

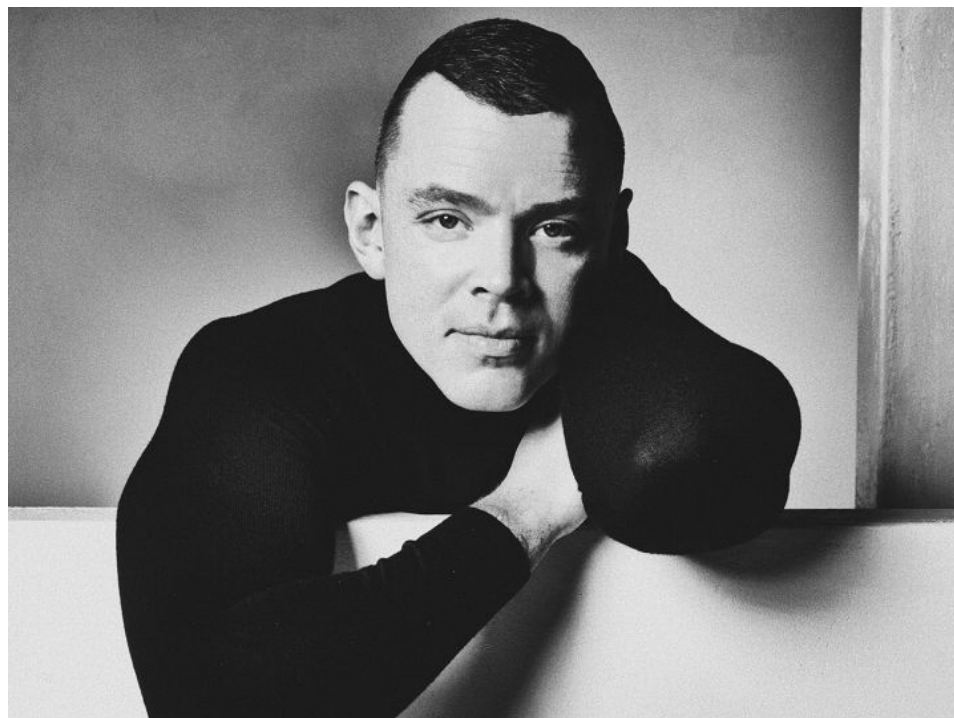
# L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

## What's New ? Interview with Bastiaan Woudt and Vincenzo Maccarone by Nadine Dinter

 [loeildelaphotographie.com/en/whats-new-interview-with-bastiaan-woudt-and-vincenzo-maccarone-by-nadine-dinter](https://loeildelaphotographie.com/en/whats-new-interview-with-bastiaan-woudt-and-vincenzo-maccarone-by-nadine-dinter)

Nadine Dinter

September 4, 2026



I first met the photographer **Bastiaan Woudt** through gallerist **Benjamin Jaeger**, and was immediately drawn to his singular way of combining minimalism, portraiture, and mystery. With Bastiaan's recent pilgrimage to Japan, and his first exhibition in Italy on the horizon, I wanted to look back at his story while catching up on both old and new work. I also had a chance to chat with his gallerist, **Vincenzo Maccarone**, co-founder with **Claudio Composti** of **MC2 Gallery** in Milan and Montenegro. Enjoy the read.

**Nadine Dinter:** Bastiaan, your upcoming show is called **The Shape of Absence** – what a deep and philosophical title. Could you tell us how you landed on it, and what it's about?

**Bastiaan Woudt:** The title is Vincenzo's. He proposed it for the show and I kept it.

I would not have found those words myself, but they describe what I have been doing for fifteen years. Black and white came first, so the color was already gone. Then it became one figure instead of a scene. The background is empty, dark or light, so there is nothing

to look at except the person. From a shoot of three hundred pictures, forty are left. The less I show, the stronger the image becomes.

I notice it in the studio all the time. We build a picture up too far, and it gets better once we start removing things. A hat that covers half a face. A body that turns into a line. I want to leave something for the viewer to fill in.

*HENRO* is where it went furthest. On Shikoku almost nobody wanted to be photographed. So the people in those pictures are seen in passing, or from behind, or too obscured to identify. I did not plan that. It is what the road gave me, and the pictures are better for it.

The same thing is going on in the portraits and in the new work, which is why the title carries the whole show.

**There is a subtle tension between your poetically charged titles – such as *Portal*, *Solace*, *Pearls*, and *Revolve* – and the minimalist style your images are best known for. Is that a deliberate move, layering into something more romantic to enhance the storytelling?**

**BW:** The titles come after the picture. I do not photograph towards a word.

I think the story is always secondary to the image for me. In some projects the narrative really matters, but a studio picture does not have to tell anything at all. I leave that to the viewer. People see whole stories in my work that I never thought of and never intended, and when that happens the picture has already done its job. I am closer to a painter building an atmosphere than to a writer telling a story.

So a title is a name. It gives the work a handle and it stops there. Nothing in the show is captioned and nothing is explained.

