

## PRESS RELEASE

**Torbjørn Rødland**

**Metal Balm**

**March 18 – April 28, 2023**

**Opening on Friday, March 17, 5 pm**

**Galerie Eva Presenhuber x Taxa**

**73-479 Songjeong-dong, Seongdong-gu, Seoul, South Korea**

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Metal Balm* by the Norwegian photographer Torbjørn Rødland, hosted by Taxa in Seoul. It is the artist's fifth solo exhibition with the gallery and his first exhibition in South Korea.

In his photographic works, Rødland explores motifs such as desire, transience, and transition. He creates images that link pop culture and everyday life and which, with their precisely composed stagings, leave a deeply psychological, often sacred impression. Through their sometimes surreal, sometimes drastic compositions, they immediately touch viewers, urging them to identify their content, to say what is actually in the picture. However, this need to find a language does not lead to a conclusive understanding, but rather always back into the picture.

The eleven works on view provide an overview of Rødland's artistic practice: still lifes, intersubjective gestures of closeness and submission, and depictions of individuals that often appear portrait-like. The motifs often continue classical models—such as the still life—but repeatedly break with the boundaries of the genre as well as the medium of photography.

Descriptions such as "colorful candies lie in an overturned lampshade" or "a child gazes at the viewer from behind an easel," accurately capture the motifs, but do not explain their supposed meaning or the appeal they exude. Rødland uses everyday objects and settings, and perfects their reflection by using the ubiquitous visual language of advertising and film. As a result, his works are accessible and appear familiar. However, he counters the seemingly endless number of photographs that we consume digitally and in print in our daily lives with pictorial worlds that radiate and demand immersion. In their structure and lighting, they do not refer to commercial photography, but rather to motifs from art history. They are thus reminiscent of theatrical representations such as those that make use of chiaroscuro, as in the works of Caravaggio, but they do not refer to such coherent narratives. Rather, they recall a narrative that connects the discontinuous, as in the films of David Lynch or the video works of Paul McCarthy.

This profound, almost meditative effect, which repeatedly captivates the gaze, contrasts sharply with the fleetingness of commercial photography. However, Rødland does not create this effect by staging motifs from pop culture in a classical manner, but rather the other way around: He incorporates everyday objects, gestures, and settings into his photographic staging and, with his critical austerity, dramatic lighting, and dichotomous construction, gives them a temporal displacement – the present appears timeless.

Yet his works do not appear sterile: Photography often derives its accessibility from the authenticity of snapshots, linking them to a "here and now." Rødland's works are regularly created in the studio and yet do not radiate the distance with which the medium is often apostrophized. Rødland often builds his visual worlds on opposites, which is reflected by the exhibition title: *Metal Balm*. Human skin meets the hardness of metal, something hard coexists with something soothing, like the knife next to the boy's face in *Boy with Japanese Knife*, or the coins in the waistband in *Small Change*. In *Candy Trail*, sugary crystalline candies lie on a warm wooden floor, while in *Shell Stack* eggshells are depicted stacked on a tablecloth, and the bottle dryer in *Hedgehog Foam* is covered in silky foam—as if Rødland wanted to take this very process to the extreme. The objects seem tactile, as if you could touch them; the people seem close, as if their thoughts concern you. The closeness in the staging corresponds to Rødland's photographic technique: He works in analog. The chemical wetness from which analog photographs emerge is transferred directly to the pictorial worlds. Thus, in Rødland's work, the medium of photography does not appear to

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be eternally interchangeable and manipulable, but instead confronts the viewer with a classical precision which, in its effect, touches on anthropological issues.

Rødland's photographs seem enigmatic, yet they rarely provide an interpretive framework; instead, they approach their subjects with a seriousness and attention to detail that lends mythic depth to everyday actions and objects. Rather than ironically commenting on everyday life in the twenty-first century, he takes it seriously, thereby enlarging its echo chamber. The images evoke the unspoken: fantasies and narratives that emanate from things and structures; they celebrate the desire, humor, and solemnity inherent in them.

*Tillmann Severin*

Rødland was born in Stavanger, Norway, in 1970, and lives and works in Los Angeles, California. Upcoming shows include the Tank Museum in Shanghai and Le Consortium in Dijon. In 2021, the Contemporary Austin in Texas dedicated a solo exhibition to Rødland titled *Bible Eye*. Recent institutional presentations include the traveling exhibitions *Fifth Honeymoon* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki (2019); the Bonnier Konsthall in Stockholm (2018); and the Bergen Kunsthall (2018); *The Touch That Made You* at the Fondazione Prada in Milan (2018) and the Serpentine Gallery in London (2017). Further solo exhibitions have been held at the Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter in Oslo (2015); the Kunsthall Stavanger (2014); the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2010); the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2010); and the Museum of Modern Art PS1 in New York (2006).

## **Institutional Collections**

Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York, USA  
Arken Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj, Denmark  
The Art Museum of Northern Norway, Tromsø, Norway  
Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway  
Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway  
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA  
Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Puteaux, France  
Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France  
Frac Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque, France  
FRAC Pays de la Loire, Nantes, France  
Haugar Art Museum, Tønsberg, Norway  
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KODE, Bergen Malm. Art Museum, Malm., Sweden  
Malmö Art Museum, Malmö, Sweden  
Margulies Contemporary Art Collection, Miami, FL, USA  
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The National Museum of Art, Oslo, Norway  
Norsk Hydro Art Collection, Oslo, Norway  
Norsk museum for fotografi – Preus fotomuseum, Horten, Norway  
The Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey, USA  
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Stavanger Art Museum, Stavanger, Norway  
Stortinget, the Norwegian Parliament, Oslo, Norway  
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