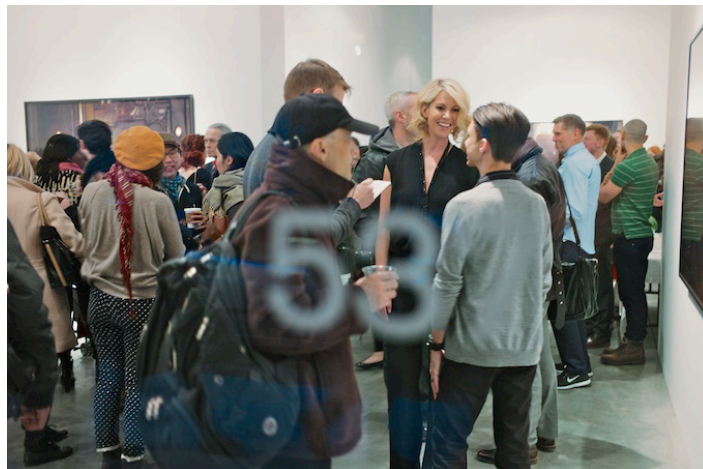


ARTE FUSE

Willkommen to the Dramatic Photos of Erwin Olaf

Oscar A. Laluyan on March 19, 2013



“A portrait is not a likeness. The moment an emotion or fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion. There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth.” – Richard Avedon

As soon as you walked into the latest photography series by Erwin Olaf at Hasted Kraeutler, you feel the somber tone but opulence of his images resonating out of the carbon prints with some in grand scale. Last March 14th, AF faced the melancholic elegance of Olaf’s pictures for his latest show Berlin. Set in the capital of Germany, it evoked a rich historic past that crescendo into an aria of arresting and haunting imagery. Berlin, Clärchens Ballhaus Mitte (10th of July 2012) could be a contemporary Rembrandt with the shadowy dancehall featuring characters that heighten the unspoken drama where on the left you have the grotesque painted ladies past their prime, a fresh faced girl peering out either in pure innocence or longing to scream for help, and a man cloaked in the shadows where he looks up on the stairs – where more insidious things could happen. A perfectly composed tableaux in large scale and the meticulous treatment makes it more alluring as Olaf used the shadows to enhance the planes and in a way give you a veiled truth of what is

presented. Berlin Porträt 05 (9th of July 2012) unapologetically portrayed a young girl with a haughty stare, seated in a traditional pose, looking wise beyond her tender years, dressed in leather and in a smaller frame gave you an unexpected visual punch to the gut. The Berlin series is darkly high drama but is lush in its seductive arc.

Towards the rear of the gallery is the Keyhole series where most of the subjects in the photo have their backs turned in shame and the installation in the middle (originally presented in Arco Madrid in 2012) gave everyone a voyeuristic moment into a door’s keyhole where you either walk away elated or covered in shame. The elegance of his photos is a perfect counterpoint to the theme of humiliation when one peers into a keyhole. What happens in closed doors are meant to be hidden or discover at your own risk – which is also exciting.

Olaf in his latest oeuvre gave us his unwavering opinion of a past and a future that we’re afraid to face but at least he gave us a dramatic tableau to reflect upon. The images are crisp and precise but we are left in the shadows to find our real sensibilities. Sometimes in the dark we get to see clearly the naked truth.