*Portal* is the one I would point at. I made it and then kept it on my list for years, because I wanted to be sure I understood it myself first. A black circle held inside a white form, the face appearing only at the edge. There is almost nothing in it, and that is the whole point.

**Your exhibition is composed of three segments: known work, previously unseen work, and your new series *HENRO*. How do you decide on the choreography of a show like this? What matters most when selecting the works, and is there a common thread running through all three segments?**

**BW:** There are eighteen works in the show and they come from three parts of my practice. The portrait work people know from me, a group of pieces I made this year that have never been shown anywhere, and a selection from *HENRO*. That is the first time *HENRO* leaves the Netherlands.

I like working with a gallery that has taste and a good curatorial eye, and a selection is something you arrive at together. The gallery usually starts it. In this case Vincenzo put forward a group of works and I responded to that, and after a few rounds back and forth you have a selection you are both happy with.

That is how these three groups came about. The new work, the *HENRO* pictures, and the older ones people already know. It is my first solo show in Milan, so we wanted it to be varied. You want to show your best work and the work you are known for, and at the same time something new like *HENRO*. It is a good opportunity to have all of that in one room.

What connects them is the thing that connects everything I make. A sculptural way of looking at the human body, as a form within a space rather than as a story.

**Vincenzo, with *The Shape of Absence*, you're not only presenting Bastiaan's work in Italy for the first time, but also kicking off your collaboration with him. What's most challenging for you, as a gallerist, about introducing a new artist?**

**Vincenzo Maccarone:** Introducing a new artist is always a profound and exciting process, but with Bastiaan, there was a special kind of awareness: both Claudio and I have been following and admiring his work for many years. In the relationship between a gallerist and an artist, there is an almost energetic timing, a precise moment when trajectories finally align, and both feel completely ready. Not earlier, not later, but right now.

Presenting a new visual language in a culturally rich and demanding context like Italy is undoubtedly a challenge. However, the core role of a gallery goes beyond simply showing artworks; it is about guiding and educating viewers toward new, more intimate visual perspectives.

With *The Shape of Absence*, our goal was precisely to create the ideal context to convey Bastiaan's overall poetics. We wanted to feature not only his renowned sculptural and constructed approach to photography – the main body of work that brought him international recognition – but also to place this production in direct dialogue with *HENRO*, his series created in Japan, which reveals a much more intimate dimension.

The title itself, *The Shape of Absence*, stems from this very idea: absence is explored and interpreted in two fundamentally different ways. In his studio portraits, absence is minimal, controlled, and achieved by deliberately stripping away elements. In *HENRO*, on the other hand, absence is just as central, yet it is organic, suspended in the air, and shaped by the unpredictability of the journey itself. Bringing these two distinct expressions of absence together and letting them resonate within the same space was both the most exciting challenge and the true core of this exhibition.

**What makes Bastiaan's work stand out among the other artists on your roster, and what do you personally and professionally find most intriguing about it?**

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**VM:** What sets Bastiaan apart within our roster is an almost extreme formal rigor, combined with a unique sensitivity toward materiality and light. His visual language resides in a subtle territory between photography, painting, and sculpture: he does not merely capture an image, but constructs a physical, tangible presence – a process deeply rooted in meticulous research into materials, such as the use of Japanese *washi* paper and piezography printing.

From a professional standpoint, what intrigues me most is his extraordinary capacity for visual synthesis. In today's contemporary landscape, there is a frequent tendency to overload images with elements and narrative. Bastiaan, by contrast, works entirely by subtraction. Through an almost radical gesture, he strips away everything unnecessary to arrive at the absolute core. This formal purity gives his work an iconic, timeless power, while remaining firmly grounded in the language of contemporary fine art photography.

On a personal level, I am deeply moved by the balance he achieves between mystery and delicacy. An artwork should never be overly explanatory or impose a closed narrative. The strength of Bastiaan's imagery lies precisely in its sense of suspension: these works are fully realized in their execution, yet they remain open and quiet, allowing the viewer the mental and emotional space to complete the picture. It is this poetic tension, this ability to evoke so much through absence and light, that makes his practice so deeply captivating.

**Bastiaan, let's talk more about your new series, HENRO. It was shot in Japan during a cycling trip with your brother along the Shikoku Henro, one of the oldest Buddhist pilgrimage routes in the world. Tell us about the project's genesis, and how it all came together.**

**BW:** In March 2024 my brother Martijn and I went to Shikoku, an island in the south of Japan. We took our bicycles and our cameras and not much else. There was no plan and no shot list.

We cycled the route, we did not walk it. After a few days everything starts to look the same. You get up, you pack, you ride, you arrive, you sleep, and you begin again. There is a lot of silence in that.

I photograph people, and on Shikoku that did not work. Normally I have a place to make portraits and someone with me who can open a door, an interpreter or a local. I had neither. I carried a note in Japanese that explained who I was and that the work was meant as an homage to the pilgrimage, and I showed it often. Almost nobody wanted to be photographed.

