

SEPTEMBER 7, 2019 – JULY 31, 2020
Press opening: Friday September 6 (9.30am-1pm)

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ROGER BALLEEN

After developing an idiosyncratic style which is referred to as “Ballenesque”, Roger Ballen became one of the most prominent photographers of his generation. He achieved international recognition through his unique and powerful use of drawing, painting, and collage alongside various sculptural techniques in elaborate installations, inventing a new, hybrid aesthetics, firmly rooted in the art of photography. At the same time, Roger Ballen directed several acclaimed videos, including *I fink u freeky* with the South African Band Die Antwoord.

With the exhibition “The World according to Roger Ballen”, la Halle Saint Pierre Paris will be showing an unforgettable overview of this extraordinary artist, an unprecedented experience. On this occasion, unseen installations will be created by Roger Ballen exclusively for this exhibition, as well as his unseen recent color photographs.



INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION BY MARTINE LUSARDY

Roger Ballen reigns over the black-and-white world of the human psyche. Disturbing, provocative and enigmatic, the work of this American-born South African photographer, a geologist by training, expresses the sense of confusion of a man confronted by the nonsensical nature both of his life and of the world in general. Ballen's work has been the subject of



Martine Lusardy

exhibitions at prestigious institutions for more than thirty years now. Although each of his shows is an event, his decision to exhibit at the Halle Saint Pierre in Paris, an atypical museum devoted to outsider art and unusual forms of creativity, demonstrates his freedom from artistic genres. For the Halle Saint Pierre, a collaboration with Roger Ballen is an invitation to showcase – or test out – the artistic and cultural otherness of art brut. In his relationship with creativity, Ballen has constantly explored a form of art that is rooted in the deepest layers of human nature; like the French dramatist, actor and writer Antonin Artaud, he is always moving towards more primal means of artistic expression.

It was outside the usual boundaries of culture, in places of confinement and exclusion, that the French artist Jean Dubuffet redefined the territory of art, in the belief that it could be more authentic and personal there. Artists who are resistant or impervious to the norms and values of 'asphyxiating culture' are the harbingers of a new relationship with the world, whose unexplored potential they lay bare. To them, creation is life's act of protest in the face of the threat of nothingness.

When Ballen photographs South Africans marginalized by fear, poverty and isolation, he transforms the existence of those who live in

a world of absurd and repetitive gestures into another existence, in which they are the artists of a sculptural universe that they themselves have created.

In *Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa* (1986), Ballen shows us places where both the architecture and the inhabitants are in decline. Fascinated by

'the faded and crumbling glory of the dorps with their decrepit portents of grandeur and remnants of unfulfilled promises', he enters into a world, both literally and metaphorically, where he records visual and cultural anomalies as the signs of a dying culture. Later, in *Platteland* (1994), he shows us a realistic and deeply affecting portrait of the rural world during apartheid. He photographs people caught up in political, economic and racial turmoil within the intimacy of their daily lives, with all their physical and psychological flaws.

Outland (2001), *Shadow Chamber* (2005) and *Boarding House* (2009) mark the clear development of a unique style and vocabulary. Ballen introduces deliberate *mise en scène*, which he uses to capture existential vertigo; beneath the theatre lies the truth. The marginal figures he engages with, and with whom he has gradually built up strong and sympathetic relationships, become the comic and tragic actors in his psychodramas, no longer in a social context but within a formal artistic world. Their gestures and preoccupations, now intensified, seem to be stripped of meaning. Their bodies, their 'vehicles of being-in-the-world' (to quote Maurice Merleau-Ponty) – shrunken, decrepit and deformed, and sometimes existing only as fragments – bear witness to their turmoil at having lost any obvious connection to the universe.

Asylum of the Birds (2014), the culmination of several years' work, is a place of both refuge and imprisonment. Dramatic and dreamlike, it speaks of the human condition, even when humans are absent. In a setting filled with detritus, a few lost beings, their bodies fragmented or stripped of their verticality, cohabit with a colony of animals. The masters of this space – the birds – fly free, bearing witness to this erasure of human life. Recalling Dubuffet's late series on 'non-places', with its deeply nihilistic inspiration, *Asylum* is an attempt to represent not the world but its incorporality, that nothingness filled with the phantoms and phantasms we project on it.

