

Roger Ballen: Animalism

Pavilion 9A, Mattatoio di Roma
27 May – 27 July 2025

Curated by Alessandro Dandini de Sylva in conjunction with Marguerite Rossouw
Sound installation by Cobi van Tonder

From 27 May to 27 July 2025, Pavilion 9A at the Mattatoio di Roma will be hosting **Roger Ballen: *Animalism***, an exhibition promoted by Rome the Capital City's Cultural Affairs Department and by **Azienda Speciale Palaexpo**, organised by Azienda Speciale Palaexpo in conjunction with **ISTMO**, curated by Alessandro Dandini de Sylva in conjunction with Marguerite Rossouw, and with a sound installation by Cobi van Tonder.

Roger Ballen (born in New York in 1950, Roger has been living in South Africa for over forty years) is one of the world's greatest and most celebrated contemporary photographers. With *Animalism*, a research project he has been pursuing for over two decades, Roger explores the deep and often disturbing relationship between human beings and animals. The images in the exhibition blur the boundaries between human and animal behaviour, questioning that distinction's very nature. Specifically devised for the exhibition space of the Mattatoio di Roma, a former slaughterhouse where animals were once slaughtered for human consumption, the exhibition is conceived as a single installation, a typically "Ballenesque" theatre in which primeval instincts and the absurd hold sway. The Mattatoio itself, a symbol of historical violence and of man's domination over animals, becomes part of the artwork, revisited as a space for thought and reflection.

The exhibition unfolds in three rooms, offering visitors an experience at once immersive and contemplative of Ballen's work. We move from a luminous introductory space hosting a selection of twenty-one photographs taken between 1996 and 2016, to a dark central space housing eight projectors that offer visitors an asynchronous presentation of over eighty photographs from Ballen's most important projects, including *Outland*, *Shadow Chamber*, *Boarding House*, *Asylum of the Birds* and *Roger's Rats*. The final space houses four lightboxes and a video-animation of the *Apparitions* series. The Pavilion's central room, immersed in darkness, is designed both to involve and to envelope visitors. The photographs, arranged in chronological order from the entrance to the back of the space, map out a path reflecting the development of the artist's visual style, stretching from a more immediately documentary approach, via an intense staging of the photographic space, to his more experimental creations with their highly pictorial impact.

Using surreal compositions and dark absurdity, *Animalism* reveals the way in which animals are at once an external presence and an intrinsic part of the human psyche, unveiling the profound links between civilisation and untamed nature.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Quodlibet and designed by Filippo Nostri, with a conversation between Roger Ballen and curator Alessandro Dandini de Sylva and with plates reproducing all the images on display.

And finally, Roger Ballen, who has expressed both his admiration for, and his artistic debt to, Mario Giacomelli on more than one occasion, appears in a direct dialogue in the exhibition entitled "Mario Giacomelli. The photographer and the artist" at the Palazzo Esposizioni Roma from 20 May to 3 August 2025. Ballen will also be taking part, with the installation of one of his huts, in the fourth edition of the *Festival des cabanes* 2025 at the Académie de France à Rome - Villa Médicis from 5 June to 30 September 2025.

Roger Ballen

Roger Ballen, an American artist who has been living and working in South Africa since 1982, is considered one of the most influential photographers of the 21st century. His work has been shown at numerous international institutions and is part of the collections of such important museums as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His research, characterised by a unique aesthetic combining photography with design and installation, reveals a surreal and often disturbing world peopled with freaky characters, claustrophobic settings and enigmatic symbolisms. His images testify to journeys delving into the abyss of the human psyche, where reality and dreams merge in a complex tangle of meanings and interpretations. Roger Ballen is represented by BUILDING gallery in Milan, Italy.

Alessandro Dandini de Sylva

An Italian curator, publisher and artist, Alessandro Dandini de Sylva has curated numerous exhibitions and produced numerous publications on contemporary photography for such institutions as the MAXXI Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo in Rome, the Museo Nazionale Romano in the Baths of Diocletian in Rome and the Centro Arti Visive Pescheria in Pesaro. He is the founder of *Aniene*, an editorial project devoted to the city of Rome, in conjunction with the designer Filippo Nostri, and of *Istmo*, a visual research studio for industrial organisations combining contemporary photography, the documentation of hi-tech projects and artistic experimentation.

Marguerite Rossouw

The artistic director of Roger Ballen's studio for the past eighteen years, Marguerite Rossouw has been deeply involved in every creative aspect of his work, from the creation of photographic images and installations to films. In particular, she has made a significant contribution to Ballen's most seminal projects, including *Boarding House*, *Asylum of the Birds*, *Theatre of Apparitions*, *Roger the Rat* and his forthcoming publication with Thames & Hudson entitled *Spirits and Spaces*.

Cobi van Tonder

A South African composer, artist and researcher, Cobi van Tonder creates immersive sound installations that explore the relationship between sound, space and perception. Her work on acoustics and microtonal music has been presented at numerous festivals and international institutions, and she has received accolades for her innovation and research in the field of electronic music and sound art. She has a PhD in musical composition from Trinity College Dublin, an MFA in artistic practice from Stanford and a BA Hons in musicology from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Mattatoio di Roma

Piazza Orazio Giustiniani, 4 - Rome

Pavilion 9A

www.mattatoioroma.it - Facebook: @mattatoioroma - Instagram: @mattatoio – #MattatoioRoma

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday from 11.00 am to 8.00 pm – Admission free

Closed Monday. No further admission after 7.00 pm (one hour before closing time).

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