

PRESS RELEASE

RINEKE DIJKSTRA

BEACH PORTRAITS

13 DECEMBER 2024 TO 18 MAY 2025

Contemporary Art Collection

Press preview: Friday, 13 December 2024, 9.30 am

Frankfurt am Main, 31 October 2024. The ocean—a gaze: The artist Rineke Dijkstra (*1959) portrays young people looking directly into the camera on various beaches around the world—in Poland, Great Britain, Ukraine, Croatia and the United States. The carefully composed photographs are a search for the essence of human existence: sensitive encounters in which the artist also raises questions about authenticity and truthfulness in portrait photography. From 13 December 2024 to 18 May 2025, the Städel Museum will present 27 of Dijkstra's works in a solo exhibition, including 23 images from her *Beach Portraits* series, which attracted international attention and established her as one of the most influential female photographers in contemporary art. Works from the *Streets* series and a self-portrait of the artist are also featured in the exhibition.

In the *Beach Portraits* series, created mainly in the 1990s, Dijkstra links the young people portrayed across national borders through a consistent composition. Set against the serene, basic background of the sea and reduced in context and clothing, the focus is entirely on the subjects, their characters and their youthful naturalness, which are manifested in the tiniest nuances of facial expression and posture—especially when, despite their best efforts, their emotional worlds are revealed. As a result, these powerful shots become timeless images that embody the human condition, full of uncertainty, curiosity and the search for identity. Through their unique visual language, which draws on art historical references ranging from the works of Sandro Botticelli to August Sander, among others, Dijkstra's photographs express a contemporary historical view of the post-Cold War era.

Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum, notes: "Rineke Dijkstra's portraits could not be more contemporary, and at the same time they are already great works of art history: they have long been icons of photography. The medium of photography plays a central role in the Städel Museum's collection: photographs were acquired for the teaching collection as early as the 1850s. Today, the collection comprises more than 5,000 works—from the beginnings of photography to the immediate present, including key works by pioneering female photographers. I am

Städtisches Kunstinstitut
und Städtische Galerie

Dürerstraße 2
60596 Frankfurt am Main
Phone +49(0)69-605098-195
presse@staedelmuseum.de
www.staedelmuseum.de/en

PRESS DOWNLOADS
newsroom.staedelmuseum.de/en

PRESS AND
ONLINE COMMUNICATION
Pamela Rohde
Phone +49(0)69-605098-170
rohde@staedelmuseum.de

Franziska von Plocki
Phone +49(0)69-605098-268
plocki@staedelmuseum.de

Elisabeth Pallentin
Phone +49(0)69-605098-195
pallentin@staedelmuseum.de

therefore all the more delighted that, with Rineke Dijkstra, we are now able to present such an important photographic artist at the Städel Museum.”

“In her work, Rineke Dijkstra succeeds in sensitively approaching the essence of the human being—a claim shared by photographic theory and art history. Rineke Dijkstra’s protagonists are people who are not only searching for their identity across cultural boundaries, but who are also united by a timeless question: ‘When and how do I understand myself and how do I want to be perceived by my environment?’ It is this empathetic, all-too-human moment that is expressed in Dijkstra’s works and makes them so timeless”, adds **Maja Lisewski, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art and curator of the exhibition.**

Staging and Naturalness

For Rineke Dijkstra, a high degree of naturalness in her photographs is of central importance. While working as a freelance photographer for various magazines in the late 1980s, she sought new forms of artistic expression. *Self-Portrait, Marnixbad, Amsterdam, Netherlands, June 19, 1991* (1991) marks a turning point in her career as an artist. The photograph shows her in a moment of utter exhaustion after an intensive swimming training programme, which she did every day as part of her rehabilitation following a serious bicycle accident in 1990. Too tired to strike a pose, her only option was to look directly and unflinchingly into the camera. Dijkstra found inspiration for the *Beach Portraits* in this captured moment, which lies somewhere between restraint and personal transformation. In this series she captures the complexity of young people in transition in all their contradictions. Since then, the artist has been less interested in the young people themselves than in the point at which identity and personality are still developing and have not yet been fully absorbed into learned social roles.

The people Dijkstra portrays exert a certain fascination and idiosyncrasy that allows her to connect with them. Her own relationship and that of the viewer to the people she portrays is very important to her, and she always maintains a respectful distance in her photographs. In both the *Beach Portraits* and *Streets* series, she stages the young people in frontal poses, like freestanding sculptures, giving them a dignified aura. The reciprocal gaze establishes a direct encounter between the viewer and the person portrayed, without creating a voyeuristic effect despite this intimate moment. The simple and repetitive composition of the photographs focuses attention entirely on the central figure. As in a photo studio, the background of the sea is always the same, only the weather and the elements of the landscape change and characterise the composition of the picture, which clearly emphasises the unagitated posture of the young people.

The Photographic Moment

The artist uses a fill-in flash and a large-format 4 x 5 inch analogue camera, which requires a great deal of attention and time. Due to the technically induced deceleration of the photographic process, the subjects become more and more relaxed over time and lose the desire to control their appearance in front of the camera. In the *Beach Portraits* and *Streets* series, Rineke Dijkstra focuses heavily on the silhouettes of the young people, asking them not to smile as the only instruction, which is why it seems as if the emotions have been transferred from their faces to their entire bodies.

