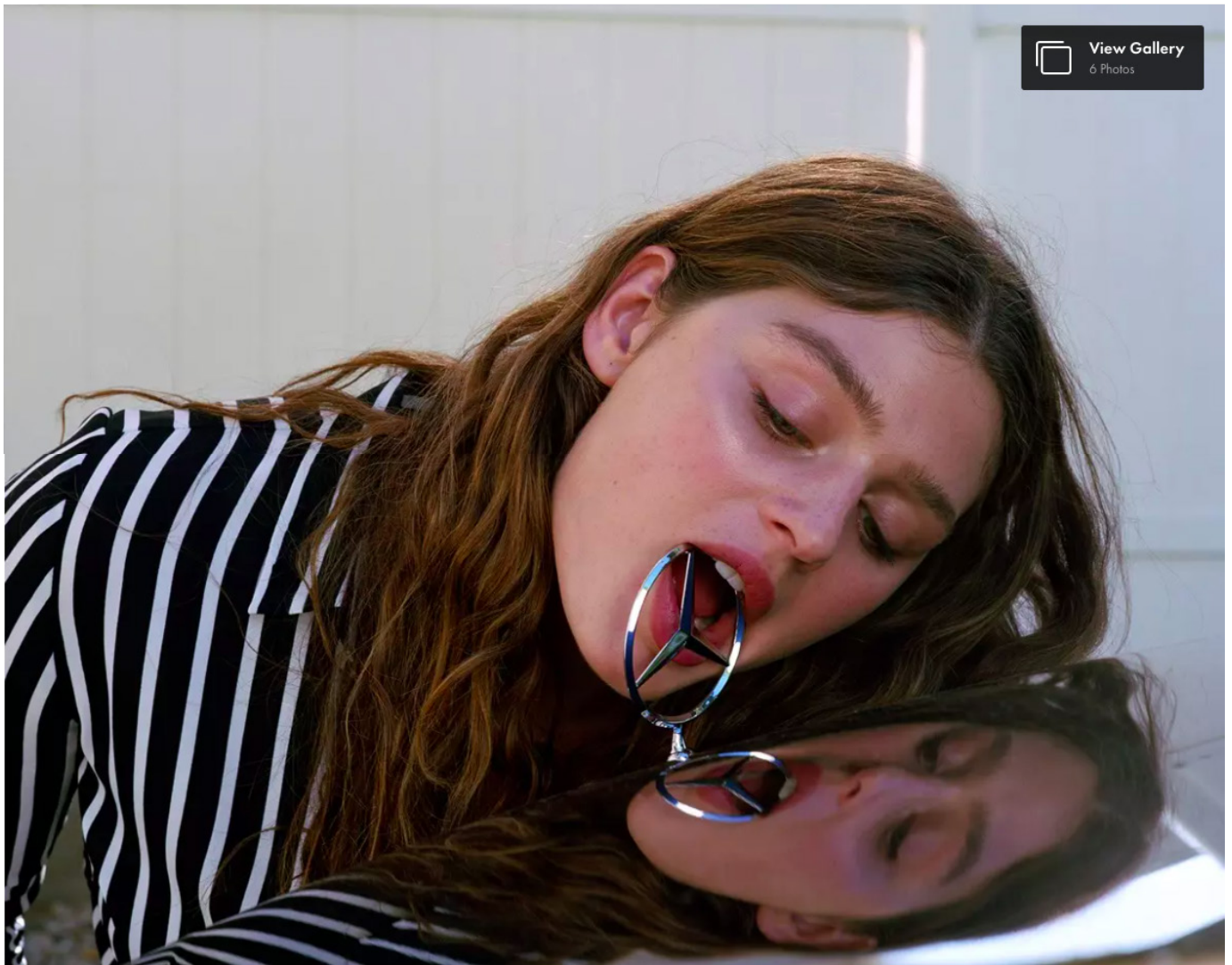


Torbjørn Rødland: "I'm interested in addressing the analytical mind, but also the paranoid body"

by MARIGOLD WARNER



Imbued with symbolism, humour and mystery, Torbjørn Rødland's photographs occupy an uncanny space

A topless man lays across a dining table, intently watching a pair of burning candles drip. A paint-covered toddler, reminiscent of a renaissance putto, stares deep into the camera lens. A woman seduces a Mercedes hood star with her mouth, moments from either licking it, or tearing it off.

Torbjørn Rødland's photographs have become known for occupying an uncanny space, one that can be simultaneously pleasing and puzzling, or romantic and amusing. The photographer is acutely conscious of this dichotomy, of how an image can be comforting to one viewer, but horrific to another, and actively seeks it within his work. "I'm interested in addressing the analytical mind, but also the paranoid body," he says. "People have very different experiences, different types of bodies and emotional lives, and so they will form different reactions to single images."

Rather than working on a series of images, Rødland tends to produce one image at a time, later curating them to tease out different meanings. "It is a process of seeing, or discovering the connections in the works that I've made, and trying to help those themes out by combining single images, so that they bump each other in one direction or another," he explains.



An Unfinished Hand, 2017–2020. © Torbjørn Rødland. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York.

Currently on show at Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich, *More Than Tongue Can Tell* was curated with the formal similarities between each image in mind. Rødland was interested in the visual links between some of the images, such as the dripping of wax and the dripping of paint, or rows of turnstiles and a striped shirt. "Then there were just some kind of mystical sexuality that started to arise from the material, or some ideas about creation," he says.

Alongside the images, Rødland is exhibiting his latest film, *Elegy for the Silent*. Poetic, but melancholy, it follows an old man as he looks out onto a world that no longer aligns with his values. Combining fragments of imagery from various places and times, Rødland's camera takes us to volcanic landscapes, and pebbled beaches, past rows of pink limousines, and to a cobbled curb, where a pile of cut flowers drown in a puddle. Much like his photographic process, crafting the film involved piecing together imagery that spoke to one another.



Candlestick Pattern no. 2, 2020. © Torbjørn Rødland. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York.

Born in 1970 in Stavanger, Norway, the photographer began drawing as a small child, and by his late-teens, was contributing editorial cartoons to his local paper. Although he grew up with a dark room in his home — built by his father, an amateur photographer — he did not take up photography as an artistic medium until later on. At 21, he enrolled onto a Cultural Studies degree at Rogaland University Centre in Oslo. “That’s when I switched over,” says Rødland, who later went on to study photography at the Bergen National Academy of the Arts. “My photography was closer to the artistic impulse than my drawings.”

Still, paintings and drawings provide a source of inspiration, or reference point, in Rødland’s process. “I always look to what painters do, while pushing for photography to constitute equally complex and layered visual expressions of—and statements for—our time,” says Rødland, in a statement provided by the gallery. Removed from the intrinsic here-and-now of the photographic medium, part of the success of Rødland’s images in igniting multiple emotions in his viewers lie in their timeless quality. “Photography is no longer a young medium. Like painting, it can help us empower the past and reconnect with the archaic, the living mystery.”

Torbjørn Rødland: More Than Tongue Can Tell is currently on show at [Galerie Eva Presenhuber](#), Zurich, until 20 February 2021.



Turnstile Gate no. 1, 2020. © Torbjørn Rødland. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York.