

Hellen van Meene

The Dissolve

February 22 – March 30, 2024



One of the most influential international photographers of her generation, Hellen van Meene is known for her intimate color portraits of adolescent girls and young women inspired by traditions of classical painting. An exhibition of recent work, *The Dissolve* will be on view at Yancey Richardson from February 22 through March 30, 2024, with the majority of the photographs on view in New York for the first time. A reception with the artist will be held on Thursday, February 22 from 6-8 p.m.

In her sixth solo exhibition at the gallery, Dutch artist van Meene continues her exploration of female identity with 20 photographs made between 2016 and 2023. Many of her young subjects are on the cusp of adulthood and van Meene highlights both the psychological tension and confusion often experienced during these transitional years. Her unique visual language employs an exceptional use of natural, luminous light reminiscent of 17th century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer.

Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs, V&A, wrote in the book *Hellen van Meene: The Years Shall Run Like Rabbits* (Aperture 2015), “Each photo resounds with painterly color harmonies. She has a lucid understanding of the nuances of natural light: how it can transform a scene before the lens into a picture that distills and then transcends the depiction of reality. Coupling this with her choreographed scenes and her intuitive use of gesture in the faces and attitudes enacted by her subjects, she has consistently produced the condition for photographic transformations.”

Van Meene’s subjects are often caught in dreamlike states or otherworldly situations. In one, a bride stands calmly as the train of her wedding dress ignites in a semi-circle of flames. In another, a sitter cradles a fish like a baby, and in another, butterflies carefully position themselves on the subject’s face, neck, and chest. One young woman immersed in a body of water is surrounded by flowers while fully dressed, recalling Shakespeare’s Ophelia. Van Meene’s subjects appear detached and unflummoxed about their unusual situations, absorbing the ambiguity of being at the brink of adulthood, while caught in the liminal space between childhood and womanhood.

In the words of van Meene: “*The girl’s dreams go beyond her daily life, as she yearns to be a butterfly and take flight into the skies. Her untangled hair serves as a powerful symbol of freedom and flight, inspiring us all to chase our dreams and embrace our innermost desires.*”

For more than 20 years, Hellen van Meene (Dutch, b. 1972) has been known as one of the world’s top photographers for her carefully staged portraits of adolescent girls. Her work has been exhibited internationally in museums including Fotografiska, New York (2024); Museum of Fine Arts Boston (2019); Musee d’Orsay, Paris (2016); Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels (2015); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2009); Art Institute of Chicago (2008); Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (2008); and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2007).

Van Meene’s photographs are held in institutional collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; Museum of Fine Art, Boston; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Fries Museum, Netherlands; Museum of Photography, Netherlands; Folkwang Museum Essen, Germany; Huis Marseille, Amsterdam; and Museo Artium del Pais Vasco, Spain.

Van Meene is the subject of five artist monographs, including *Hellen van Meene: The Years Shall Run Like Rabbits* (Aperture, 2015); *Hellen van Meene: tout va disparaître* (Schirmer/Mosel, 2009); *Hellen van Meene: New Work* (Schirmer/Mosel, 2006); *Hellen van Meene: Portraits* (Aperture, 2004); and *Hellen van Meene: Japan Series* (The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago and De Hallen, Haarlem, the Netherlands, 2002).

Van Meene lives and works in Heiloo, Netherlands.

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Image above: *Untitled #497*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 16 x 16 inches.