

# MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

mga  
monash gallery of art

## BRUTAL TENDER HUMAN ANIMAL: Roger Ballen photography

Opening: 3.00pm Saturday 5 September 2009  
>to be opened by Dr Shaune Lakin, Director MGA

Exhibition dates: 4 September – 1 November 2009

Internationally renowned photographer Roger Ballen has produced some of the most controversial images of our times. *Brutal, tender, human, animal: Roger Ballen photography* is Melbourne's only opportunity to experience the work of this award-winning photographer, and to view the extraordinary images that have placed Ballen at the centre of contemporary photography.

MGA is the exclusive Victorian venue for this major survey exhibition. Presenting over 70 gelatin silver photographs made between 1983 and 2007, *Brutal, tender, human, animal: Roger Ballen photography* includes some of the most compelling and confronting images of our time.

Shaune Lakin, Director of the MGA states "Roger Ballen is one of the world's most important photographers. As with all great works of art, Ballen's photographs are at once beautiful and challenging: they raise serious questions about ethics and social responsibility, class and race. This is a rare opportunity to see some of the most powerful images produced in our lifetime."

The American-born Ballen's photographs document his experience of South African fringe-dwellers. A geologist by training, Ballen began to photograph the houses and townfolk he met while looking for potential mining sites in the 1970s. These travels took Ballen into the poor rural areas known as *dorps*. Struck by the isolated character of these places, which were for the most part invisible to those living in cities or larger towns, Ballen began to document the *dorps*, and in doing so produced some of the most extraordinary social records of the twentieth century.

Ballen has said of this work, "It's not possible to take good pictures if you don't have an understanding and empathy with your subjects. I've always felt a real closeness towards my subjects and have had a very good relationship with them over the years." However, Ballen has been accused by critics of exploiting his fringe-dwelling subjects and their situation. *Brutal, tender, human, animal: Roger Ballen photography* will give Melbourne audiences the opportunity to consider Ballen's pictures and judge for themselves whether the artist is indeed brutal or tender.

Ballen was born in 1950 in New York. Ballen has received awards including Best photographic book of the year at the PhotoEspaña festival in Madrid and Photographer of the year at the inaugural Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles in France in 2002. His photographs have been exhibited at venues around the world, including the Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Gagosian Gallery in New York, and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. *Brutal, tender, human, animal: Roger Ballen photography* was curated by Robert Cook of the Art Gallery of Western Australia and has also been shown in Perth and Canberra.



Dresie and Casie, twins, West Transvaal 1993  
gelatin silver print  
© Roger Ballen



Brian with pet pig 1998 gelatin silver print  
© Roger Ballen

AGWA exhibition supporters: Wesfarmers Arts—Principal Partner, 303, *The Sunday Times*, IFAC, Channel Seven Perth, Mirvac Hotels & Resorts, Ernst & Young; Wesfarmers Arts—Principal Partner, 303, *The Sunday Times*, IFAC, Channel Seven Perth, Mirvac Hotels & Resorts, Ernst & Young.



Media enquiries: Mark Hislop (Communications Coordinator) Tel:03 9562 1569 M:0411 964 382 Email:markh@monash.vic.gov.au

Entry to MGA is free thanks to ConnectEast, the owner and operator of EastLink!



MGA 860 Ferntree Gully Road, Wheelers Hill Victoria 3150 Australia  
T: + 61 3 9562 1569 E: mga@monash.vic.gov.au W: ma.org.au  
Tue-Fri: 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun: 12pm-5pm, Mon/public holidays: closed

ARTS  
VICTORIA



CITY OF  
MONASH