

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ROGER BALLEEN

Born in New York City in 1950, Roger Ballen has lived and worked in Johannesburg, South Africa for almost 30 years. During this period from 1982 to 2008 he has produced many series of works which has evolved from photo-journalism to a unique artistic vision. This exhibition tracks the development of his style which has made an important contribution to the visual arts. Ballen's work has been shown in important institutions throughout the world and is represented in many Museum Collections such as Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England and Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA.

In the series *Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa* (1986) Ballen illustrates his love for architecture and interiors that seem to speak volumes about the inhabitants of these strangely familiar yet alien spaces. The next series of work is *Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa* (1994) in which Ballen focuses on the inhabitants of small rural towns and approaches his subjects with a combination of empathy and the unflinching eye of a photojournalist. More than any other collection of Ballen's work, *Platteland* vividly brings to life the precarious existence of the people who inhabit the unseen countryside.

Texture, composition and an assortment of both objects and animals increasingly become part of the frame in *Outland* (2001) and *Shadow Chamber* (2005). In these works seemingly incompatible objects coexist comfortably with sense of authenticity. To the uninitiated the assortment of objects may seem arbitrary but upon closer inspection one can discern Ballen's ability to bring out the interrelationship between the different objects, the people, their forms and arrangement as well as their metaphysical and emotive qualities. The series *Shadow Chamber* in particular demonstrates how space, volume and atmosphere are manipulated to create an eerie and surreal world.

The latest series of works from *Boarding House* (2009) are almost exclusively painterly and sculptural. The human and animal subjects have all but disappeared and function more like stage props or weird sculptures within the composition. Visitors to the gallery will notice that, despite the range of subjects and approaches that Ballen has pursued, a sense of continuity is maintained by a number of visual 'threads' and graphic elements such as electric wires that can be traced from his latest work back to his earliest photographs in the small towns of South Africa.