

Press release

June 2016

Torbjørn Rødland

Matthew Mark Luke John and Other Photographs

June 12 to August 27, 2016

Löwenbräu Areal, Limmatstr. 270, 8005 Zurich, 2nd floor

Opening on Saturday, June 11, 6 to 8 pm

Tuesday – Friday 11-6, Saturday 11-5 and by appointment

Special opening times during the Zurich Art Weekend: June 9 – 12, 10 to 8 and during Art Basel: June 13 – 20, 10 to 6 and by appointment

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Matthew Mark Luke John and Other Photographs*, an exhibition of new photographs by Torbjørn Rødland. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Over the last two decades, Torbjørn Rødland has created a body of images in which precision and critical rigor co-exist with an erotic, improvisational intensity that evades the reach of language. This standoff between divergent ways of seeing, and between intellectual and intuitive modes of perception, places the unpredictable physicality of the world—as well as the social structures that distance people from it—at the center of his work. The current exhibition includes 14 color photographs whose double-edged allegories reveal the layers of pleasure and discomfort lurking beneath the surface of aesthetic experience.

The photograph from which the show's title is taken, for instance, depicts a young boy who appears to be praying. Backlit with radiant, natural sunlight, there is no outwardly obvious reason why he should be considered anything other than the image of purity and religious innocence. And yet whether because of its voyeuristic overtones or the gulf of meaning opened by the work's title—the symbolic weight of the gospels condensed into an uninflected string of their authors' now-ubiquitous names—the picture feels ominously pressurized. It draws equal semiotic power from the timeless mysteries of religious ritual and the dire ramifications of contemporary Church scandal, and its luminosity is both offset and accentuated by emotional shadows. What feels right is inseparable from what feels wrong.

If the majority of contemporary image-making relies upon the mediated, distancing effects of digital technologies, Rødland's ongoing use of analogue formats allows him to retain a measure of technical vulnerability, and to maintain a close connection to photography as a physical set of relationships between subject, light, film, and developing chemicals. The literal wetness of this process becomes a metaphor for the thriving, unpredictable quality that distinguishes life from the inert stuff that surrounds it. Several photographs on view feature gooey, sticky substances that negotiate the spaces between objects or body parts, rendering them less discrete and placing them in intimate connection with one another. The photograph flattens the world it depicts, but it also makes room for a life-giving fluidity, bringing together otherwise separate forms in a single imaginative continuum.

Works like these revel in visual detail in a manner reminiscent of classic 20th century art photography, even though their knowing, arch humor gives them an iconoclastic charge that suggests that other value systems are at stake. When a common element shows up in two pictures with distinct emotional registers, its aesthetic properties haunt both images without becoming their primary subject. A non-descript beige carpet, for instance, makes an appearance in both 'Hard Fruit', a photograph of a large apple, and 'First Abduction Attempt', a violent, cinematic image of a woman being dragged through a door. The texture and color of the carpet anchor both photographs, and yet this seems almost besides the point given the narrative associations they also engender. Conversely, when Rødland employs techniques or stylistic approaches associated with specific applications in the culture at large, such as fashion and advertising, he does so with an eye toward their formal properties, so that the aesthetic function, like nature itself, threatens to override whatever practical or utilitarian uses to which it is put.

For this reason Rødland's images are not created – and thus cannot be read – according to a single interpretive framework. They are dependent upon a willingness to wrestle with the diversity of life as a constantly evolving system of physical phenomena, emotional reaction, and cultural exchange. Since Rødland operates under the condition that any of these modes can take precedence over the others at any

given time, the range of what his photographs make visible is quite broad. At one end of the spectrum, beautiful, repulsive, or somewhere in between, are the plain facts of sensory experience; at the other are the socially negotiated contexts in which those facts take on psychological meaning and moral weight. The entirety of this range comes into view in a work like 'Midlife Dilemma', in which a young shirtless man dispassionately accosts an older man in a suit. That their relationship is unclear, or that they might have been posed (the young man looks directly into the camera), does not take away from the intense intimacy of the scene. What matters is that one touches the other, and that the camera records the light that touches them both.

The opening of *Matthew Mark Luke John and Other Photographs* will coincide with the inauguration of a project Rødland produced for Manifesta 11 in collaboration with Dr. Danielle Heller Fontana, a Zürich-based dentist. A portion of that project will be on view at the LUMA Foundation, directly across from the gallery's space in the Löwenbräu Areal building.

Torbjørn Rødland (b. 1970, Stavanger, Norway, lives and works in Los Angeles and Oslo) has been the subject of a number of institutional solo exhibitions, including shows at Henie-Onstad, Oslo, Norway (2015); Kunsthall Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway (2014); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan (2010); Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, United States (2010) and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, United States (2006).

Group exhibitions include *What People Do For Money*, MANIFESTA 11, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); 9. Berlin Biennial, Berlin, Germany (2016); *Billboard*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, United States (2016); *The Elephant Test*, Lothringer13 Städtische Kunsthalle München, Munich, Germany (2014); *Altars of Madness*, Casino Luxembourg Forum d'art Contemporain, Luxembourg (2013); *The Eye is a Lonely Hunter: Images of Humankind*, Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg, Germany (2011); *N'importe quoi*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, France (2009); *Disturbance*, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (2008); *Trials and Terrors*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, United States (2005); *Elysian Fields*, Purple Institute, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2000); and *dAPERTutto*, 48th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art, La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (1999).

Booklaunch on Sunday, June 12, 4-7 pm in presence of the artist.

For more information, please contact Andreas Grimm (a.grimm@presenhuber.com) at the gallery.

Current exhibitions:

- Joe Bradley, *Canton Rose*
June 12 to July 23 2016
Maag Areal, Zahnradstrasse 21, 8005 Zurich
2nd floor
Tue – Fri 10 - 6, Sat 11 - 5 and by appointment

- Mark Handforth, *Snow White and Pink Panther*
June 12 to July 23, 2016
Maag Areal, Zahnradstrasse 21, 8005 Zurich
5th floor, rooftop terrace
Tue – Fri 10 – 6, Sat 11 – 5 and by appointment

- Walead Beshty, *Automat*
June 12 to August 27, 2016
Löwenbräu Areal, Limmatstrasse 270, 8005 Zurich
1st floor
Tue – Fri 11 – 6, Sat 11 – 5 and by appointment