

bettina rheims

Opening on November Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 2018, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Exhibition from November 17, 2018 to January 12, 2019
Rue des Sablons 6 & rue des Bains 61, 1205 Geneva

Xippas gallery is pleased to present, for the first time in a Swiss gallery, an exhibition of Parisian photographer Bettina Rheims.

Portraits of famous or unknown women make it at the heart of Bettina Reims's work, depicting an unconventional photography, essentially dedicating itself to a peculiar iconography of the body. The photographs presented at Xippas Gallery were made between 1994 and 2013, samples from some emblematic series of the artist *Pourquoi m'as tu abandonnée ?* and *Héroïnes*.

« During a photoshoot, we must break the toy of the person posing. It's pretty at first, and then it's less so. It becomes confusing, weirder. This is where the story is told. »

In the early 1990s, Bettina Rheims simultaneously worked in France and the United States, producing fashion series for numerous magazines and posters for movies. She came to realize the inevitable entanglement between her personal practice and what she created on demand, therefore decided to gather samples of different projects and created a new series of photos; *Pourquoi m'as tu abandonnée ?*.

The representation and construction of femininity are her favorite subjects, a quasi-obsession of the artist. The woman photographed by Bettina Rheims is not only exposing herself, she actually is freeing herself, deconstructing her image as she is discovering her body. It is a representation of unusual beauty portrayed through particularly and meticulous well-thought staging, as well as using specific scenarios imagined and mastered by the artist. Bettina Rheims therefore raises the question of a potential compatibility between feminism and fashion photography.

The instrumentalization of « women posing » is forgotten, giving the subject a new status in the way they are represented. She strays away from the gender, and through her singular point of view, brings out fantasy and concurrently denounces the authority of codes and societal prejudices. Bettina Rheims plays a major role during the body liberation era, she depicts bare skin. Her pictures break the codes of conventional portraits and fashion photography to instantaneously push the boundaries, shattering the « glamorous » , as well as bringing beauty and the erotic at their peak.

This is how Bettina Rheims' photography is similar to a composition. She calculates, thinks and puts together the image she wants to give, like a painter using an infinite palette. A complete sense of freedom in the representation of woman which gives her pictures a uniquely modern and committed identity.

« I always thought my work was tightly related to sculpture, that these women that I'd depict actually lived in the space within the picture, not simply printed on a piece of paper. »

For the series *Héroïnes* Bettina Rheims invited 23 women that she had wanted to take pictures of since a long time; some of them she already knew, others attracted her because of their charisma or their iconic influence. « Melancholy is a lonely woman sitting on a rock, lost in her own thoughts, gazing into the distance ». Inspired by this quote by Jean Clair that appeared in the exhibition *Mélancolie* at Le Grand Palais in 2005, the artist decides to build a rock inside her studio. The rock transforms itself into a sort of pedestal for her models to take possession of its essence, and eventually get lost in it. The series is effectively a tribute to sculpture. Women spurting out from the rock, dissolving into the understructure without touching the ground, like one of Rodin's girls or an idol of the Cyclades.

That is why Bettina Rheims' artistic process is unclassifiable. Portraits, fashion, political, modern, committed? Her photos use a variety of genres in order to create a singular universe. Bettina Rheims disturbs the codes established in photography by staging these women, portraying them in the most vulnerable moments, capturing the intimate relation between the model and photograph. She transcends them with her strong but matchless sense of representation. Thus, extremely disturbing portraits can be born, carried through by the eyes of the Avant-guard Bettina Rheims.

