

# KUNSTHALL STAVANGER (/EN)

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## *Interview with Torbjørn Rødland*



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By Heather\_Jones | Interviews

*Torbjørn Rødland is the 2014 ONS artist and his exhibition *The Yellow Shell* is currently on view at Kunsthall Stavanger through October 26. Below, Rødland talks with Kunsthall Stavanger curatorial intern Mirja Majeovski about picture-making, note-taking, and the connection between images.*



Torbjørn Rødland, *The Yellow Shell*, installation view, 2014. Photo: Christopher Jonassen.

## Can you describe your working process? How do you refine ideas into images?

The starting point can be an observation, something that I see, that sets about the process of thinking. For example it can be a photograph that I encounter in a blog, old calendar or a book that has an interesting set up, something that I don't completely understand. At other times it can be that I buy an object that I am curious about and carry it around for a while. For instance I buy a lot of textiles and small things when I am in Tokyo or Beijing. Things can also happen really fast, like with the photograph I made last year of a guacamole bowl in the shape of an avocado. I came across the bowl, bought it and went straight home to photograph it. Sometimes, when I session with a person, I bring a bag of props and clothes. We try different things and see what works. If a prop does not happen I might try it at another time. Basically it is not about having and executing a clear idea but rather making a photograph in order to figure out and to accentuate what I found interesting in something that I saw.



Torbjørn Rødland, Vacuum Cleaner, 2002.

**When looking at the dates of your works, I noticed that there are often years between the taking of the photograph and the first printing of it. What makes you go back into your archive and pull out an image?**

At times the photographs get printed soon after the negatives are made but more often they stick around for a while. I usually decide pretty quickly what is interesting from a session and then it is just a matter of finding the right context in which the photograph can be activated. If an image first appears in a book then that does not count as a first printing.

**Do you have a process for making notes and storing partially-matured ideas?**

I don't really make notes. It is more that I have these jpegs and folders on my computer with images that I am interested in.

**So you mainly work based on visual references?**

Yes, though I don't see them as references but rather as starting points; if it would be a reference then I would want people to identify a source. For me it is never about the origin of the image, which is just part of the process. After making my photograph – my version – I loose interest in whatever I was looking at to begin with.



