



SOMEPLACE ELSE

THE AU INTERVIEW: ROGER BALLEEN TALKS ASYLUM OF THE BIRDS AND MONA EXHIBITION

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Well known and highly regarded photographer **Roger Ballen** (Born in New York City, lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa) is coming to Australia to exhibit a series of works at the MONA Gallery in Hobart, Tasmania. We caught up with Roger to talk about this exhibition, his latest book *Asylum of the Birds* and much more to learn more about his craft...

Your new series of works - and accompanying book - *Asylum of the Birds* has evolved over the last five years. Did the end result satisfy your original curiosities? Did it end up being anything that you originally expected it to be?

I am very excited about my upcoming new book *Asylum of the Birds* to be published by Thames and Hudson. I believe this project reveals a mature unique aesthetic .

All my projects evolve step by step. It is impossible to know what the next photograph will be; let alone have any idea what the final product evolve as.

What do you hope people take away from this series?

I hope the images remain imbedded in people's psyches. I like to compare my photographs to bullets with viruses on their tips. They enter deep inside the viewer's insides, and like a virus transform the interior structures.

The idea of "happy little accidents" and "good luck" are something many photographers point to for their best works. Those perfect moments etc. With your approach, however, this seems to be something less in mind - every shot seeming to be meticulously planned and thought over. Is this a fair assessment? If so, at what point are you able to consider something "perfect" (or as close to it as you can get) and if not, what would be an example of a "happy little accident" for you? Or perhaps there's a bit of both in your work...

My photographs are the result of a complex relationship between my conscious and subconscious and literally involve thousands of steps before I take a take a shot with the camera... Consequently, I do not believe in luck. I commonly make the point; "Is it luck when Tiger Woods' golf ball goes straight into the hole?"

Has the way you approach your photography over the years been influenced by changing technologies? If so, how?

I have been using the same Rolleiflex 6mm x 6m film camera for past thirty years. I am the last generation that has grown up in a black and white film environment, and I am dedicated to working within the framework of this media.

Manmade buildings have inspired both Asylum and your 2009 book Boarding House. What do you think it is about the physical nature of the "building" that makes it such a fertile ground for your photographic style at this point of your career?

The buildings that I have worked in become my studio... my stage. Both the Boarding House and the Asylum of the Birds projects took more or less five years to complete. During this period I got to know intimately the people, animals, and the places of the building that I worked in. I choose to work in these physical spaces as a result of the fact that they encapsulated important aspects of my aesthetic.

Your anticipated exhibition at MONA will bring together work from your series Asylum of the Birds and Apparitions over three spaces, including a "site-specific environment" inspired by Asylum. What can we expect from this environment and can you tell us a little bit about the Apparitions series?

The installation that I will create at MONA is intended to reflect the physical space that I work in. It will give the audience an opportunity to experience certain aspects of the environment that I work in. On the other hand, I hope that the installation is not intended to be only documentary, but should be an artwork in itself.

In addition to images from Asylum of the Birds series, I will also be showing images from a series that I refer to as the Apparition series. These images were taken over the last eight years and reflect the evolution of my photography to a media that incorporates aspects of drawing and painting. These photographs were shot with black and white film and like my other images are psychological statements. It might be difficult to know exactly where the space of these images is; except that it exists in deep inside our minds.

This exhibition seems to be a special one for you, in terms of its grand vision - not to mention location - how does it compare to other exhibitions you've had over the years?

Only recently have I begun to create installations as part of my shows. This show is important to me not only for this reason, but because it is the first time that I have shown such a number of images from Asylum of Birds with those from Apparitions. The exhibition is a true reflection of my current aesthetic.

You said that the aesthetic of MONA overlaps your own - what did you mean by that?

I have always believed that MONA is an institution that focuses on high quality art that makes a strong impression on the inner mind.

You are a photographer who many look up to - what advice do you give to emerging photographers - especially who strive for originality in the same breath as yourself...

I have always believed in the same formula: passion for what you do, discipline, hard work, dedication, and a tenacity that allows one to continue year after year no matter what the circumstances.

What else is in store for you in 2014?

I am working on a new series of works with an animal that people have vilified over the years. Furthermore, I am completing a film that parallels my Asylum of the Birds series as well as attempting to finish the Apparition series.

Roger Ballen exhibits at the MONO gallery in Tasmania from this Friday, December 7th. The exhibition runs until the 21st of April, 2014. More details about the show can be found here: <http://www.mona.net.au/what's-on/exhibitions/>

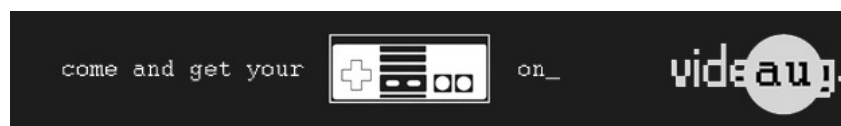
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