For Dijkstra, the decisive moment is the one in which determinable factors such as light, colour and composition come together, but which she cannot completely control. She generally approaches her subjects in two steps: First, she looks at the person through the camera's viewfinder. The subject appears upside down, making it more difficult to read emotions and facial expressions, but allowing the composition to come into its own. Due to the analogue technique, the photographic result is only visible to the artist afterwards. Details that she was not consciously aware of when taking the photographs reveal unexpected facets of the people portrayed, lifting them for a moment out of their everyday reality. The precise indication of the place and time of the shooting in the titles of the works has a documentary aspect, pointing to these brief, significant moments that contrast with the simple staging and casual poses of the young people.

USA and Eastern Europe

By dispensing with superfluous pictorial information, Rineke Dijkstra creates portraits with which the viewer can easily identify and in which social typifications of people can be found. In the tradition of August Sander (1876–1964), whom Dijkstra herself cites as an important source of inspiration, she creates sociological observations and questions social role models. After starting the *Beach Portraits* series in the Netherlands in 1992, she travelled to the USA that same year and photographed young people on the beach at Hilton Head Island in South Carolina, which is still considered one of the most luxurious holiday destinations in the United States. The photos she took in Eastern Europe shortly afterwards reveal subtle but significant socio-cultural differences, showing teenagers on the beaches of Poland, Ukraine and Croatia in informal poses and old-fashioned swimwear, sometimes in underwear or street clothes. The US adolescents, on the other hand, wear fashionable bikinis and swimsuits, sometimes trying to imitate poses from glossy magazines. The footprints in the sand of *Hilton Head Island, S.C., USA, 24 June 1992* (1992) show that the girl Erin was trying out different poses. The make-up and jewellery suggest certain expectations and hopes of the young adolescent in relation to these photographs; Rineke Dijkstra was asked by Erin the day before at dusk on the beach if she could

take her portrait, and they arranged to meet the next day—an exceptional situation within the series, as the other shots were spontaneously initiated by Dijkstra. The photograph shows Erin trying to tame her windswept hair, trying to look perfect and yet feeling insecure.

Art Historical Parallels

Because of Erin's pose, *Hilton Head Island, S.C., USA, 24 June 1992* is often associated with Sandro Botticelli's (1445–1510) *The Birth of Venus* (1485–86). The 15-year-old girl in Dijkstra's best-known work, *Kolobrzeg, Poland, July 26, 1992* (1992), comes even closer to the art-historical icon. The strong reference is due to her elegant and simple appearance. From the outset, the girl on the Polish beach reminded Rineke Dijkstra of a Renaissance painting, but the resemblance to Venus, not least because of the almost identical contrapposto pose, only became apparent after the photograph was taken. Although Dijkstra does not actively seek them out in her work, other photographs also bear similarities to important works of art history, such as *Yalta, Ukraine, July 30, 1993* (1993), which recalls the harlequin motifs of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973). These parallels with paintings are reinforced by Dijkstra's almost painterly use of colour, the omission of shadows and the uniformly designed backgrounds of the photographs.

In her work, Rineke Dijkstra emphasises the discrepancy between the desired self-projection and the actual effect of her protagonists. Her portraits often show what the subjects do not want to reveal to the outside world but nevertheless feel. The smallest details and unconscious gestures, such as the position of the hands or the expression in the eyes, reveal more about the young people than they themselves may have intended. By capturing these specific, personal characteristics, Dijkstra creates authentic images that transcend the individual and provide insights into human identity and self-perception.

Rineke Dijkstra (*1959 in Sittard, Netherlands) lives and works in Amsterdam, where she studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy from 1981 to 1986. She has received numerous awards, including the Hasselblad Foundation Award in 2017 and the Johannes Vermeer Award in 2020, and is represented in major international collections such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the MACBA in Barcelona, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Tate Modern in London and the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main. Her work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at the Lehmbrock Museum, Duisburg (2022), the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2019), the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek (2017), the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt am Main (2013) and the

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2012), among others. From 8 November 2024 to 10 February 2025, the Berlinische Galerie will be showing a survey exhibition of the artist's work.

STÄDEL INVITES RINEKE DIJKSTRA

Live event with the artist, with music & drinks

On Friday, 13 December 2024, the curator Maja Lisewski will talk to the artist Rineke Dijkstra about her exhibition *Beach Portraits*. Short guided tours in German and English invite visitors to discover the collection of contemporary art and its exciting connections with the work of Rineke Dijkstra. Drinks and music by DJ and producer Thysma will round off the evening. The discussion with the artist will be held in English.

Tickets cost 5 euros and can be purchased shortly online at shop.staedelmuseum.de.

Remaining tickets will be available at the box office. Doors open at 6.30 pm, event starts at 7.00 pm.

The STÄDEL INVITES event series takes place in partnership with BMW on the occasion of exhibitions by selected contemporary artists.

RINEKE DIJKSTRA: BEACH PORTRAITS

Exhibition dates: 13 December 2024 to 18 May 2025

Curator: Maja Lisewski, Assistant Curator, Contemporary Art Collection

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Städel Invites Rineke Dijkstra: 13 December 2024, in partnership with BMW

Information: staedelmuseum.de/en

Visitor Service: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Opening Hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays, 10.00 am – 6.00 pm; Thu 10.00 am – 9.00 pm

Special Opening Hours: For up-to-date information on special opening hours, please visit staedelmuseum.de/en/visit.

Tickets and admission: €18, reduced €16; Tuesday Special: every Tuesday 3–6 pm €9, admission free for children under 12. Groups of at least 10 persons who would normally be charged the full admission fee: €16 per person. Groups are required to book in advance by contacting +49(0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de.

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STÄDEL STORIES: For more stories and background information on the collection and the special exhibitions, read, watch and listen to stories.staedelmuseum.de (in German)