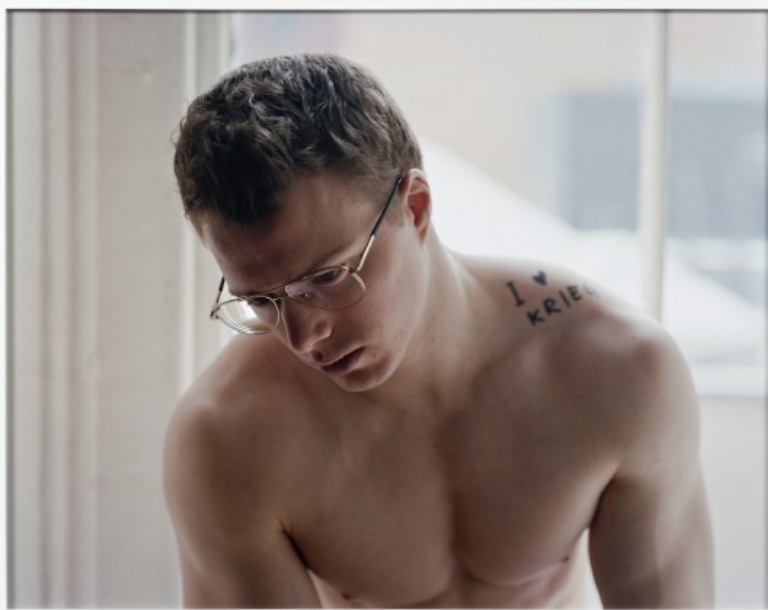
Torbjørn Rødland, Butterflies, 2007

**Do you choose the objects and the models that you work with based on the same principle of curiosity?**

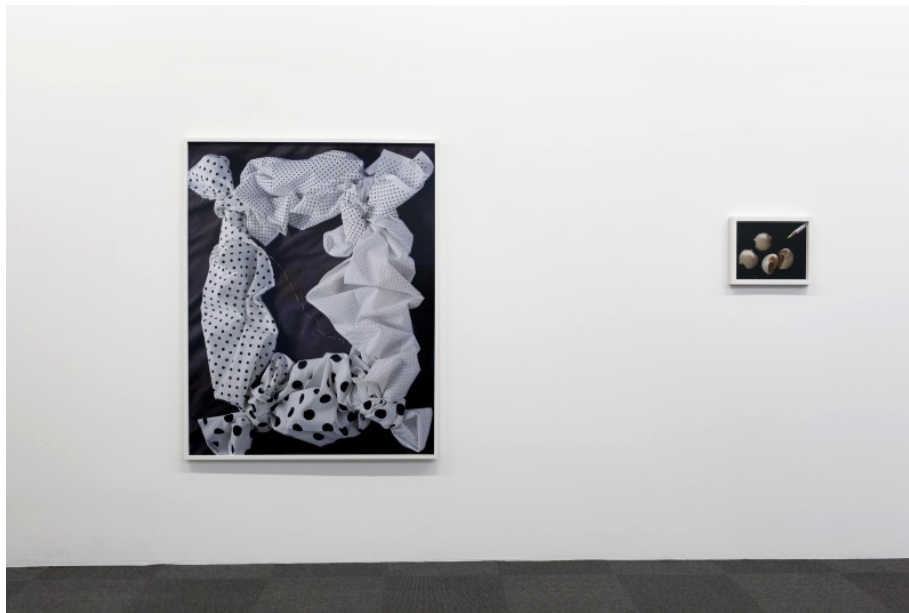
When it comes to casting, it is a question of who I think can contribute to the project as a whole. It does not matter if they are professional models, amateur models, acquaintances or friends of friends. I choose titles with a similar attitude: They need to contribute to the project as a whole and have this character that I can't quite figure out.

**I'm glad you brought up work titles. Sometimes they highlight what you want to emphasize in the image, at other times they are very general, such as *Young Man* for example. What kind of a role do you assign to titles in the interpretative process of the images?**

Different titles do different kinds of jobs. Some of them, as you mentioned, are very neutral, the type that an art historian would put on a four hundred-year-old piece that she just discovered. Others are more active, or poetic, or hard, and maybe point towards less obvious layers of interpretation. I keep a list of titles – not in a computer but in a little planner – and at times when I need a title for a book, exhibition or image I just check the list to see if I have one that works.



Torbjørn Rødland, *Young Man*, 2009-2014.



Torbjørn Rødland, *Tied Quadrants*, 2010-2014; *Yellow Pencil and Shells*, 2012-2014; and *Black Tape*, 2003. Photo: Christopher Jonassen.

**In connection to the opening of your exhibition *The Yellow Shell*, the kunsthall hosted a reunion concert of the local band Bever with whom you had a close collaboration with in the past. Can you tell how you first met the band and more broadly what kind of role music plays in your life?**

Well, one of the joys of making the six films I've done so far was that I could work with music more actively. I have a passion for music and like linking visuals and sound. I probably spend more time researching new music than I do researching photography. I just find it more rewarding. And yes, we met when Tore Rygh, the vocalist of Bever, and I were both reading Cultural Studies at the University here in Stavanger. This was before I studied art. I enjoyed playing with genres so I made different band photographs that resembled for instance sport photos; the band members looked as if they had just received medals and were waving to a fictional audience with a bouquet of flowers in their hands. I also made other photographs with a really long lens so it looked like the band was being observed from a distance and photographed without them knowing it.





Torbjørn Rødland, Yellow Spring, 2012-2014.

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**I've understood that you don't think in terms of themes when you are making photographs. Is the process of exhibiting then when the connections between the images are being formulated?**

Often in retrospect I become conscious of the consistency of my interest – I can be really into what looks like very separate images and work with them individually. Later, when putting together an exhibition or a book, I realize these images are all interlinked. Discovering different threads and principles is part of the joy of putting together a suite of photographs. Also, when I've activated a piece once, I think it is interesting to do it differently in another setting. So I enjoy re-hanging and showing photographs in untried juxtapositions. This show, *The Yellow Shell*, has quite a few pieces that have been previously shown in other exhibitions and combinations.

**Photographers tend to think in term of series. What are your thoughts on seriality?**

I started out working strictly on one project that was called *In a Norwegian landscape*. I thought I was going to work forever with that same title. When the series came to an end – it became both too easy and too difficult to continue – I did single images for a while, before starting a new series. Finally, after my *Close Encounters*, I more consciously took a break from the serial way of thinking. That became an important turning point for me. I found it easier to combine photographs that were less alike. When images are not part of a series they openly link to and activate each other in ways more subtle and rewarding. Also, when you cannot look for meaning in repetition but have to find it between different images, the viewer gets activated in a more interesting way. I try to apply the conveyed intentionality of a series to a single image. I didn't photograph five small boys urinating into water. Just one. That one image contains the whole project.