

PRESS RELEASE

Ed van der Elsken

Sweet Life

September 7 – October 12, 2019.

Opening September 7, 5 - 7 pm

Annet Gelink Gallery is proud to present an exhibition with a special selection of photographs from Ed van der Elsken's legendary photo book *Sweet Life* (1966).



Call and Ruby in front of their museum, Mojave Desert, USA, 1960

August 1959, exactly 60 years ago, Ed van der Elsken (1925-1990) and his wife Gerda van der Veen set off on a fourteen-month journey around the world: to West and South Africa, the Malaysian Peninsula, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, the United States and Mexico. In order to find funding for their travels, one of the commissions Van der Elsken took on was to report for the *Katholieke Illustratie*. During their travels Van der Elsken would regularly provide them with a report with photos and texts. But Van der Elsken's main goal was making a book. His book *Sweet Life* was published in 1966 and appeared in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, the United States, France and Japan. Van der Elsken took care of the design of the book himself: after five different drafts and six years later, he finally managed to get *Sweet Life* published. This travelogue is a chronicle of Van der Elsken and Van der Veen's journey and their encounters with a range of people in the streets, varying from youngsters in Durban, to the refugees on the hills in Hong Kong, to youngsters in love in Mexico. In *Sweet Life* Van der Elsken celebrates life in high contrast images with dark and pessimistic undertones. Or, as described in *Camera in Love* (2017), "The photographic odyssey embodies Van der Elsken's sense of adventure, his entrepreneurial spirit, his inexhaustible fascination with people and other cultures".¹

Besides iconic photos in black and white we also show 'new' discoveries in colour from his *Sweet Life* series. For example, the Zulu couple in Durban, which so far had only been known to us in black and white. Although, Van der Elsken vividly describes the couple in his book: "Dear, naive Africans. Serious and sweet. I'm terribly proud of the picture at the right. (...) The youngsters at the right are Zulus, in Durban, South Africa. Brother and sister. (...) They were all dressed up in their best clothes - the girl in anklets, bracelets, necklaces, beaded corselet, ribbons in her braided hair, flaming orange sweater, enormous breasts, two or three capes; the boy just as colourful in his own way, with his riding breeches, carved walking stick, fancy sweater and scarf, satin-faced jacket, broad brimmed hat. They were unbelievably relaxed and straight forward - knockouts, both of them."²

In addition to the photographic travel journey of Van der Elsken's world trip, you will also find several colour portraits of 'couples' in the exhibition. Van der Elsken emphatically positions himself between his camera and the subject he is capturing. With his colour photography, Van der Elsken pays tribute to humankind and life around universal themes such as love, life and death. These colour images resonate with the current exhibition, *Lust for Life*, at the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam. Joyful and intimate images, Van der Elsken at his best, are brought together in this exhibition.

Ed van der Elsken's (1925, Amsterdam -1990, Edam NL) work has recently been shown in major solo and group exhibitions at Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam (2019), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2018), Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid (2017-18), the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2017), Jeu de Paume, Paris (2017).

He is highly acclaimed for his characteristic publications, the most memorable being 'Love on the Left Bank' (1956), 'Bagara' (1957), 'Jazz' (1959), 'Sweet Life' (1966), 'Eye Love You' (1977), 'Amsterdam!' (1979) and 'Once Upon a Time' (1991).

Ed van der Elsken's work is part of the collection of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam (NL); The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (US); Modern Art Museum, Kawasaki (JP); MoMA, New York (US); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (NL); Fotomuseum Den Haag (NL); Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam (NL); Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (ES)

¹ Ed van der Elsken, 'Camera in Love', Prestel, 2017, p. 157.

² Ed van der Elsken, *Sweet Life*, Harry N. Abrams New York, 1966.