

**Roger Ballen. Call of the Void**  
(Danse macabre No. VIII)

19 April – 29 October 2023



**Press preview:**

Tuesday, 18 April 2023, 10:30 am

**Opening:**

Tuesday, 18 April 2023, 6:30 pm

**Press material:**

[tinguely.ch/en/press-download](https://tinguely.ch/en/press-download)

Roger Ballen, *Headless*, 2006

**Roger Ballen. Call of the Void is the eighth in the Museum Tinguely's 'Danse macabre' series of exhibitions shown in response and proximity to Jean Tinguely's late work *Mengele – Dance of Death* (1986). While Anouk Kruithof. *Universal Tongue* (2022) focused on dance and Bruce Conner. *Light out of Darkness* (2021) concentrated on the apocalypse, the link this time is the disturbing, unsettling quality of Roger Ballen's photographs and installations and the profound sense of unease that they evoke. He probes the human psyche, confronting both himself and his viewers with questions of being and becoming. The Basel exhibition of this South African artist that is to run from 19 April to 29 October 2023 assembles photographs, videos and installations, which together make for a truly 'Ballenesque' mood.**

Roger Ballen was born in New York City in 1950 and lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa. He is one of the most famous and distinctive photographers of our age. He began his career with unsparing, full-frontal portraits of South African villages and people, but over the past twenty years has tended to work more and more in the studio, producing images that forfeit none of that original potency. His objects – items of furniture, walls with drawings, wire cages, masks, stuffed animals and animal parts, live rats, birds, snakes, dogs, cats, figurines and, less and less frequently, actual people – are staged in square-format, black-and-white photographs. Ballen thus inscribes them into a composition, while at the same time respecting their autonomy and allowing them to speak for themselves.

Viewing the results is like roaming into the subconscious, into realms that are dark, mysterious and often disturbing or even frightening. Even in Ballen's portraits of the 1990s, it was never beauty or balance that interested him, but rather the troubling nonconformity peculiar to the 'white precariat' of the South African hinterland. Whereas in those days it was the life stories legible in his subjects' faces and poses that fascinated Ballen, his later works focus on the relationships between objects and the weird moods that these generate.

In recent years Ballen has created a style – or to be more exact, an underlying mood – that is recognizably his own. He calls this 'Ballenesque', a coinage that denotes the strange, discomfiting, disquieting quality of his works. He also incorporates this atmosphere into his installations, which are becoming more frequent. He stages scenarios in his studio that he not only captures through photography, but also, more recently, has started to showcase in exhibitions. At Museum Tinguely, this remarkable leap from two-dimensional photography into three-dimensional space culminates in a shack built specially for the exhibition. Aside from serving as a backdrop for various scenarios, this crude dwelling can also be entered, enabling visitors to see, smell and feel the 'Ballenesque' first hand.

The Basel show will also feature a specially reworked version of one of Ballen's last analogue series of rat photographs. A selection of these images will be shown for the first time alongside other prints featuring Ballen's birds. Two videos, *Ballenesque* (2017) and *Roger the Rat* (2020) will push the boundaries still further into another artistic sphere. In the works of Roger Ballen, it is the fragile, the uncertain, the wavering, the uncanny and the obscure that set the tone. These are works that viewers can dive or dream their way into, works in which chaos and order co-exist, just as do anxiety and inspiration.

**The exhibition at Museum Tinguely is curated by Andres Pardey, in close collaboration with the artist and his artistic director Marguerite Rossouw.**

On the occasion of the exhibition *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void* at Museum Tinguely, Kehrer Verlag is publishing an English catalogue with texts by Roger Ballen, Andres Pardey and a foreword by Roland Wetzels, with approx. 40 illustrations. Available in the museum shop from 13 June for 35 CHF (ISBN 978-3-96900-127-1).

**Inside Out Centre for the Arts:** In March 2023, Roger Ballen has opened the Inside Out Centre for the Arts which is located in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Centre aims to create an awareness of issues related to the African continent through exhibitions with a distinctively aesthetic and psychological perspective. It is also an educational centre and offers a dynamic programme of educational talks, panel discussions, masterclasses and presentations that reflect on the current exhibition and on topics relevant to arts and culture. The first exhibition to be shown there is entitled *End of the Game* and confronts the practice of unrestrained hunting in Africa which has led to the ecological devastation currently faced on the continent. Through a combination of documentary images, artefacts and film clips, along with Ballen's photographs and installations, the exhibition attempts to record and highlight the historical significance and context of the 'Golden Age' of hunting expeditions by the colonialists and powerful Western figureheads— such as Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, King Edward VIII and Hemingway— which took place from the mid 1800s onwards. Ballen's approach explores the deeper psychological relationships humans have with the natural world.

«As one approaches the shelter in the middle of the exhibition-space, one is surrounded by black and white photographs that I have taken from the series *Asylum of the Birds* and *Roger's Rats*. In a simplistic sense, these rats and birds have symbolized good and evil, darkness and light, throughout human history. Birds link the heavens to the earth and rats are unfairly associated with dirt, disease, and darkness. Each species of animal brings its own mythology, and when you bring that mythology into a photograph, it offers unlimited possibilities for creating deeper meanings relevant to the human condition.»

Roger Ballen

**General Information Museum Tinguely:**

**Exhibition title:** *Roger Ballen. Call of the Void (Danse macabre No. VIII)*

**Address:** Museum Tinguely | Paul Sacher-Anlage 1 | 4002 Basel

**Opening:** Tuesday, 18 April 2023, 6:30 pm

**Duration:** 19 April – 29 October 2023

**Opening hours:** Tuesday – Sunday, daily from 11 am–6 pm, Thursday 11 am–9 pm

**Website:** [www.tinguely.ch](http://www.tinguely.ch) | [www.insideoutcentreforthearts.com](http://www.insideoutcentreforthearts.com)

**Social Media:** @museumtinguely | #museumtinguely #rogerballen #ballenesque #callofthevoid

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