

# finding beauty in the banal with torbjørn rødland

Photographer of the wonderfully weird and the weirdly wonderful, we ask Torbjørn Rødland to respond to quotes from other artists past and present.



Torbjørn Rødland examines notions of time, transformation, and dreams in his photography. Encouraging viewers to consider and re-consider the way they see, and what they think about certain things, there is no constraint in his work, just a mixture of primitivism, historicism, myth and wry humor. Rødland's latest exhibition, *I Am A Photograph* at Galerie Rodolphe Janssen in Brussels, places somewhat sensual still lifes - strawberries covered in cream, a white stretch limousine curving round a bend in the Hollywood Hills - next to a series of portraits of LA socialite, Paris Hilton. Originally from Norway but based in Los Angeles, Rødland captures the stillness that lies behind the façade of his subjects perfectly.

We presented him with a series of quotes from other photographers, artists, designers, directors and anyone else with something interesting to say, and asked Rødland for his brutally honest opinion...



**"Anybody can be a great photographer if they zoom in enough on what they love."**

**David Bailey**

I like this quote, if only I could manage to not make an ice-cream molecule joke. And sometimes you have to take a step back and make sure your love has shape and form.

**"There are no bad pictures; that's just how your face looks sometimes." Abraham Lincoln**

Isn't this some sort of false dichotomy? The picture would have been better had it showed the face in a different moment, from another angle, in a different light. All the queens of IG know this.

**"Landscape photography is the supreme test of the photographer – and often the supreme disappointment." Ansel Adams**

A valid enough view. Landscape photography is about viewpoint. Natural light and optical viewpoint. It's about getting up very early in the morning or waiting around for hours. I could argue that portrait-in-landscape represents a more complete photographic challenge. When the motif comes with eyelids, everything changes. Also this: all analogue photography comes with disappointments.

"As soon as we renounce fiction and illusion, we lose reality itself; the moment we subtract fictions from reality, reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency." Slavoj Žižek

Great! This is why there's more reality in my photography than in the work of twelve random photojournalists. Not because photojournalism is fiction-free, but because it hopes and tries to be.





**"I know the best moments can never be captured on film, even as I spend nearly half my life trying to do just that." Rosie O'Donnell**

Photography is not necessarily about capturing perfectly lived moments. For me it's more about imagining possible futures.

**"The reason people find it so hard to be happy is that they always see the past better than it was, the present worse than it is, and the future less resolved than it will be."**

**Marcel Pagnol**

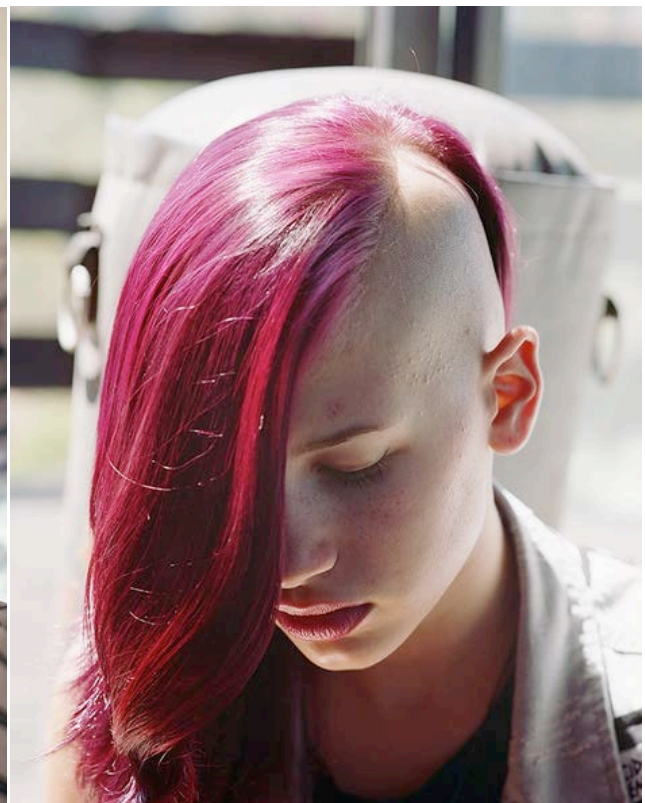
I've always seen my own future as more resolved than it has turned out to be, and I've always had serious problems living in the present.