So the people you see in the series are photographed in passing, or from behind, or in a way that leaves them unrecognizable. That is simply what was possible there.

Halfway around the island I stopped working the way I always work. I photographed everything instead of being selective, and I think that is why this project does not look like the others. I made the pictures in a few weeks. It took me two years to work out how they should exist.

**You had already started working with Japanese paper in some of your earlier work, and now the material and your latest series, HENRO, seem to have found each other. Does this less abstract, more poetic series feel like it reflects another side of your inner world?**

**BW:** I started using Japanese paper before *HENRO*, on the series *Echo from Beyond*. So it has been in my work for a while. With these pictures it works better than it ever has.

The prints are piezography, made by hand on Japanese washi. The paper has a texture and a warmth of its own, and you see that in the print.

I am not sure I would call it another side of me. The images are fragments. They do not explain where I was. For two years I worked on how they should be presented. The paper, the printing, the book, the exhibition space. The work just needed that time.

**Will we see more impressions from other countries in your future work, or was this a one-time “excursion” into another world?**

**BW:** There will be more. I have worked in Morocco, Uganda, Nepal, Zambia, and now Japan, so this is the fifth project of this kind.

I love working abroad and stepping into new cultures. My curiosity for the world is enormous, and it keeps shaping the projects I take on. Going somewhere I do not know does something to the way I look that I could never achieve in the studio alone.

*HENRO* follows *Peak*, which I made in Nepal. *Peak* was about altitude and endurance. This one turned inward.

I go without a plan and without a shot list, and I end up with whatever the trip gives me. That was true in Uganda and it was true on Shikoku. There will be another one. I am not saying yet where.

**Bastiaan and Vincenzo, what makes an artwork appealing, and what vision do you each follow – as an artist, and as a gallerist?**

**BW:** The hardest part of making a strong image is simplicity. Building the most powerful picture out of as few elements as possible is genuinely the hardest thing there is, and when it works the satisfaction is enormous.

An image has to raise questions. It has to feel right, and sometimes it should pull a little. In the studio we often go too far in building a picture up, and it gets stronger once we start taking elements away.

An appealing artwork, for me, is the one you walk past and feel compelled to stop for. You look once, you look again, and you keep looking. It makes people walk back, ask questions, get emotional. That is what I am after.

Trends barely register for me. I just walk my own path and work from what I find beautiful and interesting. My work has its feet in the past and its eyes on now.

**VM:** I fully share Bastiaan's perspective: a successful artwork should never provide easy or comforting answers; instead, it must raise questions and challenge the viewer's gaze.

For me, both as a gallerist and a collector, what truly makes an artwork captivating is its ability to withstand time and never exhaust itself upon first viewing. A powerful work possesses an internal layering that does not reveal itself all at once; it triggers an emotional and intellectual short-circuit that compels you to stop, step back, and re-read it every time from a new perspective. If an artwork continues to question you and move something deep inside years later, then it has achieved its truth.

This connects seamlessly to my overall vision as a gallerist. My search is entirely unconcerned with fleeting market trends or passing fads, which so often prove to be superficial. I look for artists who possess an authentic, rigorous, and consistent voice – creators capable of digging deep into their own visual medium. The role of a gallery is not merely to display or sell, but to build a solid, cultural bridge between the artist and the viewer, guiding the collector's eye toward a beauty that is complex, quiet, and enduring.

### **What is next for you, Bastiaan?**

**BW:** The show travels. After Milan the work goes to ArtVerona from 9 to 11 October, and then to Roma Arte in Nuvola from 20 to 22 November, both with MC2 Gallery. The same framed works make all three trips, so it is really one journey. I will be in Verona as well.

*HENRO* comes down in Alkmaar on 20 September. That is the last chance to see the full series in the Netherlands, and after that it is abroad.

The book is at the gallery in Milan. *HENRO* is published by 1605 Collective in an edition of 750.

And I am working on something I have wanted to try for years. My photographs already feel sculptural to me even though they live in two dimensions, and I am looking at whether I can turn that into actual three-dimensional work. It is early. I am not showing anything yet.

For more information, visit [www.bastiaanwoudt.com](http://www.bastiaanwoudt.com) and [www.mc2.gallery](http://www.mc2.gallery) and follow @bastiaanwoudt on Instagram

**The exhibition:**

***The Shape of Absence* opens on September 10, 2026 and is on view through September 27, 2026, at MC2 Gallery, Via Maroncelli 7, Milan, Italy**

Wednesday-Sunday from 10 am to 7 pm. By appointment Monday and Tuesday.

**The book:**

**Bastiaan Woudt : *HENRO***

Publisher: 1605 Collective

Design: Bastiaan Woudt and Janneke Schrey

Printing: Ronda + Bierman

Published: 27 March 2026

Edition: 750 copies

Size: 30 x 32 cm

Pages: 72

Cover: 3 mm grayboard

Endpapers: Cromatico 90 gsm

Interior: Munken Lynx Rough 150 gsm

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