Sebastiaan Bremer

Bloemen (2015)
Suite of five inkjet prints with hand-additions and collage elements, image 12 x 8 1/2 inches each, sheet 18 x 13 1/2 inches each. Edition of 6. Printed and published by the Lower East Side Printshop, New York. $1,800 each.

New York–based Dutch artist Sebastiaan Bremer mines extant images for his photographic alterations; his sources are usually personal, but he also looks for images that carry wider cultural implications. He is interested in how we consume images: what does a photographic image signify? Which archetypes does it represent and what personal meanings does it carry? In an effort to bring forth latent associations, Bremer makes free-associative changes to his found photographs—either adding or subtracting, or both.

In a recent body of work titled Bloemen (Flowers), Bremer used illustrations from an eponymous 1948 Dutch book of botanical photography that had been in his family for decades. Production of the book, which bears a dedication to Queen Wilhelmina, was begun in 1945 and resonated strongly in the Netherlands as the country rebounded from the traumas of the German occupation and the famine of 1944–45. (The book was released in several translations, including the English language Flowers in Colour [1948].) Positive associations with the beauty and pleasure of flowers are all but universal, but flowers—especially the tulip—are particularly important to the Dutch economy, Dutch art and Dutch identity.

This made Bloemen an appropriate source of imagery for Bremer’s first exhibition in the Netherlands, which took place last fall at Galerie Ron Mados in Amsterdam, just across the Prinsengracht canal from where Bremer had lived as a child. (He left for New York in 1992.) The pleasure of his return was apparent in the exuberant works on paper he showed, and in the recent, lush suite of hand-altered inkjet prints that is an extension of this celebratory work. Each individual flower is animated with floating dabs of acrylic paint and Mylar confetti. The flowers’ Latin and common names provide the titles: Cactus Dahlia Illusion, Dubbele Late Tulp, Parkiet Tulp Sunshine, Scilla Campanulata and Triumph Tulp Bruno Walter.

Bloemen is closely related to Bremer’s earlier series of altered photos of a family skiing holiday in the Alps. Like Bloemen, To Joy took form in unique works on paper and a handful of editions (seven images issued in 2012 and 2014, also by the Lower East Side Printshop; [see Art in Print Jan–Feb 2013]). In each case, an interesting personal history is connected to the photographs, but the images succeed even when divorced from any backstory, expressing an infectious joie de vivre that is as fresh and invigorating as a spring bloom.

—Sarah Kirk Hanley