

MAI 36 MADRID

Thomas Ruff

Selected Works

Vernissage: Friday, May 9, 7pm
Exhibition Duration: 10 May – 27 July 2024
Opening Hours: Tue – Fri, 9:30 - 14:00 and 16:00 - 19:30 & Sat 11:00 - 14:00

Thomas Ruff's survey exhibition highlights a selection of ten series spanning four decades of works, from the iconic Stars (1989-1992) to the most recent body of work untitled# (2022).

Thomas Ruff (b.1958) is one of the internationally most important artists of his generation. Already a student of the photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in the early 1980s, he chose a conceptual approach to photography that is evident in all the groups of works in his multifaceted oeuvre and determines his exploration of the most diverse pictorial genres and historical possibilities of the medium.

In order not to tie his explorations in the photographic field to the individual image found by chance, but to examine this in terms of genres, Thomas Ruff works in series.

Thomas Ruff's contribution to contemporary photography thus consists in a special way in the development of a form of photography produced without the help of a camera. He works with existing images that have already been distributed and optimized for specific purposes in other, largely non-artistic contexts. With the group "Zeitungsfotos" (newspaper photos) produced in 1990, the procedure and the origin of the material first became a subject of discussion in Ruff's works themselves. The image sources that the artist has exploited for the various series on view in the exhibition range from photographic experiments of the nineteenth century to pictures shot by a Mars probe. They have been appropriated from newspapers, magazines, books, archives and collections or were simply available to everyone on the Internet.

It is already photographed world that interests the artist Thomas Ruff and for which he has also been called a "historian of the photographic" (Herta Wolf). In the analysis of these various pictorial worlds, Ruff explores in each series the respective technical conditions of photography: the negative, digital image compression, or rasterization in offset printing. At the same time, he also takes a look at the after-life of images in publications, archives, databases, and the internet. Ruff thus formulates highly complex perspectives on the photographic medium and the already photographed world. Accompanied by prerequisites, Ruff's photographs repeatedly prove that the artist is interested first and foremost in the individual image as an image, in its composition, its format, its visual and content-related expressiveness – all this in conjunction with the traces of the technical and material aspects of photography. The exhibition offers the opportunity to experience this complexity in each individual picture.

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