

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

PRESS RELEASE

Torbjørn Rødland
Old Shep

January 14 – March 11, 2023
Opening on Friday, January 13, 6 – 8 pm
Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Old Shep*, the fourth solo exhibition by the Norwegian artist Torbjørn Rødland.

Torbjørn Rødland's new photographic works revolve around the theme of time. His motifs depict people, plants, and things in moments of transition and disappearance—predetermined breaking points where one stage of life ends, and another begins.

Bright pink and rose-colored flowers in a garden, the blossoms slightly droopy, supported by a piece of wood. A heavy old man, rustic with a beard and hat, seeking support from a huge tree trunk with a rippling lake in the background. An earthy, hilly landscape containing a chair, torn like a white skeleton. Inherent in all these images is a haunting vanitas symbolism—an atmosphere of transience, transformation, and ultimately death. Rødland chose the sad Elvis song "Old Shep" as the exhibition title. The song tells the story of a boy with his dog, who spends his life by his side and eventually dies. It forms something like the background music which lends a melancholic undertone to Rødland's intensely luminous and clearly composed imagery.

As so often in his work, Rødland responds to the aesthetics of classical visual art, frequently touching upon the structure and subject matter of sacred imagery. From the elegant composition and lush lighting to motifs such as that of mother and child, Rødland appeals to our general visual memory, but not without disrupting it in an almost surrealist manner. The mother is reduced to her heavy, exposed breasts, which hang in a suggestive manner above the baby, on whose cheek a tear of milk can be seen. The simple interior, a chair and metal candlestick in front of the window, has something ghostly about it since the chair seems to float—yet Rødland has only leaned it, tilting against the wall. The broken eggshells also appear feather-light and almost otherworldly. In their seductive and at the same time morbid symbolism, they convey a psychological dimension that lies beyond the depicted event despite the fact that, at first glance, Rødland's photographs appear so easily tangible in their often pop imagery.

Born and raised in Norway, Rødland has been living in Los Angeles for a long time. His intensely suffused imagery is reminiscent of the artificial, clichéd scenarios of Hollywood which the artist constantly subverts. A dark and mysterious undertone emanates from all his works: the toddler standing alone with a lost gaze, holding a Japanese knife to his cheek, or the red dancing shoes with white dotted socks that could be from a 1950s musical, subduing the white dog with curly fur. As delicate and harmless, or as innocent and playful as some of his stagings appear, when viewed only cursorily, the potential for danger and violence is palpable in Rødland's photographs. Through the use of encoded symbols, Rødland takes a broader perspective than sticking solely to the smooth world he momentarily unfolds before us, reminiscent of the kind art history used in the form of mirrors, fruit, animals or lighting within still lives and portraiture.

Photography is the all-consuming medium of our present era; the camera is an omnipresent tool that almost universally dominates our everyday lives: Rødland undermines any inflationary image production by inscribing a sense of deceleration in his photographs which, with the theme of transience, he takes to an extreme. His images force the viewer to pause and reflect, though it is not always easy to linger over the sometimes irritating and often strange stagings. But it is precisely this play with the stop-and-go of the gaze, with the back and forth of temporality, into which his kaleidoscope of pictorial-historical extensions throws us. Superficiality is not his thing. The sense of slowness in Rødland's work is diametrically opposed to the insane pace and immense overproduction of the medium today, making the palpable old theme of death inherent in photography still relevant—all the more so in an era where images disappear faster than they can unfold in space and time.

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Torbjørn Rødland was born in Stavanger, Norway in 1970, and lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. In 2021, the Contemporary Austin (Texas) dedicated a solo exhibition to Rødland titled *Bible Eye*. Recent institutional presentations include the traveling exhibitions *Fifth Honeymoon* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki, FI (2019); the Bonnier Konsthall, Stockholm, SE (2018); and the Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, NO (2018); *The Touch That Made You* at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, IT (2018) and the Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2017). Further solo exhibitions have been held at the Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, NO (2015); the Kunsthall Stavanger, Stavanger, NO (2014); the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, JP (2010); the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, US (2010) and MoMA PS1, New York, NY, US (2006).

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