



Erwin Olaf, the “Photo Beckett,” Portrays Motionless Undecided People and Waiting

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The Dutch photographer exhibits and edits the image series that he started in 2008 concerning waiting, which he considers as the “most painful of emotions”. In “Waiting”, the renowned artist shows people that are apparently “floating” in a grim and disturbing “formal silence” that prevents them from moving. The photographs are shown in New York while they are being edited in a monograph.

Waiting, according to the photographer Erwin Olaf (1959), is “the most painful of emotions.” A critic has compared the characters portrayed by the Dutchman in the Waiting series as being stationary and indecisive people that do not show any sureness in the next movement because, apparently, they know that there is no sense in movement with the plot of Waiting for Godot, the absurd tragicomedy of Samuel Beckett where nothing happens “but surely something will happen tomorrow”. In a recent interview, Olaf compared the protagonists of his disturbing portraits with patients that are waiting for a diagnostic which has not arrived. “It is a terrible emotion that lies between having pain and being drugged. When you go to the doctor, and you are waiting for the results of an analysis, you think: Do I have this terrible disease or do I not have it? It is a tremendously painful situation”, says the Wall Street Journal photographer.

He just finished the design of a Euro coin of Holland. The photograph series of Waiting, whose second volume has just been edited by Aperture Foundation [112 pages, retail price of 55.25 USD], is exhibited these days in New York, in the Hasted Kraeulter gallery. The exhibition, on exhibit until February 28, is titled Waiting: Selections from Erwin Olaf: Volume I & II. It is a selection of disturbing and very pictorial images from the series which he began composing in 2008. The well-known, versatile, and acclaimed artist - just completed the design of the new Euro coin for Holland -.

The characters portrayed by Olaf do not go anywhere nor do they want to go, perhaps because they know, as Beckett said, “there is no passion more powerful than the passion of sloth”: a woman with oriental features, shown on an ivory sculpture, is lifeless and shows her profile, sitting on a table in a place where the status of alive cannot be applied to anything; a boy with a scout uniform stiffly poses with an ice cream cone in his hand and at his side, with the same stiffness, there is a dog...

Restlessness and desolation



Portrait 2, Shenzhen, 2014

The mild absurd scratches of the images - a small party hat with a minimum of ridiculousness on the head of a very fat and black young man - increase the feeling of uneasiness transmitted by these characters that despite their immobility are downright desolate or, as what occurred with the series that he filmed about the decline of the city of Berlin, they are even gloomy.

From the gallery in New York, the “incredibly stylish” touch and full of “provocative tension” of the work of Olaf is lauded, which makes the spectator concurrently feel a “perverse and seductive thrill”. The “formal silence” of the immobile beings of the photographer, which seem to “float”, is full of “expressive force and an almost overwhelming energy”.