SUMMARY

Photography Series “Vultus Interpretātiō”

This thesis explored the interpretability of facial expressions in photography and examined how emotional meaning emerges in situations where facial expressions are not immediately identifiable. The work focused on the uncertainty of emotional interpretation and questioned the common assumption that facial expressions function as transparent indicators of a person’s internal emotional state.

Facial expressions are often culturally understood as visual signs that allow emotions to be recognised and interpreted intuitively. Especially within portrait photography, the face is frequently approached as a direct reflection of emotional experience. This project originated from questioning that assumption and from an interest in situations where emotional meaning becomes more unstable, ambiguous, or difficult to define.

The central research problem focused on the instability of reading emotions through photographic images. The work examined how visual perception, context, and the viewer’s interpretation influence emotional meaning and how facial expressions can become open to multiple meanings rather than functioning as fixed emotional representations.

The theoretical framework relied primarily on photographic theory concerning meaning formation and interpretation. Particular attention was given to understanding photography not only as representation, but as a space where meaning develops through interaction between image and viewer. The work approached emotional interpretation as a process that does not solely emerge from visible interpretation, but is shaped through perception, context, and subjective experience.

The practical component of the thesis followed a visual research methodology in which photographic practice functioned simultaneously as a research tool and creative process. Knowledge developed through experimentation, observation, image-making, and reflection. Early experiments focused on controlled studio conditions and facial microdetails. During the process, however, it became evident that a highly controlled environment limited interpretative complexity, leading the project toward outdoor environments and alternative visual strategies.

Daily observations of people in public spaces also formed an important part of the research process. Observing facial expressions in everyday situations revealed that

emotions are not always visually stable or immediately recognisable. The process shifted attention increasingly away from identifying emotions toward understanding uncertainty itself as a meaningful component of visual interpretation.

The final photographic series “Vultus Interpretātiō” consisted of five photographs exploring facial expressions within a similar environment. Rather than emphasizing emotional clarity, the images intentionally maintained a degree of interpretative openness. Selective focus and partially reduced readability of facial features functioned as central visual methods that challenged immediate emotional categorisation.

The results of the thesis suggested that emotional meaning in photography does not exist as a fixed visual fact but emerges through interaction between image, context, and viewer interpretation. Facial expressions cannot always be understood as transparent emotional signs. Instead, they may remain incomplete, unstable, and open in multiple readings.

The thesis demonstrated that photography can function not only as a medium for representing emotions but also as a method for examining how emotional meaning is constructed and interpreted. Through both theoretical inquiry and photographic practice, the work explored uncertainty itself as a central condition of visual understanding.

Keywords:

1. photography
2. portrait photography
3. facial expressions
4. interpretation