BIOGRAPHY

Bettina Rheims was born in 1952, in Neuilly sur Seine, France. She presently lives and work in Paris. As a photographer, her work raises questions about gender, mainly focalizing the woman's body and the intimate. Towards the end of the seventies, when photography was just beginning to be considered as an artistic practice, she rapidly made herself a name in a domain mostly ruled by men. Her career starts in 1978, right after her encounter with a young amateur stripper from Pigalle. She produces her first series of pictures, already depicting twisted bodies, strange positions, as if she abandoned herself in the exploration of the nude. This series was then published in the review *Egoïste*, then presented at the Texbraun gallery, and finally at the Centre Goerges Pompidou in 1981. Bettina Rheims' work was first published in *Egoïste* in 1979, where she was immediately noticed by the notorious Helmut Newton, who instantly asked to meet with her. Following their first meeting was born a great friendship and many conversations related to their work. In 1982, the artist stumbles upon the treasures of the Maison Deyrolle collections, giving birth to her new series *Animal*, a succession of captivating black and white close ups of stuffed animals. In 1994, she obtains the Grand prix de la Photographie de la Ville de Paris. In 1995, Bettina Rheims does the official portrait for the French president Jacques Chirac. One of her most iconic series *Chambre Close* (1990-1992) – her first work in color – marks the commencement of her relationship with Serge Bramly. Their collaboration will continue, as shown through their work on the cycle of Jesus in *I.N.I.R.I* (1998) and *Rose, c'est Paris* (2009), a tribute to surrealism and Paris. *Gender studies* (2011), marks the beginning of her interest in gender, a subject that flows logically into her previous practice raising questions about identity and how it can be perceived. Towards the end of the 1980's, she takes interest in confused beings regarding of their appearances, such as androgyny in teenagers in her series *Modern Lovers*. Following this project, the artists meets Kim Harlow who introduced Bettina Rheims' to numerous transsexuals. Those encounters gave birth to two new series: *Kim* and *Les Espionnes*, in which she applies herself to question the fundamentals of what constitutes gender, as well as the society's reaction regarding this issue. In 2017, she decides to explore the feminine body as a political tool. This led to a new project *Naked War*, which happened shortly after meeting the Femen. More recently, her project *Détenues* becomes a turning point in her personal research as the political aspect of her work becomes prominent. Backed up by Mr. Robert Badinter as well as the penitentiary administration, Bettina Rheims photographed, between September to November 2014, over sixty women detainees in France.

Bettina Rheims' work sees itself shown in various institutions such as the Musée de L'Elysée in Lausanne, Switzerland, at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in France, at the Kunsthal of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, at the Moscow House of Photography in Moscow, Russia (2006), at the FORMA in Milan, Italy (2008), at the C/O in Berlinet, at the Städel in Frankfurt, Germany. Among her more recent solo shows; *Détenues*, at the Château de Vincennes and the Château Cadillac near Bordeaux, France (2018), *Vous Êtes Finies, Douces Figures*, exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (2018), *Naked War*, at Xippas Gallery in Paris (2017), *Bettina Rheims* at the Maison européenne de la photographie in Paris (2016) in France, and *I'll Be Your Mirror* at the Fotografiska Museet in Stockholm, Sweden (2016). She additionally participates in different events such as Le Festival de Mode et de Photo de la Villa Noailles, for which she presided the Jury in honor of the 33rd edition, and, collaborating with Bill Mullen for the 18e Rencontres Internationales de la Mode in Hyères, France (2018). Let's not forget a few of her important group shows, among them: *Look West, Young Man!* At Xippas Gallery in Geneva (2018), *Shanghai 2002* (2017) at the Shanghai Gallery of Art, China, *Sguardo Di Donna, La Passione e il Corragio* [The Female Gaze — The Passion and the Courage] at the Casa Tre Oci (2015) Italy, *Rose, c'est Paris* with Serge Bramly at Bibliothèque nationale de France Richelieu (2010) and finally *La collection s'expose – Polaroid en péril !* at the Musée de l'Elysée (2010) Switzerland. Furthermore, her work also appears in numerous public collections such as : Museum of Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt and in the Olbricht Collection in Essen, Germany, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, the Centre George Pompidou in Paris, the Commission des Beaux Arts du Hainaut in Belgium, the Maison européenne de la photographie in Paris, the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris, as well as que Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. In addition, a retrospective edition covering 35 years of her successful career with over 500 photographs was published by the Editions Taschen in 2016. In 2018, the Maison d'Édition Gallimard publishes the prestigious collection of the Grande Blanche, her series *Détenues*.