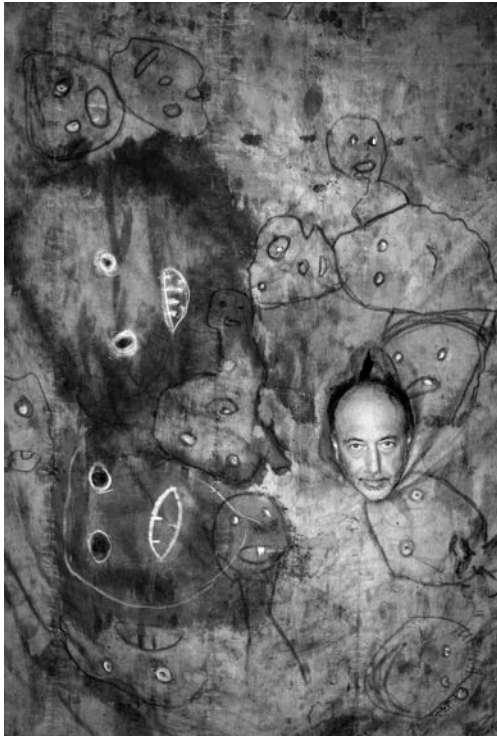
The world according to Roger Ballen has evolved over the years, born from and within his relationship with photography. His encounter with the social and psychological realities of South Africa, most notably in the dorps, was clearly a formative experience: 'The discovery of such places meant that I would frequently return, drawn for no explicable reason whatsoever.' If it is unsettling to see these domains chosen for their formal and aesthetic qualities, it is because, situated

beyond history, they seem to strip bare the sense of alienation that is still felt in a world in which people have become exiled from themselves. But images must be freed from their indexical nature before the 'Ballenesque' world of the imagination can take form as a metaphor of the human condition. The artist explores this imaginary world equally deeply in videos and installations, like theatrical renderings of his dystopian vision. A liminal zone, switching constantly between animate and inanimate, reality and fiction, human and animal, presence and erasure, leads us to an inner realm where all borders are blurred. 'My images have multiple layers of meaning, and, for me, it's impossible to say that a photograph is about anything other than myself', Ballen has said, echoing the words of Dubuffet: 'The European would do well to occasionally turn aside his gaze that is too fixed on his ideal of the social man, civilized and reasonable, and fix it upon safeguarding something that I believe is extremely precious: the part of his being that remains savage.'

Martine Lusardy,
Head of Halle Saint Pierre
Curator of the exhibition

“Every time I visit Paris year after year, I have looked forward to visiting Halle Saint Pierre. Great art has to relate to the universal, the archetypal not to the sensational, fashion, or what sells. The art in this Museum is genuine, essential, implicitly understood. One does not have to understand how the art in Halle Saint Pierre was created, where it was made, or when it was produced, it has immediate effect in the deeper chambers of the mind. I have rarely left this unique Museum of the same person as when I entered. My exhibition, *The World According to Roger Ballen* at Halle Saint Pierre will be the largest exhibition of my work in my 50-year long career. It will clearly establish the link between the Ballenesque aesthetic and Outsider Art that has played such a crucial part in my career.”

Roger Ballen



Immersed, 2016 © Marguerite Rossouw



Roger Drawing 1, 2018 © Marguerite Rossouw

“Drawing is central to the Ballenesque aesthetic. Although elements of drawing had appeared in Ballen’s photographs from the start of the 1990s, he places the conscious realization of the importance of drawing to his work at the close of the century. Although Ballen has worked with photography – a medium to which verisimilitude is intrinsic – from the start, the drawings to which he was attracted were neither accomplished nor mimetic. They were technically unsophisticated, the product of the untrained hands and eyes of people who knew nothing of art history or the art world.

Ballen never learnt how to draw. That is, he was neither taught drawing techniques nor did he seek to learn them. His mark-making was, and remains, spontaneous and impulsive. Indeed, his images carry a kind of primal force. They embody emotion and convey a general mood – at times sombre, at others fierce and demonic, and at others witty and mischievous. Although they are technically unsophisticated, there is nothing simple about the use to which he puts his drawings, nor indeed about their expressive concerns, which, for nearly two decades now, have formed the very basis of his aesthetic.”

