



ROGER BALLEEN (B.1950)

One of the most influential and important photographic artists of the 21st century, Roger Ballen's photographs span over forty years. His strange and extreme works confront the viewer and challenge them to come with him on a journey into their own minds as he explores the deeper recesses of his own.

Roger Ballen was born in New York in 1950 but for over 30 years he has lived and worked in South Africa. His work as a geologist took him out into the countryside and led him to take up his camera and explore the hidden world of small South African towns. At first he explored the empty streets in the glare of the midday sun but, once he had made the step of knocking on people's doors, he discovered a world inside these houses, which was to have a profound effect on his work. These interiors with their distinctive collections of objects and the occupants within these closed worlds took his unique vision on a path from social critique to the creation of metaphors for the inner mind. After 1994 he no longer looked to the countryside for his subject matter finding it closer to home in Johannesburg.

Over the past thirty years his distinctive style of photography has evolved using a simple square format in stark and beautiful black and white. In the earlier works in the exhibition his connection to the tradition of documentary photography is clear but through the 1990s he developed a style he describes as 'documentary fiction'. After 2000 the people he first discovered and documented living on the margins of South African society increasingly became a cast of actors working with Ballen in the series' *Outland and Shadow Chamber* collaborating to create powerful psychodramas.

The line between fantasy and reality in his more recent series' *Boarding House* and *Asylum of the Birds* has become increasingly blurred and in these series he has employed drawings, painting, collage and sculptural techniques to create elaborate sets. People are now often absent altogether; replaced by photographs of people used as props, by doll or dummy parts or where they do appear it's as disembodied hands, feet and mouths poking disturbingly through walls and pieces of rag. The often-improvised scenarios are completed by the unpredictable behaviour of the animals whose ambiguous behaviour is crucial to the overall meaning of the photographs. Ballen has invented a new hybrid aesthetic in these works but one still rooted firmly in black and white photography.

Thames and Hudson has released Roger's latest book: *Ballenesque Roger Ballen: A Restrospective* (2017) following *The Theatre of Apparitions* (2016). Featuring reflective and engaging texts by Ballen himself, *Ballenesque* offers a distinctly personal account of the photographer's career to date, including rare and privileged insights into Ballen's photographic practice and the major influences that have helped to shape his worldview. Each of the key stages in Ballen's creative journey is explored – a journey that, for Ballen has been both an outward and inward exploration of the self.



Roger has showed his works around Asia, Europe, Africa, and the US, his latest solo exhibitions being in Brazil, Switzerland, South Africa, Mexico and Belgium. His works are also part of prominent museum collections around the world, including Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Museum of Modern Art, New York, US; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Tate Britain, London, UK.