

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT



Above, Erwin Olaf's 'Still from Waiting Shenzhen' (2014) and, below, the photographer's 'Keyhole 3'

# Waiting Out Frustration, Dismay, Hope

By Jessica Dawson

Over the last 10 years, Dutch artist Erwin Olaf has produced a series of stylized images that read like the stage directions for a Samuel Beckett play. A veteran of editorial and commercial work for the likes of Bottega Veneta and Elle, Mr. Olaf's art photography serves up states of excruciating limbo: Nobody comes, nobody goes.

To create them, the artist transforms the conventions of commercial photography, with

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its emphasis on even lighting, artful sets and flawless hair and makeup, into enigmatic visual essays starring glamorous and slightly louche figures of all ages. A survey exhibition of a decade's worth of pictures and



a new series titled "Waiting" opens Thursday at Chelsea's Hasted Kraeutler.

"It's a terrible emotion, between pain and being drugged," Mr. Olaf, a chiseled 55-year-old, said of the in-between states he's exploring. "When you go to the doctor, and you wait for a test result—Do I have this terrible disease or don't I have this terrible disease? This

emotion is so painful."

By contrast, Mr. Olaf's professional life has been decidedly upbeat; recent successes include winning a competition to design the Dutch euro coin that went into circulation last year and the release of his second photographic monograph by Aperture in November. Something of a gay icon in the Netherlands, Mr. Olaf has gone from outsider to celebrated insider.

Yet his obsession remains. Mr. Olaf's exhibition marks the debut of an Ur-example of expectation: a 50-minute film charting the emotional progress of a young woman waiting for a date that never shows. As we witness her posture and expression turn from hope to dismay, Mr. Olaf hopes we will join her in a vicarious experience of frustration.

"It speaks to a level of patience that people don't seem to have any more," said Sarah Hasted, Mr. Olaf's New York dealer, of the film's conceit. "Maybe it's due to social media and technology and hundreds of TV channels, but a lot of the time people just react. It's very hard to capture that emotional state right before you react."

In addition to studio work, Mr. Olaf has recently explored location shoots in politically charged locales including the

Berlin swimming pool where Hermann Göring was reputed to bathe. In Mr. Olaf's pictures, a recurring clown figure evokes the decadence and disorder of the Weimar era that can be read as a mirror our own era of global uncertainty.

"That was a moment when Europe was on the precipice of really traumatic change," said Lesley Martin, publisher of Aperture's book program and the editor of Mr. Olaf's recent monograph. "He sees this as another moment of transition where ideas of European unity and personal freedom now taken for granted could, with the flip of a few switches, go in a different direction."

And so we wait for a date just as we wait for the world to change. And though Mr. Olaf would like to do more location shoots—he plans a trip to Detroit this year—he insists his stylized approach will continue. "As long as I live, I will celebrate fantasy," Mr. Olaf said. "I'm not so much interested in reality as it is. If I want to see it, I can look out the window."

*"Waiting" runs through Feb. 28 at Hasted Kraeutler Art Gallery, 537 W. 24th St. between 10th and 11th avenues; 212-627-0006;*

*twww.hastedkraeutler.com.*