Professor Colin Rhodes,
Dean at Kingston University, Kingston School of Art, UK

BIOGRAPHY OF ROGER BALLEEN

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 five 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* (2000, revised in 2015) and *Shadow Chamber* (2005) collaborating to create powerful psychodramas.



Roger in the family room, 2014

The line between fantasy and reality in his subsequent series' *Boarding House* (2009) and *Asylum of the Birds* (2014) became increasingly blurred and in these series he employed drawings, painting, collage and sculptural techniques to create elaborate sets. There was an absence of people altogether, replaced by photographs of individuals now used as props, by doll or dummy parts or where people did appear it was as

disembodied hands, feet and mouths poking disturbingly through walls and pieces of rag. The often improvised scenarios were now completed by the unpredictable behaviour of animals whose ambiguous behaviour became crucial to the overall meaning of the photographs. In this phase Ballen invented a new hybrid aesthetic, but one still rooted firmly in black and white photography.

In his artistic practice Ballen has increasingly been won over by the possibilities of integrating photography and drawing. He has expanded his repertoire and extended his visual language. By integrating drawing into his photographic and video works, the artist has not only made a lasting contribution to the field of art, but equally has made a powerful commentary about the human condition and its creative potential.

His contribution has not been limited to stills photography and Ballen has been the creator of a number of acclaimed and exhibited short films that dovetail with his photographic series'. The collaborative film *I Fink You Freeky*, created for the cult band *Die Antwoord* in 2012, has garnered over 125-million hits on YouTube. He has taken his work into the realms of sculpture and installation, at Paris' Musée de

la Chasse et de la Nature (2017), Australia's Sydney College of the Arts (2016) and at the Serlachius Museum in Finland (2015) is to name but a few. The spectacular installation at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2017, "House of the Ballenesque" was voted as one of the best exhibitions for 2017. In 2018 at the Wiesbaden Biennale, Germany, another installation "Roger Ballen's Bazaar/Bizarre" was created in an abandoned shopping centre.

In September 2017 Thames & Hudson published a large volume of the collected photography with extended commentary by Ballen titled *Ballenesque Roger Ballen: A Retrospective*.

VISUALS



The Back of the Mind, 2012



Waif, 2012



Addict, 2014



Disconnected, 2018



Inevitable, 2013



Mimicry, 2005

VISUALS



Roger Drawing 1, 2018 © Marguerite Rossouw



Immersed, 2016 © Marguerite Rossouw



Roger Drawing 2, 2018 © Marguerite Rossouw



Discussion, 2018



Superman, 2018



Roger in the Family Room, 2014 © Marguerite Rossouw



Roger's Roger, 2019 © Marguerite Rossouw

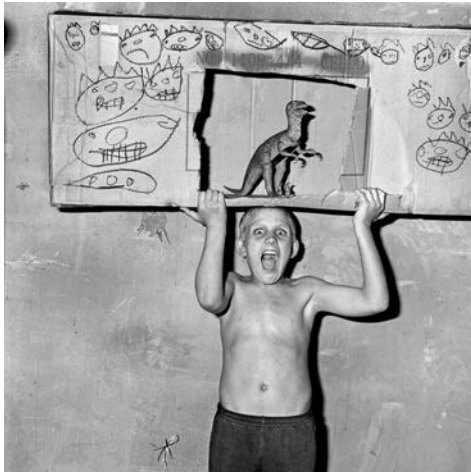
VISUALS



Mirrored, 2012



Prowling, 2001



Roar, 2002



Show off, 2000

LA HALLE SAINT PIERRE



The Halle Saint Pierre has been the Parisian cultural centre of outsider art since 1986. Thanks to the exhibition 'Art brut et compagnie' in 1995, a first in France, the Halle Saint Pierre established its reputation as a visionary and experimental museum. Since that time, it has not ceased to present avant-garde collections to the public, with a deep and reflective look at contemporary folk art.

