

Jesper Petersson

Somebody or Nobody

Everything has two sides, including your face: a straight side and an oblique side, a broad side and a narrow side, a nice side and an ugly side. Look in the mirror, which side do you like?

In 2008 a Swedish photographer was looking at an image of a face, a full frontal taken square on that he had just captured in a photo shoot. He plays with the idea of making it perfectly symmetrical. But which side of the face is best to duplicate? What is beautiful? It ends up with him making two pictures of the face, one of the right side and one of the left side. The result is two completely different pictures of the same person. The photographer gazes at himself in the mirror to find out what he has always known, that his nose is a bit crooked. He then takes two images of himself. Since 2008, he has photographed hundreds of faces. The photographer's name is Jesper Petersson and he comes from the small town of Halmstad in southern Sweden.

"There are few, or perhaps no one, who is completely symmetrical in the body and face. Yet we strive for complete perfection. Who knows, in a hundred years from now we may no longer give birth to children, but order them as designer babies? As a photographer, I appreciate the uniqueness. That is beauty. My own crooked nose makes me somebody. I am Jesper." Somebody or nobody is a visual study of human symmetry or asymmetry. Originally a superficial beauty experiment, over time it has become increasingly more profound and challenging. By showing the two symmetric images and omitting the original image, the perceived reality is left to the viewer's imagination and Jesper asks the question, "Can you really achieve perfection?" His conclusion is that the uneven face makes us special and the uniform symmetrical face makes us bland. In fact you probably would not notice the most perfect face walking past you in the street; because of the fact there are no distinguishing features.

At the opening of the exhibition in Stockholm, Jesper assembled a photo booth so visitors could photograph themselves. The lighting & the umbrella served as a natural barrier for some privacy. The camera was attached at eye level on top of a screen and visitors could see themselves and experiment freely. The final pictures were projected by 20-second delay on a wall above the DJ booth in the room with the mingling guests.

I cannot wear long earrings because I feel that my right ear is lower than my left and this can be seen clearly with my hair up and with dangling earrings. The eyebrows are not at the same height. My optometrist says that it is because the muscles around the forehead and eyes make me squint because I'm nearsighted; this also makes my glasses tend to wiggle. I usually solve the problem with shaping the lower eyebrow in a higher arc and apply a light shadow under the brow. The problem is then fixed for anyone looking at me; but the problem remains in my mind. After testing Jesper's photo booth during the opening night of the exhibition it was obvious that I have a face with one narrow side and one broad side. The two pictures are me, but at the same time they are not me. And that is the thrill with the double portraits; you have to imagine the real person!

What is beautiful and what is ugly? Since time immemorial, we have chosen to reproduce images of ourselves that do not necessarily reflect reality. Some argue that nature seeks symmetry. Some argue uniformity is comfortable and resting for the eye. But when it comes to beauty, does it mean that a symmetrical face is more beautiful than a skewed one? For example, the Egyptian queen Nefertiti is an iconic symbol of beauty. The face is completely symmetrical. No one can know for sure if she really looked like that. Nefertiti reflects the aesthetic ideals of her time and lets us interpret our own. It is no coincidence that the discovery of her was so widely reported

because she represented our cultures definition of beauty.

Appearance is important when selecting a partner. According to studies we tend to prefer faces that are symmetrical over asymmetrical. It is believed that our reaction is based upon the hunt for a partner that can provide a good offspring. Asymmetry could be a sign of defective genes and signals illness. Symmetrical people manage external forces and are healthier. It is therefore outside the individual's power to do something about this. Neither exercise nor diets can change the relationship between the two facial halves. The proportions of facial features must also be correct. Researchers have developed mathematical formulae to calculate beauty. Many celebrities who are perceived as beautiful fit into the template. And there are more ideas about how to measure beauty. Wabi sabi is a theory based on aesthetics that deals with asymmetry as a contrast between different parts of the face. Other terms are: Echoism (the similarity of one or more facial features, particularly the eyes, eyebrows, nose and mouth), Harmonism (a similarity in facial proportion, usually the wing features and the distance between them), Prima Copulism (an attraction to another person based on them having similar features to someone with whom they form a strong interpersonal bond with at an early age, usually a mother or father.)

It might not be a coincidence that the aliens in popular culture depict symmetrical bodies and faces because a completely symmetrical face is simply not natural. 3d artists use a small shift between the face halves that trick the eye to perceive the face as more realistic. At the end of the day, beauty is in the eye of the beholder!

