

Thomas Ruff *d.o.pe.*

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533 West 19th Street, New York



Thomas Ruff, *d.o.pe.01*, 2022 (detail). © Thomas Ruff / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Germany. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present new work by German artist Thomas Ruff, on view at the gallery's 533 West 19th Street location in New York. The exhibition debuts Ruff's *d.o.pe.* series, the title of which references Aldous Huxley's autobiographical volume *The Doors of Perception*, published in 1954. In this text, Huxley details his experiments with mind-altering drugs, ultimately meditating on the broadening of consciousness through artificial means. This new body of work extends Ruff's ongoing exploration of human perception and his interest in creating digital imagery that, while artificially constructed, appears naturally derived.

Ruff rose to international prominence in the late 1980s as a member of the Düsseldorf School, a group of young photographers who had studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher at the renowned Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and became known for their experimental approach to the medium and its evolving technological capabilities. Working in discrete series, Ruff has since conducted an in-depth examination of various photographic genres, including portraiture, the nude, landscape, and architectural photography. The artist's overarching inquiry into the "grammar of photography" accounts not only for his heterogeneous subject matter but also for the extreme variation of technical means used to produce his series, ranging from anachronistic devices to the most advanced computer simulators and covering nearly all ground in between.

Featuring fractal patterns that the artist generates with a specialized software program and prints onto industrial carpets, these works foreground Ruff's ongoing pursuit of the visual expression of the beauty of mathematics. Ruff first became aware of fractals, a term introduced by French mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot in 1975, early in his career in relation to his longstanding interest in the visualization of mathematical phenomena. In fractal patterns, which can be both mathematically derived and naturally occurring, an abstract motif is infinitely repeated such that it is self-similar across many different scales. Formally, these motifs recall the psychedelic art and imagery prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, which Ruff encountered in his adolescence through album covers and other formative experiences as a

teenager in the Black Forest—an apt connection for the artist as this kind of imagery also focused on an expanded notion of perception.

Ruff initially wanted to incorporate fractals in his work around the time he began exploring the pixelation of digital images in series such as *nudes* (begun in 1999) and *substrat* (begun in 2001), but the technology that would allow him to do so did not exist yet. In 2008 he was able to create imagery that embodied mathematical concepts when he began working on *cycles*, a group of images that were made without the use of a camera and featured curves visualizing complex formulas from the field of linear algebra. Years later, he returned to the idea of fractals after learning of a professional software that allows for the generation and manipulation of such imagery.

Foregrounding the pure pleasures of visuality and looking, the works in *d.o.pe.* manifest the type of patterns that Ruff imagines he would have liked to see during his teenage experimentations with such endlessly repeating structures that offer a sensorial environment in which the mind can wander. This is reinforced by the artist's use of velour carpets as a support. Originally printing the images on photographic paper, Ruff was dissatisfied with the resulting slick, flat surfaces and instead turned to a newly available, innovative technology that allowed him to print these highly detailed images onto the textured surface of the carpets. Hung directly on the wall, they imbue the imagery with a physical presence and tactile quality.

A further point of reference for the artist is the Greek goddess Chloë (or Demeter), known for her influence over that which blooms. With their lush textures, radiant colors, and endlessly multiplying quality, the works in *d.o.pe.* almost evoke fecund landscapes. Ruff's images additionally recall the highly detailed and exuberant Northern Renaissance style of artists such as Hieronymus Bosch and Matthias Grünewald, particularly Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1500), a painting that has long fascinated the artist for its ability to merge the real and the imagined, creating a microcosm unto itself.

Born in 1958 in Zell am Harmersbach, Germany, Thomas Ruff attended the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf from 1977 to 1985.

A solo presentation of the artist's work was on view at K20 - Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf in 2020–2021. Works from *tableaux chinois*, alongside fifteen other series dating back to 1989, were on view in *Thomas Ruff: after.images – Works 1989–2020*, a major solo exhibition of the artist's work curated by Martin Germann at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung in 2021. *Thomas Ruff: Méta-Photographie* is on view through August 28, 2022, at Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole (MAMC), France. Later in 2022, a two-person exhibition featuring work by Ruff and James Welling will be presented at Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany.

In 2018, Ruff was featured in *Photography Spotlight*, an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London that celebrated the opening of the museum's new Photography Centre. The artist created a new body of work titled *Tripe* as a special commission to inaugurate the space.

Ruff's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide, including Whitechapel Gallery, London (2017); The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2016; traveled to 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016); Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent (2014; traveled to Kunsthalle Düsseldorf); The

Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012); LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster (2011); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, Spain (2011); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2009); Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg, Germany (2009); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2009); Múcsarnok Kunsthalle, Budapest (2008); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2007); Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany (2007); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva (2004); and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2002).

In 2001–2002, *Thomas Ruff: Photographs 1979 to Present* was on view at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany. This major solo exhibition of the artist's work traveled through 2004 to Museet for samtidskunst, Oslo; Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Artium Museoa: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Del País Vasco, Vitoria Gasteiz, Spain; Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal; Tate Liverpool, England; and Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw.

Work by the artist is held in museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Dallas Museum of Art; Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg, Austria; Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; K20 - Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Museum of Photography, Copenhagen; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent.

Since 2000, Ruff's work has been represented by David Zwirner. This is the artist's twelfth exhibition with David Zwirner. Previous solo exhibitions at the gallery in New York include *press++* (2016), *photograms and ma.r.s.* (2013), *Thomas Ruff* (2010 and 2007), *New Work* (2005 and 2003), *l.m.v.d.r.* (2001), and *nudes* (2000). In 2016, *New Works* was Ruff's first solo show at the London gallery. In 2019, *Transforming Photography* was presented at the gallery's Hong Kong location. Ruff's first exhibition at David Zwirner Paris was on view in 2021. Ruff lives and works in Düsseldorf.

For all press inquiries, contact

Julia Lukacher +1 212 727 2070 jlukacher@davidzwirner.com

Erin Pinover +1 212 727 2070 epinover@davidzwirner.com