

“A Palm Tree is A Palm Tree is A Palm Tree”

Bruno V. Roels



Opening: Thursday, Feb 18th 2016, in the presence of the artist !

Show: Feb 19th until Apr 2nd 2016

GALLERY FIFTY ONE is pleased to announce the first solo show of Belgian artist Bruno V. Roels (b 1976). This exhibition, A Palm Tree Is A Palm Tree Is A Palm Tree, will feature his most recent work.

The title of the show is a play on A rose is a rose is a rose, a famous Gertrude Stein verse; it serves as a declaration: Roels' work gravitates around photographic repetition, variation and meaning. Rather than trying to produce 'the perfect gelatin silver print', Roels creates compositions out of variations of a single image. He uses the separate prints to make bigger compositions the way a poet uses language to write a haiku.

In Roels' take on photography, photographers start from a very definite moment in time and space, but the resulting artifacts (the prints) are far removed from that one definite moment. Susan Sontag states that photographers are always imposing their standards by preferring one exposure to another. Roels turns that notion on its head: he turns a single moment in reality into an unlimited, endless, exponentially growing amount of variations. He refuses to choose, he shows all possibilities.

By using analogue photographic techniques such as solarisation, under- and overexposure, he's able to subtract or add information to create a new world. In some of his latest works he also hides or adds information by using an opaque medium like black Indian ink. The black, almost unforgiving surface leaves the viewer to ponder what's hidden.

The repetition and serial character that's so clearly present in his work reminds us of the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, but Roels is explicitly not interested in the Becher's typological approach. He often confesses an affinity, however, with Masao Yamamoto's small, poetic photographs, citing Yamamoto's power to evoke dreams and memories as an inspiration. Warhol and Baldessari are important inspirations as well, but their work is more detached and has sardonic undertones which are largely absent from Roels' very personal assemblages.

When asked about his inspiration, Roels mentions his collection of classic palm tree postcards, the kind tourists sent home during the 20s – 40s. These cards invariably depict a paradise, and promise freedom and happiness for all. For Roels, these postcards come closest to his own work: they are constructed dreams, and reality has no real part in them.

Roels works and lives in Ghent, Belgium. Gallery FIFTY ONE premiered his work on Unseen Amsterdam in 2014, and his compositions have been well received internationally ever since (Paris Photo, Photo London, AIPAD New York...) His work is part of major international private and public collections including Artur Walther Collection (Germ, USA) and Milwaukee Art Museum (WI, USA).

It is with great pleasure that gallery FIFTY ONE announces the presence of the artist at the opening of the show.