



Peter de Ru: *Sven*

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Text by Lotta Jonsson.

Peter de Ru's visually gripping portrait deserves the time it takes to immerse yourself in the individual picture, and then slowly let the pictures find the internal syntax that will subsequently form the narrative about Sven. That the pictures have a potential for innumerable narratives is to some extent self-evident, for as often happens when you receive or buy a new book, the first impression is quite different from what emerges once you have become familiar with its universe and its main character.

Like several people who have leafed briefly through Peter de Ru's book, I get an overall impression of Sven as a hermit-like character who has chosen a life outside the social collectivity and the material benefits we normally see as necessary elements of modern life. Perhaps Sven is in fact what we call a recluse, but perhaps too he is just an old man who never saw any reason to move away from home, or never found just the right partner, so has had to live his life as a bachelor.

Peter de Ru's story of Sven describes both a life that is still being lived and a life that hardly seems livable any more, measured by present-day demands and standards. But south west of Stockholm in the small town of Boda, time and life have in some way been able to stand still or move in circles since 1925, when Sven's father, August Elias, built the house where 88-year-old Sven still lives today with his cats. Rather than an unworldly and reclusive eccentric (he watches TV, reads his

daily newspaper, goes on fishing trips with others, goes to the grocer's etc.) Sven is a person whose life was formed by certain family circumstances and a more pragmatic understanding of what one is, can and should do as a human being and individual, viewed in a larger framework. The 34 pictures depict a life that is almost over, with all its small routines, rhythms and chores, day to day, season to season. But just a few kilometres away life is led at an accelerating pace that is almost tiring to think about, in stark contrast with the existential frugality of which Sven and 'his' Boda together give an impression. With its formidable focus on the aging human being, his milieu and surroundings, with an eye for the totality and all the details that lay out clues for ever-new stories, de Ru has not only created a portrait of Sven as a presence, but also a slice of cultural history that will soon be a thing of the past. Time stands still, and in his own way de Ru has captured this stillness in his pictures. But when Sven's time has passed, his life, like the time of the picture, will already be over.

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