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Museum Tinguely *Roger Ballen – Call of the Void* (Danse macabre No. VIII)

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Disturbing installation dealing with central questions in human existence

Roger Ballen. Call of the Void is the eighth in a series of exhibitions at Museum Tinguely under the title *Danse macabre* with works responding to Jean Tinguely's late work *Mengele—Dance of Death*, shown in direct proximity to it. In his work, Ballen examines the human psyche and asks both himself and the viewer questions about being and becoming.

Ballen writes: «My show that I have chosen to title *Call of the Void* is an attempt to come to terms with what I believe to be the most central questions in human existence namely, where did we come from? What are we here for? And where do we go once we die? Whilst I do not claim to provide answers or even questions to these most profound and difficult issues, it is my hope that my exhibition will challenge the viewer's perceptions and consequently set up a process of self-examination leading to a more inquisitive state of self-consciousness.»

The exhibition consists of two parts that define and enrich one another. The walls are hung with photographs from Ballen's last analogue series, while the centre of the space is dominated by a shack, a poor dwelling for people on the margins of society of the kind often featured in Ballen's work.

He writes: «As one approaches the shelter in the middle of the exhibition-space, one is surrounded by black and white photographs that I have taken from the series *Asylum of the Birds* and *Roger's Rats*. In a simplistic sense, these rats and birds have symbolized good and evil, darkness and light, throughout human history. Birds link the heavens to the earth and rats are unfairly associated with dirt, disease, and darkness. Each species of animal brings with its own mythology, and when you bring that mythology into a photograph, it offers unlimited possibilities for creating deeper meanings relevant to the human condition.

The center of the exhibition is dominated by a structure with a mysterious door. Entering this space, the two-dimensional photographs are now expanded into a three dimensional world. The worn, broken and textured walls of the interior reveal a Theatre of the Ballenesque in which the human figures represent absurdity, comedy, and tragedy. Once inside, one is confronted with haunting depictions, sounds, and objects forcing the viewers to face their own void.»

Born in the US and based in Johannesburg, South Africa, **Roger Ballen** is one of the most important photographers of his generation. He has published over 25 books internationally and has collections in the most prominent museums in the world. His oeuvre, which spans five decades, began with the documentary photography field but evolved into the creation of distinctive fictionalized realms that also integrate the mediums of film, installation, theatre, sculpture, painting and drawing. Ballen describes his works as 'existential psychodramas' that touch the subconscious mind and evoke the underbelly of the human condition. They aim to break through the repressed thoughts and feelings by engaging him in themes of chaos and order, madness or unruly states of being, the human relationship to the animal world, life and death, universal archetypes of the psyche and experiences of otherness. Through his unique, complex visual language, and universal and profound themes, the artist has made a lasting contribution to the field of art.

Exhibition

Roger Ballen. Call of the Void
 Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland
 19 April – 29 October 2023

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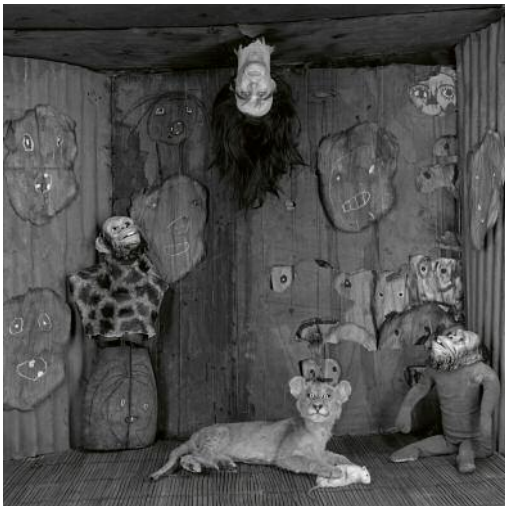
Press images



01_Roger Ballen, Mouth to Mouth, 2013
© courtesy Roger Ballen



02_Roger Ballen, Headless, 2006
© courtesy Roger Ballen



03_Roger Ballen, Inverted, 2015
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04_Installation view of the exhibition *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2023 © courtesy Roger Ballen
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05_Installation view of the exhibition *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2023 © courtesy Roger Ballen
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06_Installation view of the exhibition *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2023 © courtesy Roger Ballen
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o7_Roger Ballen in the exhibition *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2023 © courtesy Roger Ballen
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o8_Roger Ballen in the exhibition *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2023
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