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VOGUE

Imagining A World Without Men

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Marianna Rothen has a complicated relationship with femininity. The photographer, whose show, "Shadows in Paradise," opens in New York tomorrow at Steven Kasher Gallery, says her simultaneous resistance and attraction to traditional female archetypes stems from her own family, where her mother took on the roles of housewife and caregiver, while her father went to work. "Although my mother would never admit it, there was such a sorrow in that," says Rothen when we meet at her apartment in downtown Manhattan. "[I was] trying to find ways to break out of that, and not to repeat those things."

It seems she's found one: For "Shadows in Paradise," which depicts women in a world without men, Rothen photographed both a series of models and herself. Her previous work, "Snow and Rose & other tales," showed a group of largely nude women frolicking in the woods, laughing, smiling, jovial and carefree. But it's fleeting, says Rothen, the women begin to see men lurking in the books, newspapers, artwork, baby carriages and whiskey bottles that surround them. Men have infiltrated even this imaginary idyll; their influence is inescapable.

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Rothen's images have a purposefully aged look (attained by taking and re-scanning a polaroid of a digital print) intended to evoke the films of the 1960s and 1970s. For "Shadows in Paradise," Rothen found inspiration in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and Robert Altman's *Three Women*, as well as David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, films which are focused around women's many faces, and facets. Rothen herself is no stranger to illusion. She was a model for 17 years, walking the runways of Marc Jacobs and Jil Sander; posing for editorials in the Italian versions of *Elle* and *Glamour*, and working as a fit model for fashion houses like Givenchy, Yves Saint Laurent, and Balenciaga.

As a model, Rothen developed a complex understanding of beauty. Working with male photographers who, as Rothen recounts, would say things like "'baby, look smoldering,'" or 'think of your boyfriend and imagine that you're having sex with him,'" she was left feeling she had little ownership of her own image. Through photography, she found a way to reclaim it. "That was quite empowering to me," she says, "because I could look the way I wanted to look, or I could be the model that I wanted to be on my own terms." And so photography became her creative release, a place where she felt her ideas mattered.



At 32, Rothen gave up modeling entirely and transitioned almost seamlessly into the art world, showing at fairs as well as group and solo exhibitions around the globe. Tomorrow her first solo show in New York City opens at Steven Kasher Gallery.

Doing a project without men was not Rothen's initial intent for "Shadows in Paradise;" it was more that men just never really came up. Rothen explores ideals of beauty and sensuality in her work that she hopes to emulate herself—"it's always this kind of mystical woman," she says, "she has this magical, feminine thing radiating out of her"—and she used to say she would never shoot men at all. "They didn't fit into this world," she said. She has since however begun to slowly sprinkle them in: in this series, their presence is felt in inanimate objects like Erich Maria Remarque's face on the back of his book jacket, a portrait of Beethoven peeking out from a corner, a shadow of a large hand on a rock. In the future, she says, she plans to incorporate male bodies on the edges of the frame, never forgetting, of course, to celebrate the woman in the center.

Marianna Rothen's "Shadows in Paradise" is at Steven Kasher Gallery from February 23- April 15, 2017.