

Asylum

Mental hospitals are frightening places where people have crossed a threshold. It is necessary for us on the outside to imagine them as benign places and to blindly hope they are beneficial to those who live there. They are, for most of us, in that category of things we do not think about.

In the series of photographs made between 1979 and 1982, Dag Alveng has frontally attacked the secrets of the psychiatric institution. His clear depiction of its pertinent details—walls, furniture, and ephemera—reveals the possibilities of existential fact. We believe we are seeing the objects themselves and not their representation in photographs. What is depicted becomes symbolic of passivity, boredom, repetition, violence, intimidation and routine. Such a revelation is more challenging than mere transformation, since as viewers, we are forced to respond to descriptions seemingly unfiltered by the photographer.

Alveng, who made these photographs while working as the institution's nightwatchman, takes us on a surreptitious journey through its corridors and rooms, revealing to us harrowing and sorrowful truths.

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