diverse cultural backgrounds. My Japanese mother was adopted by Americans and never had an opportunity or the encouragement to explore her racial identity.” In culling this selection of images from the Light Work Collection, Williams invited viewers of *Un/Common Threads* to explore the diversity of identity and to participate in the critical mass that follows an expansion of consciousness. Laura A. Guth (c)2008 1. Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, “Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of ‘Happy Talk.’” *American Sociological Association: American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (December 2007): 895–914. The exhibition was on view in the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery from January 16 to April 19, 2007. It was curated by Kaylen Williams. The exhibition included work by the following artists: Don Gregorio Antón, Dawoud Bey, Ellen M. Blalock, Binh Dahn, Sylvia de Swaan, Lonnie Graham, Myra Greene, Saiman Li, Yuri Marder, Nzingah Muhammad, Osamu James Nakagawa, Suzanne Opton, Kanako Sasaki, Clarissa Sligh, Tone Stockenström, Lida Suchý, Hank Willis Thomas, Linn Underhill, and Carrie Mae Weems. When she curated the exhibition, Kaylen Williams was a graduate student of Museum Studies in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Syracuse University. She graduated in 2007. Laura A. Guth is an artist and educator. She lives in Manlius, NY.