

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to announce *Backlit Rainbow*, its first solo exhibition with Torbjørn Rødland. *Backlit Rainbow* features an installation of new medium- and large-scale color photographs, as well as the U.S. debut of *Between Fork and Ladder*, the artist's first moving-image work in more than a decade.

Over the last twenty years, the Norwegian-born, Los Angeles-based photographer Torbjørn Rødland has produced a body of work remarkable for its cultural reach, its awareness of photographic history and technique, and its ability to press up against psychological, moral, and philosophical boundaries. Rødland's images pointedly address their viewers and evoke a wide range of contradictory emotional and intellectual states. Curiosity, humor, pathos, criticality, artifice, reverence for the natural world, and romanticism appear throughout his work and often in the same photograph. In his installations and individual prints, Rødland also emphasizes the formal attributes of the photographic image, pushing the medium toward modes of visual expression and physical immediacy more commonly associated with painting, and forging links between 20th century art photography (he exclusively uses film-based cameras and chemical darkroom processes) and 21st century approaches to image-making common to advertising, entertainment, and social media.

Among the works on view in *Backlit Rainbow* is a group of photographs of young men that exemplifies the multi-faceted nature of Rødland's project. Inspired by a subset of Japanese manga cartoons known as *Boys' Love*, they depict homoerotic tableaux with varying degrees of sexual tension. As beautiful as they are indeterminate, the images are Rødland's renditions of scenes, often fantastical, whose sources are not photographic per se; rather, he stages models in various locations, recreating visions that previously existed only in the illustrated pages of comic books. Also complicating any reading of these photographs is the fact that *Boys' Love* comics are usually produced by and for young heterosexual women. Subtle and not-so-subtle homoerotic subtexts can be found throughout the show—rainbow-colored objects appear in two pictures, for example—and its title underscores the theme.

In these respects, Rødland's work intersects with current and very public debates about power, identity, and the ownership of images. But this tendency cannot be attributed to mere provocation, as his photographs remain elusive, slipping between interpretations and resisting description in overly determined language. Even when the specificity of their imagery seems to indicate a particular authorial stance, the pictures become stranger the longer one looks at them, undoing preconceptions and cultivating an archaic, quasi-magical state of mind in which representations are perceived to be as alive, unruly, and unpredictable as the things they represent.

Non-portrait works in the show offer metaphors for this phenomenon. In *Voodoo Shoe*, for instance, a white high-heeled shoe has been pierced by four nails. Chunks of chipped-off shoe and small pieces of debris lie scattered about, radiant in the light that fills the scene from an unknown source. Shoe and nails could stand in for any number of human subjects; the relationship between them feels intimate, sexual, violent, and tender. Rødland highlights the physical attributes of objects like these so that they are felt on a psychological level, empathically. The human and the inanimate become equally “personal” and permeable to one another. For this reason, he often makes pictures of things that are gooey, sticky, or wet, emphasizing the fluidity of boundaries and the interconnectedness of seemingly discrete things. His commitment to analogue photography and the wetness it mandates therefore has conceptual as well as formal ramifications.

These concerns are further synthesized in the moving image works that Rødland has produced over the years. *Between Fork and Ladder*, the new video on view, is the first he has realized in over ten years and, significantly, the first since he relocated to Los Angeles. It combines topical references with epic cycles, and pop sentiment with brooding archetypal allusion. Over five-and-a-half minutes, a boy performs a surreal series of actions in idyllic spaces, singing a disarmingly catchy, showtune-like song; carrying an oversized fork; cutting apart a swath of fabric printed with images of the politically loaded cartoon character Pepe the Frog; and, in one shot, standing backlit before a microphone in a recording studio. The presence of nature looms large, especially during a section when the inspirational tenor of the boy’s song is replaced on the soundtrack by a woman speaking in Japanese. Subtitles appear; the words they communicate are full of philosophical longing, but they do not always synch up with an audible voice, and portions of the woman’s speech go untranslated. As in much of Rødland’s work, seemingly superficial or obvious prompts open up chasms of unfathomable feeling and mystery, and the inert stuff of contemporary life becomes illuminated, and eventually mythic, through the alchemy of image-making.

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