

ERWIN OLAF

In Motion, In Stillness

Opening November 23, 2024

Can Sanç 13, Palma de Mallorca, Spain



Erwin Olaf, Kammerballett - I (Dance In Close-Up), 2022.
Archival print on Hahnemuhle PhotoRag Baryta. 150 x 150 cm.



Erwin Olaf, Sarcasmen - II (Dance In Close-Up), 2022.
Archival print on Hahnemuhle PhotoRag Baryta. 110 x 110 cm.

The first posthumous exhibition dedicated to Erwin Olaf (Hilversum, 1959 — Amsterdam, 2023) at Baró Galeria pays tribute to an artist whose work redefined the way we perceive the body and its relationship with cultural and social codes. It brings together two of his most recent photographic series, *Dance in Close-Up* (2022) and *Shanghai* (2017), along with the series he developed throughout much of his prolific career, *Still Life* (1994—2021). In this way, it intertwines the intimate and the collective, revealing the symbolic layers that characterize his work.

The series *Dance in Close-Up* captures the tension of the body in motion, presenting close-ups of dancers. In these images, which explore the tension between classical beauty and contemporary concerns, the body becomes an ambiguous territory. Here, the move-



Erwin Olaf, *Hangpu, The Journey (Shanghai Series)*, 2017.
Archival Print on Canson Platine FibreRag, 120 x 160 cm.



Erwin Olaf, *Still Life with Gloriosa*, 2021.
Collodion print, 41 x 30 cm.

ment of dance is not merely a physical act but a language that questions and redefines the limits of the corporeal. The series invites a deep, almost intimate gaze into the body as a space of resistance and a vehicle of emotional expression. In these images, motif and methodology converge. Dance relates to the approach Erwin Olaf took when composing and executing his photographs. In his own words, “My images are like a play: they are choreographed, planned, every gesture and every expression is intentional.”

This theatrical aspect is most clearly seen in *Shanghai*, a more subtle series, where the focus shifts to the psychology of space and cultural codes. Through carefully constructed scenes, Olaf explores the modernization of China, but also the silences and tensions that emerge in a society undergoing transformation. These images, oscillating between portraits and broad urban scenes, reveal the conflict between progress and tradition.

Finally, the tradition of art history itself is manifested in the composition of the still lifes. In these photographs, titled *Still Life with Tritoleia* (2018) and *Still Life with Gloriosa* (2021), Olaf offers a new vision of a classical motif through a modernist staging that evokes Mondrian’s geometry. The flowers, suspended in a carefully designed space, act as metaphors for the fragility and transience of life. If dance and travel imply movement and physical displacement, the still lifes place us before the experience of stillness, revealing photography’s ability to encapsulate time.

ERWIN OLAF

Erwin Olaf was an internationally exhibiting artist whose diverse practice centered around society's marginalized individuals, including women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community. In 2019 Olaf became a Knight of the Order of the Lion of the Netherlands after 500 works from his oeuvre were added to the collection of the Rijksmuseum. Taco Dibbits, Rijksmuseum director, called Olaf "one of the most important photographers of the final quarter of the 20th century".

In 2018, Olaf completed a triptych of monumental photographic and filmic tableaux portraying periods of seismic change in major world cities, and the citizens embraced and othered by their urban progress. Like much of his work, it is contextualized by complex race relations, the devastation of economic divisions, and the complications of sexuality. Olaf maintained an activist approach to equality throughout his 40-year career after starting out documenting pre-AIDS gay liberation in Amsterdam's nightlife in the 1980s.

A bold and sometimes controversial approach earned the artist a number of prestigious collaborations, from Vogue and Louis Vuitton, to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. He served as the official portrait artist for the Dutch royal family in 2017, and designed the national side of the euro coins for King Willem-Alexander in 2013. He was awarded the Netherlands' prestigious Johannes Vermeer Award, as well as Photographer of the Year at the International Color Awards, and Kunstbeeld magazine's Dutch Artist of the Year.

Erwin Olaf has exhibited worldwide, including Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, Málaga, Spain; Museu da Imagem e do Som, São Paulo, Brazil; Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany; Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA; and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile. In the spring of 2019, Olaf's work was the subject of a double exhibition at Kunstmuseum The Hague and The Hague Museum of Photography, as well as a solo exhibition at the Shanghai Center of Photography and an exhibition at The Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam. In 2021, he will mount solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle München, Germany; the Suwon Museum of Art, Suwon, Korea. Olaf's work is included in numerous private and public collections, such as the Rijksmuseum and Stedelijk Museum, both in Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, France; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, The Netherlands, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, United States; Art Progressive Collection, United States, and the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Russia.

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