

PRESS RELEASE

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**OLIVIER RICHON** | *Anima(l)*

16 January – 22 February 2009

Private View: Thursday 15 January, 6.30 - 8.30pm

*Anima(l)* is the second solo exhibition at the gallery by artist Olivier Richon. Since the 1980s, Richon has continued an ongoing investigation into the artifice of the represented image, primarily through photography, using a highly individual technique which has combined a painterly aesthetic with a pin-sharp, almost hyperrealistic attention to detail. Influential to a generation of practitioners, his work can be seen as an ongoing form of research. He has been head of the Department of Photography at the Royal College of Art, London since 1997.

The present exhibition includes new works focusing on images, or 'staged portraits' of different animals as well as domestic still life objects. The subjects include a monkey, a tortoise and a dog, arranged in the neutral space of a photographic studio. In this sense they refer both to the conventions of photographic portraiture, and also provide a blank environment in which that represented can be placed centre stage without distraction. Each of Richon's compositions are presented in a highly suggestive way, as if a specific text is there to be read, to denote meaning. But, as critic Leslie Dick has noted, "nothing is self-explanatory: in opposition to the common sense view of the photograph as evidence, a shadow-mark of a real (passing) event, here there is authorial intention, historical context, a set of meanings which require interpretation."

The artist has stated that he is concerned with the manner by which photography uniquely preserves the stillness of an object. He writes, "The work proposes a reflection upon the animate and the inanimate, and the way in which a tension between the two is created". For example, tension is created between the controlled environment of the studio and the unpredictable behaviour of the live animal. The title '*Anima(l)*' itself comes from a discussion made popular among thinkers in the 1700s, concerning the presence or absence of the soul, the anima, of the animal. If Richon's earlier series used creatures such as peacocks or a rhinoceros as quotations and references to allegorical pictures from art history, the recent work shown here is more concerned with the animal directly as well as the act of looking.

Olivier Richon (b. 1956, Lausanne) was a student of Victor Burgin. He has exhibited extensively, including most recently a solo exhibition at Bildkultur, Stuttgart (2008) and contributing to the group exhibition 'Zoo' at La Centrale électrique, European Centre for Contemporary Art, Brussels (2006). His work is in public collections including the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris and Brooklyn Museum, New York. A monograph '*Real Allegories*' was published by Steidl, Germany in 2006.

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