

# Cris Brodahl

## *Initials*

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Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Cris Brodahl.

Over the course of the last decade, Cris Brodahl has built up a highly distinctive, enigmatic oeuvre that radiates a sense of mystery and beauty. Largely figurative, her work engages with such universal themes as power, love, death, religion, fear and violence, while also exploring contemporary notions of beauty, femininity and sexuality.

Brodahl's meticulously executed works are based on photographic collages composed from a variety of historic and contemporary source material, such as glossy magazines devoted to fashion, cinema, dance or interior design, to name but a few examples. Cutting, splicing and overlapping a variety of recognizable elements, the artist creates new hybrid forms that are both reassuringly familiar and, at the same time, oddly disconcerting. These collages form the springboard for ensembles of work in a variety of media.

Often featuring women, Brodahl's work tends to subvert the concept of traditional portraiture. Instead of gazing at the viewer, her subjects stare in the opposite direction, or are denied an identity altogether – their features excised and replaced by other imagery. In her most recent work, for example, Brodahl juxtaposes elaborately coiffured women from a glamorous, bygone era with antique and contemporary furniture and furnishings. An artful amalgam of exposure and concealment, these evocative, jarring and beguiling combinations ultimately remain inscrutable: the imagery strikes a chord and seems pregnant with meaning, but yields no immediate or definitive answers.

In terms of appearance, technique and psychological undertow, Brodahl's work can be situated within the historic tradition of Belgian Symbolism and Surrealism. On a contemporary level, however, her work relates directly to the symbiotic relationship between photography and painting. In Brodahl's oeuvre, the two art forms converge, and clearly influence each other – a quality that engenders an unnerving sense of displacement and dislocation. A photograph can be many things – a 'frozen' moment in time, a record of absence or presence, the incontrovertible registration of reality, the carrier of memory or, in the case of advertising and publicity imagery, as used by Brodahl, dreams and aspirations. In this sense, her work touches upon the shaping of female identity through consumption – be it of imagery, products, desires or passions – and the manipulative roles played by photography, advertising and magazines.

Brodahl's subtle colour palette lends her oeuvre a great coherence. Her use of sepia, black and white, and deep, muted colours evokes, paradoxically, both the passage of time and a sense of timelessness. In an era of self-promotion and mass media, Cris Brodahl remains a rare enigma: an artist who has never been interviewed and who communicates solely through her work.

Cris Brodahl (b. 1963) lives and works in Ghent. She was accorded a solo exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum in 2010 and her work has been exhibited in numerous group exhibitions including *Inner Journeys*, Maison Particulière, Brussels, Belgium (2013), *The Biennial of Painting: The Image of Man* at the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2012), *Secret Societies* at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2011) and *An Archaeology* at 176, London (2007).

Xavier Hufkens

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