NIGHT BIRDS IN LIGHT

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WHEN LOOKING AT STEPHANIE ALLEMANDS LARGE-SCALE PHOTOGRAPHS OF SUMPTUOUSLY STYLED, OFTEN LIFE-SIZED TABLEAUX OF FLOWERS, A SET OF STRIKES YOU ARE LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER IS THAT OF AN ATTENTIVE PAINTING LOVER WHO LOVINGLY ARRANGES FLOWERS IN A VASE BEFORE SETTING ABOUT THEIR WORK. THE PHOTOGRAPHERS OF LONDON-BASED STUDIO STATE ALLEGIANCE, HOWEVER, ARE NOT ONE FOR SUCH CONVENTIONS. THEIR WORK IS ONE OF DISTINCTLY MODERN SENSIBILITIES, WHERE FLOWERS ARE ONLY ONE OF MANY ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP THEIR ELABORATELY CONSTRUCTED, OFTEN SURREAL IMAGERY. AS WITH ALL GOOD CENTURIES OF LUSCIOUS FLORAL STILL LIFE PAINTING, THERE'S A SENSE OF MELANCHOLY AND DECAY. DESPITE THE ABUNDANCE OF BLOOMS, THERE'S ALWAYS A HINT OF DEATH AND DECAY. AS WITH THE GREAT PAINTINGS OF THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES, THERE'S ALWAYS A SENSE OF THE FLEETING NATURE OF BEAUTY. AND WHILE STEPHANIE ALLEMAND'S WORK IS ENTIRELY CONTEMPORARY, THERE'S A SENSE OF THE TIMELESS ABOUT IT. THE WORK CONTAINS SO MANY DIFFERENT ELEMENTS, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PIN IT TO ONE SPECIFIC TIME OR PLACE. THE ARTIST'S WORK IS ALSO CONSTANTLY EVOLVING, AND WE'RE EXCITED TO SEE WHAT SHE DOES NEXT. WE CHATTED TO STEPHANIE ABOUT HER PHOTOGRAPHY, HER INSPIRATIONS AND HOW SHE'S BEEN KEEPING BUSY DURING THE PANDEMIC.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AS A PHOTOGRAPHER. WHAT DID YOU STUDY AND WHAT WERE YOUR EARLY INFLUENCES?

I STUDIED PHOTOGRAPHY AT CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS IN LONDON. I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN PAINTING AND ART HISTORY, SO I THINK THAT'S WHERE MY EARLY INFLUENCES CAME FROM. I'M ALSO INFLUENCED BY FILM AND LITERATURE.

YOUR WORK IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS BEING SURREAL. WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THIS DESCRIPTION? WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE WORD SURREAL?

I DON'T REALLY THINK OF MY WORK AS SURREAL. I'M MORE INTERESTED IN CREATING A SENSE OF MYSTERY AND AMBIGUITY. I LIKE THE IDEA OF THE VIEWER BEING UNSURE OF WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING AT AND HAVING TO SPEND TIME WITH THE IMAGE TO UNDERSTAND IT.

YOUR ALLEGIANCE IS CLEARLY STRONG IN FLORAL PHOTOGRAPHY, BUT YOU'VE ALSO EXPLORED OTHER SUBJECTS. WHAT DRAWS YOU TO FLOWERS AS A SUBJECT? WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPLORE IN THE FUTURE?

I'M ATTRACTED TO FLOWERS BECAUSE OF THEIR BEAUTY, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THEIR FRAGILITY AND TRANSIENCE. I'M INTERESTED IN EXPLORING OTHER SUBJECTS AND I'VE BEEN WORKING ON SOME NEW PROJECTS RECENTLY, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT I'LL DO NEXT.

YOUR WORK IS VERY CONSTRUCTED AND CAREFULLY STYLED. WHAT'S YOUR PROCESS LIKE? DO YOU HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT YOU WANT TO CREATE BEFORE YOU START, OR DO YOU LET THE IMAGE EVOLVE AS YOU WORK?