**"You have to like the present; if not your life becomes secondhand, if you think it was better before. Or that it will be better in the future." Karl Lagerfeld**

Ok, Karl. Rub it in. I can take it.

**"If you have reasons to love someone, you don't love them." Slavoj Žižek**

Yeah, there is no such thing as rational love. Never mind if this seems to renounce love for your children, for your parents—I like your boldness.



**"I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact." Lévi-Strauss**

Right. There's no getting away from myths. Except maybe through depression, when meaning is lost.

**"Narcissism and self-deception are survival mechanisms without which many of us might just jump off a bridge." Todd Solondz**

In a two-year-old TED talk, the writer Andrew Solomon refers to a study. It found that people suffering from depression had quite an accurate idea of how many monsters they killed playing a video game for an hour. Non-depressed players tended to exaggerate the number greatly. So is depression the ability to see reality for what it actually is? I choose not to think so. Narcissism and self-deception sound like shitty lifelines, but it is definitely healthy to mythologize reality. I'm getting out of bed this morning because I'm living a fairytale. I take part in something bigger than me. This is not necessarily deceitful!

**"I don't listen to what art critics say. I don't know anybody who needs a critic to find out what art is." Jean Michel Basquiat**

Oh, a lot of people want to be familiar with the cultural canon. What else can we do? My enjoyment of late 50s Jimmy Giuffrè, for example, grew from being told by a critic that this musician is a key figure in the development of improvised American music.

**"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." Aristotle**

Yeah, that was a long time ago. The challenge today is to fully acknowledge and integrate divergent perspectives on the whole thing. Art that rejects the idea of inward significance is now the newest old art, and it's everywhere.

**"I'm afraid that if you look at a thing long enough, it loses all of its meaning." Andy Warhol**

I hold the opposite view. I'm convinced there is meaning in whatever you look at long enough.

**"I love Los Angeles, and I love Hollywood. They're beautiful. Everybody's plastic, but I love plastic. I want to be plastic." Andy Warhol**

We tend to go from one extreme to the other. Being plastic is obviously no solution. Rejecting surfaces also doesn't work. So viva the new complexity, the new soul and its surface.

**"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." Anais Nin**

I believe this is true. And it's one of the reasons I'm studying the system of ego strategies and personality types called the enneagram.

**"My idea of an interesting person is someone who is quite proud of their seemingly abnormal life and turns their disadvantage into a career." John Waters**

This is a precise description of a successful life strategy for type 4 in the enneagram. I carry a bit of that poison myself.

**"I like to control everything, and you cannot control everything. You have to at some point say, 'I let go and I'm going to let the cards fall where they fall...' For a control freak, it's hard." Naomi Campbell**

Yes! Here is self-observation and self-improvement, which I'm a strong supporter of.

**"A lot of people are afraid to say what they want. That's why they don't get what they want." Madonna**

Fair enough. But I prefer how Oscar Hammerstein said it in *South Pacific*: "You gotta have a dream. If you don't have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?" A lot of people, by the way, don't know what they want.

**"But this was what happened when you didn't want to visit and confront the past: the past starts visiting and confronting you." Bret Easton Ellis**

This is one strange interview! I also believe the past has to be confronted in order to break destructive patterns. But I've actually never been in psychoanalysis.

**"What's right? If you want something, you have the right to take it. If you want to do something, you have the right to do it." Bret Easton Ellis**

Isn't this rhetoric a tad rapey?

**"The concept of commercialism in the fashion and art world is looked down upon. You know, just to think, 'What amount of creativity does it take to make something that masses of people like?' And, 'How does creativity apply across the board?'" Kanye West**

Call me, Kanye. Send an email. Jürgen Teller is clearly not the right photographer for you and your wife.

*I Am A Photograph* opens at Galerie Rodolphe Janssen in Brussels September 11 - October 17. *Venetian Otaku* opens at Team (Bungalow) in Venice California September 20 to November 8.