

# HAMILTONS

ERWIN OLAF: IM WALD | 26 JANUARY - 12 MARCH 2022



**Im Wald is a new series by Dutch photographer Erwin Olaf, it is the first of his series to be photographed purely on location. "In The Forest" is set in the beauty of the Bavarian and Austrian Alps, it draws attention to several global issues, including climate change, wanderlust, immigration and the COVID19 pandemic; directly investigating nature's impact on our lives.**

Olaf highlights the role of people in isolation, staging them in visually astounding settings and examining their relationship to nature. Both the vastness of the landscape by comparison to the subjects, but also the subjects' empathy with the natural environment, are dramatized by the scale of the images.

Several of the works are inspired by the artistic movement 'Romanticism'. The genre which peaked in Northern Europe, in particular Germany in the 19th Century celebrates the individual, human emotion and the wonder of nature. In one of Olaf's images, we see a young boy standing in front of a colossal valley. In awe of the grandeur of nature, he remains entirely still, blending into the mist around him. The work is a direct reference to the iconic German Romantic painting 'Wanderer above the Mist' (1817) by Casper David Friedrich. Like in this painting and others of the time, the subject hovers between a sublime future and an overwhelming present.

In Im Wald, Olaf does not want to compare current events with the past but raises questions about the present and the future. He positions his protagonists in the here and now, with props like a plastic bottle, headphones, selfie sticks, and hygienic masks. Yet Olaf achieves a universal and timeless quality by shooting the series in monochrome.

Olaf consciously chose a black and white palette for this series, to emphasize the brute force and indifference of our world. For this aesthetic, he was inspired by the landscapes of the American pioneer of "straight photography" Ansel Adams (1902–1984). The monochromatic tonality also contributes to the feeling of disorientation within the vast expanse of the forested landscape. The exhibition features four museum scale landscapes alongside intimate portraits of the subjects within them.

Olaf gained worldwide recognition for his highly stylized and meticulously choreographed photographs, videos, and installations. Influenced also by his own travels and accompanying feelings of transience and anomie, Olaf's models often gaze into the distance and evoke an uneasy, disconnected sense of mystery. Their cinematic nature reflects Olaf's evolution as an artist, leaning towards a more complex narrative.

The exhibition **Erwin Olaf: Im Wald** will run from 26 January - 12 March 2022 at Hamiltons Gallery, London.

## BIOGRAPHY

Erwin Olaf (born in Hilversum, the Netherlands, 1959) emerged onto the international art scene with his series 'Chessmen', which won the Young European Photographer of the Year award in 1988.

Olaf started his career by documenting 1980's nightlife, but soon explored his own series and subjects in both black-and-white and colour. He now shoots tableaux style images, adopting the role of both director and photographer, opting for a cinematic style embedded with stillness which seeks to express the sitter's genuine emotions and neuroses.

Olaf's bold and theatrical approach to photography has earned him commissions from Louis Vuitton, Vogue, and the Rijksmuseum amongst many others. Erwin Olaf is today one of the leading living contemporary photographers in the world. In addition to many international awards over the course of his career, his work is held in many private and public collections internationally including, amongst others, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain in Paris, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow or the Art Progressive Collection in the United States.

In 2018, the Rijksmuseum acquired five hundred key artworks from Olaf's forty-year oeuvre for their collection. This followed official portraits Olaf made for the Dutch royal family in 2017-18 and his designing the new euro coin for King Willem-Alexander in 2013.

In 2019, Olaf became a Knight of the Order of the Lion of the Netherlands, in the same year, Olaf's work was the subject of a double exhibition at Kunstmuseum The Hague and The Hague Museum of Photography, as well as a solo exhibition at the Shanghai Center of Photography. In May 2021, was his solo exhibition Unheimlich Schön at Kunsthalle München, Germany. Under the same title, the publishing house Hatje Cantz released a comprehensive catalogue in April 2021.

The artist lives and works in Amsterdam and has been represented by Hamiltons Gallery for 14 years.

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