



## **Rene & Radka**

**\*1974 Germany / / \*1975 Czech Republic**

This cosmopolitan photographic duo consisting of Czech Radka Leitmeritz and German René Hallen, who lives for more than ten years in Paris, have been making themselves better and better known on the European scene in recent years, not only with their advertising campaigns and fashion editorials, but also with their remarkable artistic work. Photographs by this pair are remarkable for their particular aesthetic, which is a function of their style of perception followed by their capturing of reality, either in natural or posed scenes and scenarios. Indeed, to the extent that one can hardly believe that these are real shots and not computer-generated photomontage. Just as the artists are attracted by the disturbing beauty of an abandoned merry-go-round and children's playgrounds, giant chintzy flying kites and fully-clothed girls swimming under water, their photos awaken in the viewer ambivalent feelings just like those we might have while dreaming. They appear before us like surreal pictures often moving on the edge of poetic dream like visions and nightmares with the teasing tension of a lightweight horror movie. René & Radka won their name in particular through their original photographs of children, created for example for brands such as Kenzo and Miss Sixty, the French magazine Milk and Japanese Vogue. Although their name currently appears under a long list of major advertisements (e.g. for Van Cleef & Arpels and Aston Martin, Kenzo) and fashion photographs and portraits for leading magazines depicting adult models, the fantastical world of children never ceases to attract them in the independent cycles of work to which they devote themselves in parallel.

This exhibition shows three such series together: Come and Play With Us Forever and Ever (2005-2007) and Under Water (2008-2009), which they jointly presented three years ago at the Alinari National Photography Museum in Florence, and their latest, Colours of the Wind, which had its premiere this summer in the luxury Parisian department store Bon Marché. In Come and Play With Us the artists placed their artfully dressed young heroines in striking stylised images in which time stands still - as if frozen in the moment just before or after some dramatic event. What that event is, we can only guess, and it is exactly this together with the choice of colours and lighting that constitutes the exciting aspect of these photographs. From them we hear a deafening silence, in whose undertones we hear the horrifying line from the twins in Kubrick's The Shining: "Come play with us, Danny..." Rocking horse, merry-go-round, labyrinth - these ought to be things of joy, inviting children to play. But is that the case here? We don't see into the eyes of the girls on the photographs, they have their backs turned to the viewer, their eyes cast down, their hair or sunglasses covering their faces. You can just feel the tension and sense the stories playing out in their beautiful doll-like heads.

In any event an impenetrable curtain separates you from their secret world; perhaps that boundary is the mirror beyond which they have gone like Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. The Under Water cycle also draws you into the special atmosphere of fanciful and fairy tale stories. Its water nymphs immediately enchant you, even as they have their eyes closed. Their figures dressed in eye-catching costumes are given up entirely to the watery world: almost lifelessly and as if they were floating beneath the surface, with only escaping bubbles to let us know that life still persists in them. As if they themselves were dreaming on the edge of life and death in a meditative oblivion in the darkest depths. We feel their lightness, but at the same time a certain weightiness. How and why have they come to be underwater and fully clothed? Are they human beings changed in to sleeping beauties, or perhaps they are nymphs, returning from the world of people? These too are the thoughts aroused in us by these captivating scenes, which the photographers succeeded in conjuring up in an ordinary urban swimming pool, which they have turned into a professional photography studio. Among other things, Under Water shows how wonderfully this photographic double act knows how to work not just with adult models, but also with children, and all under conditions which might well be called extreme. You almost catch your breath when you look at these almost romantic pictures.

Whereas in the aforementioned series René & Radka carefully stage the visions in their photographs, in the final Colors of the Wind cycle they record imposing inflatable kites flown by their owners on the north beaches of France. Once again we find ourselves in the poetically playful universe that is so close to children, even though this curious past-time is in reality the domain of grown-up enthusiasts. Here we can see a child-like figure on only one of the pictures, and that almost by accident, but through it we can form an idea of the scale of these glorious coloured airborne beings. So after the phenomenon of water the photographers have conjured up the air, which of course in this case gives shape and movement principally to present creatures of the water-medusas, octopuses, fish... Only in places toys wander in in the shape of a ball or a teddy bear, as if left behind on the beach by children. And although they are carried aloft against the horizon of the sea and the sky with clouds, we can get the feeling that they are sailing under the surface of the sea, even sometimes sinking down to the bottom.

In their pictures René & Radka record for us this magical experience full of poetry and colour, recalling brightly its watercolours as well as clips from animated cartoons. Thanks to them we can be transported in to a fascinating fantasy world living its own life just outside the window of Captain Nemo's submarine. But here the window is the lens of their camera. Tereza Bruthansová, Ph.D. Exhibition curator René & Radka They live and work in Paris. SOLO Exhibitions: Moonage Daydream, 2006, Vieux Gallery, Berlin; Come and Play with Us Forever and Ever, 2007, Galerie Philippe Chaume, Paris; Under Water, 2009, Galerie Philippe Chaume, Paris; Dreams and Shadows, 2009, Museo Nazionale Alinari della fotografia, Florence; Colors of the Wind, 2012, Bon Marché, Paris. Their photographs have been published in many important

international magazines, for example in Wallpaper, W, Vanity Fair, Elle, Milk, New York Magazine, Wall street Journal, in Japanese Vogue and Numero in China. Citizen K, They have developed campaigns for brands and companies like Kenzo, Adidas with David Beckham, Absolute Vodka, Miss Sixty, Energie, John Lewis, Aston Martin and Van Cleef & Arpels. In 2009 the Prestigious ARTE TV channel made a long documentary about their photographs.

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