

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

AnOther^{Magazine}

The Story Behind Rineke Dijkstra's Poignant New Portraits

As part of our #CultureIsNotCancelled campaign, Daisy Woodward talks to Rineke Dijkstra about her new exhibition at Marian Goodman gallery, which in lieu of a physical show has moved online

By Daisy Woodward (April 21, 2020)



Hel, Poland, August 12, 1998

Copyright Rineke Dijkstra, Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery New York, Paris and London

Dutch photographer and filmmaker Rineke Dijkstra makes portraits like no one else. Her works are large in scale, betray a command of lighting, composition and visual acuity as impressive as that of the 17th-century Dutch masters, and are breathtakingly candid, appearing to encapsulate the very essence of her subjects. Some of her most famous photographs depict single figures – think: her 90s photographs of angularly posed adolescents, standing on a beach in their bathing suits, or Olivier, the young, furrow-browed officer she captured as he climbed the ranks of the French Foreign Legion – but she is also beguiled by group portraiture, the

NEW YORK PARIS LONDON

WWW.MARIANGOODMAN.COM

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

subject of her new online exhibition at London's Marian Goodman gallery. "I am always looking for authenticity in people, their individuality and how they distinguish from others," Dijkstra tells AnOther, "but also, what connects them and how people relate to each other."

The show looks at various types of collective scenarios. Night Watching, for instance, an enthralling three-screen video installation commissioned by Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, features 14 different groups of people – from Dutch school girls to Japanese businessmen – observing, and talking in front of, Rembrandt's magnum opus, The Night Watch (1642). The painting itself is off screen, allowing viewers to hone in on the awed gallery goers instead, and their united response to one of art history's most seminal group paintings.

But the exhibition's most prolific grouping is the family portrait. "It started with a number of commissions, and then I realised that it's a beautiful subject for me," Dijkstra explains of her enduring fondness for the familial, which has resulted in multiple depictions of siblings, photographed at home, over the course of her 30-year career. "I like the idea that the families will go on living with their portraits," she expands. "Every day, they will see how I depicted them, how they are frozen at a more or less random point in a past that will seem further and further away. Meanwhile, the family will continue to evolve, the differences will be barely visible from day to day, so it's the unchanging portrait that will make them conscious of all the changes. That will make the portrait a kind of baseline, a lasting reminder that time goes by."

The passing of time is a resonant theme in Dijkstra's work, and she frequently returns to her sitters to capture them as they grow and change. Two key series on display, Emma, Lucy, Cecile, (Three Sisters) (2008–2014) and Chen and Efrat (1999–2005), depict sisters: the first grouping, three Dutch siblings of differing ages; the second, a pair of Israeli twins. For both projects, Dijkstra shot the young women over a number of years, poignantly observing their journeys from childhood, through the inevitable awkwardness of puberty (all frumpy tops, and insouciant expressions), and out the other side. In each image the backdrop is intentionally pared-back, enabling the protagonists to command our full attention, while they in turn stare back at us, their eyes focussed intently on the camera before them.

The marked intimacy of these portraits is a testament to the connection Dijkstra so ably cultivates between herself and her elected subjects. "The way I select people is always quite intuitive," the photographer reveals. "I should feel a click, I think it is recognition." But it's not until the shoot itself that she can determine whether or not the necessary elements for a successful photograph are at play. "It is of course

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

primarily about the person: the dynamics and the concentration which occurs during shooting; whether someone will surrender to the camera and drop their pose a bit. Everything should come together like loose puzzle pieces: the posture, the gestures and the facial expression, but also the composition, the light, the colours. And then it's certain details – especially the ones you don't usually notice at first – that can lift the picture above itself.”

And indeed, whether it's the almost indiscernible touching of a knee to a sister's shoulder (as in *Sophie and Alice*, Savollinna, Finland, August 3, 2013), the decision of one identical twin to wear earrings, and the other a choker (*Chen and Efrat*, Israel, 16 Dec. 2000), or the mirroring – intentional or not – of an older sister's leg positioning (*Marianna and Sasha*, Kingisepp, Russia, November 2, 2014), it is such minutiae that give way to narrative speculation and poetic reflection on human connection. “I hope that my portraits can gain universal value and will tell their own story within the context of their subject,” Dijkstra affirms. “In the concentrated and clenched moment of a picture, and the small details you can perceive in it, you can generate attention and meaning, which mostly escape us in everyday life.”

[View the exhibition online now.](#)