

EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

Erwin Olaf *Palm Springs*

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Opening reception with the artist: Thursday, 25 April, 6-8pm

Edwynn Houk Gallery is pleased to present *Palm Springs* (2018), a new body of work by Erwin Olaf. Made on location, *Palm Springs* depicts a series of enigmatic encounters with a cast of imagined characters, inspired by the celebrated history and aesthetic of the southern California city.

While set in the modern day, *Palm Springs* evokes the memory and visual language of the city's past, recalling its heyday as the quintessential midcentury paradise. Southern California has been mythologized as a carefree promisceland, a limitless pastiche of cerulean swimming pools and emerald lawns, a reputation preserved by iconic poolside scenes by artists such as Slim Aarons and David Hockney. Olaf's vision harnesses these themes to explore twenty-first century realities: the desire for glamor, wealth, and sex are ever present, but this world is more diverse, complicated, and introspective than before. In Olaf's new *Palm Springs*, young people read *Lolita* while sun-bathing on yellow patches of grass; workers daydream in public laundromats; families enjoy scenic picnics on rocky desertscapes; and the artist himself, drinking a dirty martini poolside, sports graying hair.

Cinematic and painterly, each scene is a perfectly staged composition, with every detail conscious and controlled, while also intimating a sense of mystery and disquiet. Dressed fashionably in immaculate homes or lounging at the pool, Olaf's subjects appear to live a beautiful life, yet each is caught in moments of palpable desire, fantasy, reflection, and tension—a reflection of Olaf's interest in the experience of the individual in an increasingly globalized world. Viewers are left to allow their imaginations to fill in the context of the scenarios and relationships captured in each photograph, as Olaf masterfully creates a sense of emotional immediacy while leaving the ambiguous storyline open to personal interpretation.

This exhibition anticipates the artist's sixtieth birthday, an occasion also being commemorated with three museum retrospectives of his work. The Gemeentemuseum and the Fotomuseum, both in The Hague, have concurrent shows on view through May 12. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has acquired 500 works spanning Olaf's career for its permanent collection and will present *12 x Erwin Olaf*, an exhibition featuring a selection of the artist's photographs in dialogue with Dutch Golden Age paintings, opening on July 3. A 400-page monograph, *Erwin Olaf: I Am* (Aperture), was also published this month.

Olaf's work is in numerous private and public collections, including the Rijksmuseum and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; George Eastman Museum, Rochester; and the Sir Elton John Collection, UK and USA. The artist lives and works in Amsterdam.