



Short Stories: Photographer Paolo Ventura's latest, evocative series

Posted by Anna Carnick
February 12, 2015



Detail; *The Man in the Suitcase*, 2013

About a decade ago, Italian photographer Paolo Ventura began composing a series of miniature, diorama-like sets, and then shooting them to appear life-size. The results were haunting and curious, clearly fabricated yet moving, depicting tales ranging from an imagined war (as in 2006's *War Souvenir*, photographed inside the closet of Ventura's Brooklyn apartment) to glimpses inside the memory bank of an older circus performer looking back on his life (2008's *Winter Stories*), as well as the story of an elderly Jewish watchmaker in the Venice ghettos during World War II, who creates an automaton to keep him company (2011's *The Automaton of Venice*).

Throughout, Ventura (whose own father was, notably, a children's book author) has maintained a sense of theatricality, evoking just enough story while leaving the rest a mystery for viewers to resolve on our own. One is never totally sure what he or she is looking at. As Francine Prose notes in the introduction to *War Souvenir*: "What are we seeing? What do we think we are seeing? And what we are concluding about what we think we are seeing?"

For his latest series, *Short Stories*, which is on view now at Seoul's Gallery Baton, the theatricality remains, but the players are now assuredly life-size. Ventura himself has entered into the frame, and even made it a family affair, enlisting his twin brother and young son to pose alongside him (his wife also collaborated behind-the-scenes). The series was born of a rather banal incident, when a piece of the roof over Ventura's Tuscan studio fell in. "A light streamed through," he explains. "I put a glass over the hole, and decided to build a little theatre where the light shone." One weekend not long after, "My family [Ventura's wife, Kim, and son, Primo] and I began playing. I painted a backdrop, and we started acting out 'short stories' with old costumes and props that I'd collected over the years."

Describing the images, Ventura says, "These are [twelve] stories with a very simple structure, and [most have no] text. . . . The title is enough; then each person can see what he wants to see. That's the idea of a short story."

Ventura says the series was great fun—especially being able to create something with his son. "When we finished, he said he had a great time," Ventura recalls, "but he begged me not to pick him up from school dressed like this."



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