I USUALLY HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT I WANT TO CREATE BEFORE I START. I'M QUITE METHODICAL AND I LIKE TO PLAN EVERYTHING OUT IN ADVANCE. I'M ALSO QUITE PARTICULAR ABOUT THE DETAILS, SO I'LL SPEND A LOT OF TIME ON THE SET MOVING THINGS AROUND UNTIL I'M HAPPY WITH THE COMPOSITION.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR WORK? HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE WORKING AS NORMAL, OR HAS IT BEEN DIFFICULT TO ACCESS STUDIO SPACE AND MODELS?

I'VE BEEN LUCKY THAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE WORKING AS NORMAL DURING THE PANDEMIC. I'VE BEEN ABLE TO ACCESS MY STUDIO AND I'VE BEEN WORKING WITH MODELS AS USUAL. I'VE BEEN KEEPING BUSY WITH A FEW NEW PROJECTS AND I'VE ALSO BEEN ABLE TO TRAVEL A LITTLE BIT, WHICH I'M VERY GRATEFUL FOR.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? ANY EXCITING PROJECTS ON THE HORIZON?

I'M CURRENTLY WORKING ON A NEW BODY OF WORK THAT I'M REALLY EXCITED ABOUT. I'M HOPING TO HAVE IT FINISHED BY THE SPRING, SO I'M HOPING TO BE ABLE TO SHOOT IT SOON.

FINALLY, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO'S JUST STARTING OUT AS A PHOTOGRAPHER?

I'D SAY TO JUST KEEP SHOOTING AND EXPERIMENTING AS MUCH AS YOU CAN. IT'S EASY TO GET DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU'RE JUST STARTING OUT AND YOU'RE NOT SEEING THE RESULTS YOU WANT, BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP GOING AND KEEP LEARNING.

STEPHANIE ALLEMAND'S SET DESIGN AND STYLING ARE ESPECIALLY OUTSTANDING. DO YOU HAVE A BACKGROUND IN STYLING OR SET DESIGN? WHERE DO YOU SOURCE YOUR PROPS AND FLOWERS?

I DON'T HAVE A BACKGROUND IN STYLING OR SET DESIGN, I'VE JUST LEARNED A LOT BY WORKING WITH OTHER PEOPLE AND BY EXPERIMENTING MYSELF. I USUALLY SOURCE MY PROPS FROM VINTAGE SHOPS AND ONLINE, AND I GET MY FLOWERS FROM A FLORIST.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'VE EVER BEEN GIVEN?

I'M NOT SURE IF IT'S MY FAVOURITE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS REMEMBERED A PIECE OF ADVICE I HEARD A LONG TIME AGO: "DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE BORING." I THINK IT'S EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN TRYING TO BE CLEVER OR ORIGINAL, BUT SOMETIMES THE SIMPLEST IDEAS ARE THE BEST.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MOOD BOARD AT THE MOMENT?

I'VE BEEN LOOKING A LOT AT PAINTINGS BY THE DUTCH MASTERS, PARTICULARLY THE STILL LIFES. I'VE ALSO BEEN LOOKING AT A LOT OF FASHION EDITORIALS AND CAMPAIGNS.

