

Guest photo

NICO KRIJNO, SURREAL SCAVENGER OF IMAGES

Photography: Nico Krijno

Text: Natacha Wolinski

South African photographer Nico Krijno constructs his images with found objects. He assembles these everyday pieces into surreal sculptures for the camera and then recycles them.



When hopeful young photographers came to show Henri Cartier-Bresson their prints, he liked to look at them upside down. That way he could forget the subject and concentrate on the composition. Had his visitor been Nico Krijno, the master might have found himself flummoxed. For the vivid, fantastical still lifes created by this South African prodigy aged thirty-seven are highly deceptive. You'd need to be pretty sharp to say where they begin and end. These works are more like illusionist wallpaper. Come to think of it, are they photographs or are they paintings? Nico Krijno kicks that one into the long grass. He prefers to describe them as sculptures.

True, in order to produce these images the artist creates weird and wonderful ephemeral constructions. These are the fruit of his playful prospecting. He picks up bits of wood and old rope, tins, electrical wire, ribbons and old magazines from bric-a-brac merchants, waste dumps or simply on the street, then, in his studio, paints, repurposes, sculpts and assembles these lowly scraps into photographic objects. Just for the camera. The volumes of his sculptures translate into effects of surface in his pictures. Once he has his photos, he reworks them with retouching software, gradually elaborating spaces of fiction that lean towards the surreal. With his biomorphic forms, haywire geometries and dizzying, infinitely mirrored motifs, Krijno re-enchants photography using the cast-offs from our consumer society. Then he takes these precarious sculptures apart and puts the elements back in circulation. It is like the curtain going down on a play.

With these tricky pictures in Pop-bright colours, Krijno breaks with the solid South African tradition of engaged documentary photography whose tutelary figures are David Goldblatt, Santu Mofokeng and Pieter Hugo. Even if the luminosity of his images and the vigour of his colours naturally evoke a very African kind of energy, Krijno is clearly his own man. He admits to a childhood passion for photography and acknowledges his study of theatre and cinema. He mentions a three-year exile in London, where he worked as a TV technician before going back to his first love and briefly being the assistant to the photographer Rankin. But when you look at his career, he really comes across as one of those rebel artists who push the envelope – the frame – with all the nonchalance of the outsider. He came to attention in 2011 with a solo show in Cape Town and is now represented by two prestigious galleries: Beetles + Huxley in London and The Ravestijn Gallery in Amsterdam. Krijno lives with his wife and children on a solitary farm not far from Cape Town, and is continuing along his very personal path. Conceived under austral skies, his free and joyful works conjure up a singular cosmogony. Nico Krijno does not photograph the world, he constructs his own.











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