



ROGER BALLEEN

Shadow Land. The Photography of Roger Ballen 1982 – 2015.

25.09.2015 – 17.01.2016

Wing, MEDIApoint and Project Room

Curators: Pia Hovi-Assad, Anni Venäläinen

Media preview on 24.09.2015 at 11.00

Preview for the public on 25.09.2015 at 12.00

Opening on 25.09.2015 from 18.00–20.00

Roger Ballen's disturbing, strangely beautiful photographs remain to haunt the mind. Originally a documentary photographer, Ballen has gradually begun creating dreamlike compositions with objects, people, animals and drawings. His medium has throughout been the black-and-white photograph. This exhibition presents a cross section of Ballen's work. It also includes two documentary short films, *Asylum of the Birds* (2014) and *Outland* (2015), in which Ballen takes us to the people and the settings in urban outskirts where the photographs were shot. The exhibition even features a music video, *I Fink U Freeky* (2012), which marked the beginning of Ballen's cooperation with the South African band Die Antwoord.

American by birth and a geologist by training, Ballen's work took him to South Africa, where he began to photograph the people he met and the places he visited, initially on 35mm stock in the manner of street photography. Ballen has said that his aesthetic vision can best be described as 'Roger Ballen's world', which has developed step by step over the past more than forty years. When Ballen switched to using a Rolleiflex, his method changed. As he could no longer take pictures surreptitiously, he had to ask people to pose for the camera. Initially his photographs were about people, such as the series *Dorps, Small Towns of South Africa* (1982–1986) and *Platteland, Images from Rural South Africa* (1986–1994), in which he photographed white people living in isolated conditions in remote areas. This period also included the famous picture *Dresie & Casie, Twins*, from 1993. It was around this time that visual content, such as odd details and carefully considered juxtapositions, began to gain prominence in Ballen's work.

The documentary aspect of his work receded when Ballen's interaction with his subjects developed. Already in the early series *Outland* (1994–2000) and *Shadow Chamber* (2000–2004) the subjects became performers, who together with Ballen created visions that sound the depths of the human psyche. In the latter series, strange twisted wires and cables which had appeared already in earlier pictures as well as deformed drawings begin to take over. Gradually the pictures have evolved into complex visions composed of visual metaphors, based on real places but complemented with staged situations and compositions. In the series *Boarding House* (2004–2008) and *Asylum of the Birds* (2008–2013), created in the past ten years, precedence is increasingly given to animals, birds, drawings, paintings and objects over people. Because of the unpredictability of humans and of animal behaviour in particular, the photographic 'decisive moment' – that instant when the composition and events in the picture coalesce for a brief moment when the shutter is released – has not lost its importance.

Ballen's pictures contain both a comic and a tragic element simultaneously. One can even see social commentary in them, although the artist himself denies any political overtones, emphasising instead his interest in human psychology, into that which is most profoundly human in us. In fact, he calls his pictures extensions of his own mind. Ballen has consistently adhered to the black-and-white square format. The pictures can be seen as being related to outsider art, installation art or theatre, while also being part of the tradition of photojournalism and photographic art. Most recently Ballen has also set up his installations in galleries and has extended his work to include moving image works, such as music videos and short films.

Enquiries:

Anni Venäläinen, chief curator (temporary), exhibition services, tel.+358 (0)44 701 7601, anni.venalainen@pori.fi