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

I'VE BEEN LISTENING TO A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS RECENTLY, BUT I'VE BEEN PARTICULARLY OBSESSED WITH THE NEW ALBUM BY THE 1975. I'VE ALSO BEEN LISTENING TO A LOT OF OLDER MUSIC, LIKE DAVID BOWIE AND THE SMITHS.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FILM?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE FILM, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE WORK OF WES ANDERSON. I'M A BIG FAN OF HIS QUIRKY AESTHETIC AND I LOVE THE WAY HE USES COLOUR AND SYMMETRY.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE BOOK, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE WORK OF THE AMERICAN WRITER DONNA TARTT. I'VE READ ALL OF HER BOOKS MULTIPLE TIMES AND I'M ALWAYS EXCITED WHEN I HEAR THAT SHE'S WORKING ON A NEW ONE.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE IN THE WORLD?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE PLACE IN THE WORLD, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE SOUTH OF FRANCE. I'VE BEEN THERE A FEW TIMES AND I'VE ALWAYS HAD A GREAT TIME.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FOOD?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE FOOD, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED ITALIAN FOOD. I'M A BIG FAN OF PASTA AND PIZZA.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE DRINK?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE DRINK, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED A GOOD GLASS OF WINE.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE WORD?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE WORD, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE WORD "SERENDIPITY". I THINK IT'S A BEAUTIFUL WORD AND I LIKE THE IDEA OF THINGS HAPPENING BY CHANCE.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PHRASE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE PHRASE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE PHRASE "THIS TOO SHALL PASS". I THINK IT'S A GOOD REMINDER THAT EVERYTHING IS TEMPORARY, AND THAT EVEN THE DIFFICULT TIMES WILL EVENTUALLY COME TO AN END.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE QUOTE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE QUOTE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE QUOTE "THE ONLY WAY TO DO GREAT WORK IS TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO" BY STEVE JOBS. I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO, AND I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO LIVE BY THAT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SONG?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE SONG, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE SONG "HEROES" BY DAVID BOWIE. I THINK IT'S A BEAUTIFUL AND INSPIRING SONG, AND I'VE ALWAYS FOUND IT VERY MOVING.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE MOVIE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE MOVIE "THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL" BY WES ANDERSON. I THINK IT'S A BEAUTIFUL AND HILARIOUS FILM, AND I'VE WATCHED IT MANY TIMES.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TV SHOW?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE TV SHOW, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE SHOW "THE SOPRANOS". I THINK IT'S A BRILLIANTLY WRITTEN AND ACTED SHOW, AND I'VE WATCHED IT MANY TIMES.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ANIMAL?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE ANIMAL, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE ANIMAL "THE OCTOPUS". I THINK IT'S A FASCINATING AND INTELLIGENT CREATURE, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED LEARNING ABOUT THEM.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE COLOUR?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE COLOUR, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE COLOR "BLUE". I THINK IT'S A BEAUTIFUL AND CALMING COLOR, AND I'VE ALWAYS FOUND IT VERY INSPIRING.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE NUMBER?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE NUMBER, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE NUMBER "7". I THINK IT'S A LUCKY NUMBER, AND I'VE ALWAYS FOUND IT VERY APPEALING.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SPORT?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE SPORT, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE SPORT "FOOTBALL". I THINK IT'S A FANTASTIC SPORT TO WATCH AND PLAY, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE VIDEO GAME?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE VIDEO GAME, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE GAME "THE LEGEND OF ZELDA". I THINK IT'S A BEAUTIFULLY DESIGNED AND IMMERSIVE GAME, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED PLAYING IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOARD GAME?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE BOARD GAME, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE GAME "CHESS". I THINK IT'S A CLASSIC AND STRATEGIC GAME, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED PLAYING IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CARD GAME?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE CARD GAME, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE GAME "POKER". I THINK IT'S A FUN AND EXCITING GAME, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED PLAYING IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PUZZLE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE PUZZLE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE PUZZLE "SUDOKU". I THINK IT'S A CHALLENGING AND ADDICTIVE PUZZLE, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED SOLVING IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK GENRE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE BOOK GENRE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE GENRE "MYSTERY". I THINK IT'S A GENRE THAT KEEPS YOU GUESSING AND ENGAGED, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED READING IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE GENRE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE MOVIE GENRE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE GENRE "COMEDY". I THINK IT'S A GENRE THAT'S GREAT FOR RELAXING AND LAUGHING, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED WATCHING IT.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TV SHOW GENRE?

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ONE FAVOURITE TV SHOW GENRE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THE GENRE "DRAMA". I THINK IT'S A GENRE THAT'S GREAT FOR EXPLORING COMPLEX CHARACTERS AND STORYLINES, AND I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED WATCHING IT