

For Immediate Release

ROGER BALLEEN
THE THEATRE OF APPARITIONS

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One of the most influential and important photographic artists of the 21st century, Roger Ballen's career spans over forty years. His strange and extreme works confront and challenge viewers to journey into their own minds as he explores the deeper recesses of his own. Often blurring the line between reality and fiction, Ballen's black and white square format photographs evolved from a stark documentary style to what he now describes as 'documentary fiction'.

The Theatre of Apparitions, work from the past decade, is a short psychological thriller that explores the dark space between sanity and insanity, dream and reality. Separated into seven chapters or "acts", *The Theatre of Apparitions* is a treat of Ballenesque images taking viewers on a deep journey into their subconscious. Inspired by the sight of hand-drawn carvings on blacked-out windows in an abandoned women's prison, Ballen started to experiment using different spray paints on glass and then 'drawing on' or removing the paint with a sharp object to let natural light through. The results are like prehistoric cave-paintings: the black, dimensionless spaces on the glass are canvases onto which Ballen carves his thoughts and emotions. Fossil-like facial forms and dismembered body parts coexist uncomfortably with vaporous, ghost-like shadows. Earthly and otherworldly, physical and spiritual, his work transcends all traditional concepts of photography.

BIOGRAPHY

Roger Ballen was born in New York in 1950 and has been based in Johannesburg, South Africa since the early 1980s. His work as a geologist took him into its countryside and those experiences led him to photograph the hidden world of small South African towns. At first, he photographed its streets and soon found himself knocking on people's doors and entering a world of people and objects, which had a profound effect on his work. After 2000, Ballen found his subject closer to home in Johannesburg — mostly marginalized white people who collaborated with him in the series *Outland* and *Shadow Chamber* to create powerful psychodramas. This line between fantasy and reality becomes even more blurred in his recent series, *Asylum of the Birds* where Ballen creates elaborate sets using drawings, paintings and sculptural objects to heighten the bizarre and complex narrative. The human characters recede into the backdrop as their disembodied body parts interact with creatures of the animal kingdom, dolls etc. With this series, Ballen manages to integrate drawing and photography in a highly original way. Ballen's latest project, *The Theatre of Apparitions*, work from the past two decades, is a short psychological thriller that explores the dark space between sanity and insanity, dream and reality.

Roger Ballen's books include:

Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa (1986)

Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa (1994)

Outland (2000)

Shadow Chamber (2005)

Boarding House (2009)

Asylum of the Birds (2014)

The Theatre Of Apparitions (2016)

Nothing Is More Real Than Nothing (2016)

In addition, Ballen has directed hugely acclaimed video *I Fink U Freeky*, made with Zef pop group Die Antwoord in 2012 that has garnered 80-million hits on YouTube. Ballen's more recent videos include *The Theatre of Apparitions*, (2016), *Asylum of the Birds* (2014) and *Outland* (2015).

Roger Ballen is one of the most widely collected photographers in the world. His photographs reside in major museum collections including *Museum of Modern Art*, New York; *Centre Georges Pompidou*, Paris; *Musee de l'Elysee*, Lausanne; *Museum Folkwang*, Essen; *Tate Britain*, London; *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam; *Johannesburg Art Museum*, Johannesburg; *Fotomuseum*, Munchen; *Art Gallery of Western Australia*, Perth and *Berkeley Art Museum*, California to name a few.