Many successful exhibits

Major historical exhibits have studied the artistic and cultural reality that the concepts of art brut, singular art and outsider art relay in other cultures: *Outsider Art and Folk Art* (USA), *Haiti: angel and devil*, *Japanese art brut*, *British Outsider*, *Images of the Unconscious* (Brazil), as well as the latest successes, *Banditi dell'arte* (Italy), *Leeward of Art Brut II*, and the *Stadshof Collection* (Netherlands)... Themed exhibits introduce or deepen research on related topics specific to the field: the unconscious, madness, genius, automatism, mysticism, myths, origins, spiritual, medium and visionary art, delirium writing, dolls...

Solo and group exhibits provide a necessary space for living creation: *L'oeil à l'Etat sauvage*, *Eloge du dessin*, *Louis Pons*, *The World According to HR Giger*, *Unica Zürn*, *Fred Deux - Cécile Reims*, *Michel Macréau*, *Jean Rustin*, *Chomo*... as well as the more recent *Raw Vision*, *Les Cahiers Dessinés*, the trilogy *HEY! Modern Art & Pop Culture*, *Grand Trouble*, *Caro/Jeunet*, *Turbulences dans les Balkans*, *Art Brut Japonais II*...

Self-taught virtuosos or oblivious naïve artists, these radically individual creators offer works of excess, but also of poetry and innovation.



The Halle Saint Pierre, averse to the laws of the market, gives the floor to those excluded from traditional circuits, revealing at each temporary exhibit a constantly evolving art without the limits of genre.

A living and evolving cultural place with international reach

La Halle revolves around its temporary exhibits, a library and a café. More than an art centre, it is a vibrant place where artists, collectors, amateurs or visitors meet to exchange ideas, views and critical information.

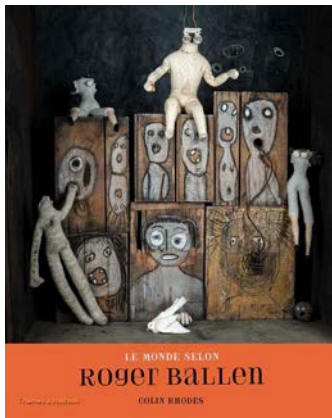
Multiple cultural and educational activities contribute to discussions around art brut: presentations by outsider artists who do not benefit from any distribution of their work through film festivals, poetic and literary evenings, conferences and debates, small publishing house gatherings, activities for a young public...

The bookshop is the essential hub of the Halle Saint Pierre, specializing in the literature surrounding this art, and participating each year in the Outsider Art Fair. The Halle Saint Pierre also proposes the international magazine *Raw Vision*.

In France and abroad, the Halle Saint Pierre occupies a unique place in the news and the promotion of this marginal, evolving and fascinating art form.

Director: Martine Lusardy, founder of the Halle Saint Pierre cultural project and curator of exhibits since 1995

PRACTICAL INFORMATION



CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

The World according to Roger Ballen

Roger Ballen and Colin Rhodes

Introduction by Martine Lusardy

05 September 2019 | £35.00

Extent: 208pp | Hardback

Size: 30.5 x 24.5 cm | 168 illustrations

ISBN: 9780500545218

Throughout his career, Roger Ballen has pursued a singular artistic goal: to give expression to the human psyche—to explore, visually, the hidden forces that shape who we are. This retrospective monograph, published in association with a major exhibition at the Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, provides a unique overview of the life and work of one of the most distinctive art photographers practicing today.

The World According to Roger Ballen, co-authored with Colin Rhodes, looks at Ballen's career in the wider cultural context beyond photography, including his connections with and collections of Art Brut. It features photographs selected from across Ballen's career, along with installations created exclusively for the exhibition at Halle Saint Pierre and photographs of objects and works from Ballen's own collection of Art Brut.

Organized thematically, with texts by Colin Rhodes and an introduction and interview with Ballen by Martine Lusardy (the Director of the Halle Saint Pierre), *The World According to Roger Ballen* is both an accompanying publication to the first, major exhibition of Ballen's work in France and an exploration of Ballen's positioning within and connections to the wider context of modern and contemporary art.

HALLE SAINT PIERRE

2, rue Ronsard - 75018 Paris
M° Anvers (2) / Abbesses (12)

Open every day:

Weekdays from 11 am to 6 pm

Saturdays from 11 am to 7 pm

Sundays from 12 noon to 6 pm

Temporary exhibits:

Full price: 9 € / reduced price: 7 €

hallesaintpierre.org

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