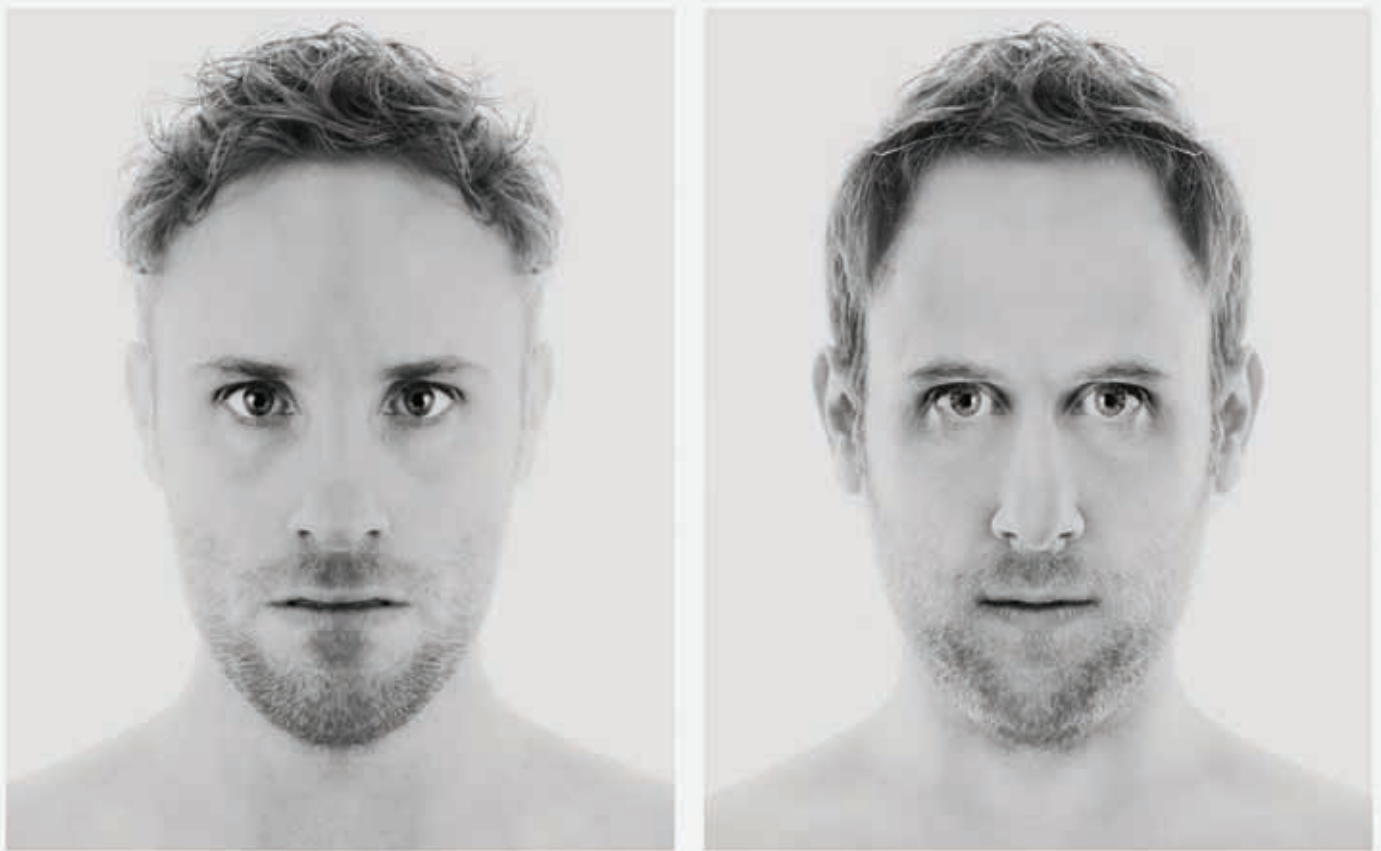




Jesper's first photo project, in 1999, was a book called PALS which was dedicated to presenting and exploring friendship and his closest friends in pictures. After 2 years of studying photography and art at Fotoskolan in Gothenburg, Sweden he returned to his hometown- Halmstad- to start up a business. For several years he worked on commercial assignments whilst exploring his personal work. His biggest influences are movies and observing everyday life. His subjects tend to be people even though he thinks humans (including himself) are self-centered and obsessed with their appearances and

possessions. The result is that he is more aware about his own flaws.

In another project titled 'Yes baby!' Jesper sets out to explore society and our way of living which can be looked upon as a form of relationship or marriage where men and women often respond to each other's needs with: Yes Baby!, without reflecting on their own inner feelings and needs. His photographs in 'Yes Baby!' reflect on how we are "building" our bodies and images of ourselves and how we think others want us to be, act or to be seen.



Jesper's message is simple- Become who you want to be, celebrate your star qualities, embrace your flaws and live your life!

During the last 10 years Jesper has produced five books and participated in several solo and group exhibitions. He currently works with some of Sweden's top magazines, advertising agencies and companies. Jesper's style of photography has created a demand for his work both in

Sweden and in other parts of the world. He is represented by the Swedish Gallery DeFreo www.defreo.se His commercial website is www.iamjesper.com

Article by Caroline Hedlund, Curator Uppsala, Sweden.

