

## Preview

### Our Land



Art

**Wanna Be King** acrylics on canvas

#### **Marjolein Rothman**

Motive Gallery (see listings)  
18 October-29 November

She's probably best known for the fragmented visions that seem to emerge from the surface of her canvases, like shadows from an unmasterable past. Now, Dutch painter Marjolein Rothman (1974) presents 'Our Land', a solo exhibition of new, large-scale paintings based on vintage photographs from what was then the colony of the Dutch East Indies: a few portraits of Queen Wilhelmina or her husband Prins Hendrik, and others featuring the Japanese Emperor Hirohito and his wife. When displayed in the Netherlands, where issues of national identity still stir up heated debate, are her layered portrayals of those in power more patriotic or treasonous?

Since winning the Royal Prize for Painting in 2004, Rothman's work has focused on collective identities – religious, national or political – and how they crystallize around specific representations. To show how these representations contribute to myth-making, Rothman created a series of portraits of famous historical figures who have been rendered unrecognisable. Rothman then submitted those images to her painterly surgery, breaking them into countless pieces as if to further undermine their iconic

status. In another series, Rothman used the style of official portraiture to portray anonymous citizens, thereby turning them into figureheads.

The works on display here in 'Our Land' are slightly different. They still display Rothman's characteristic fragmented brushwork and her unique use of grey shades, but they are less concerned with the iconography of fame. Instead, Rothman hints at the relationship between the subaltern and the powerful by highlighting the sense of unease that underlies these portraits. Queen Wilhelmina seems to be corseted by her chair, while her husband, Prins Hendrik, is reduced to a severe mask of dark strokes that speak of his frustrated royal ambitions (in 'Wanna Be King'). Yet 'Our Land' also features a typical colonial photograph that shows a group of half-naked Indonesian women. The composition is both solemn and disquietingly sensuous.

With this new series, Rothman continues her investigation into the politics of representation, especially the role that images play in creating a sense of national consensus and lending legitimacy to those in power. Visually compelling and socially engaged, 'Our Land' singles her out as one of the most interesting young painters working in the Netherlands today. *Catherine Somzé*