

MAI 36 GALERIE

Thomas Ruff

tripe & flower.s

Opening: Thursday, April 25, 2019, 6 – 8 pm
Exhibition: April 26 – June 1, 2019
Hours: Tues-Fri 11 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., Sat 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Mai 36 Galerie is delighted to present works from two new series by Thomas Ruff (born 1958 in Zell am Harmersbach/Schwarzwald).

Since the late 1970s, the artist has been exploring the structures and contiguities of the photographic medium. Ruff is interested not only in the various genres of photography, but also in the many different photographic techniques these involve. He analyses the visual significance and power of expression in different photographic genres -- including portraits, landscape, architecture, astronomy, reportage, nudes, abstraction – and makes use of all the photographic techniques and methods he knows. As a result, his oeuvre encompasses everything from his own analogue and digital photographs to computer-generated images as well as photographs from scientific and private archives, press photos and photos found on the internet.

In his two new series *tripe* and *flower.s*, shown together here for the first time, Ruff brings analogue photographic techniques of the 19th and 20th centuries into the digital world of the 21st.

For *tripe*, he looked to the paper negatives produced in Burma and Madras between 1856 and 1862 by Captain Linnaeus Tripe (1822-1902), who had been commissioned by the British government. These are now held in the archives of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Ruff was particularly interested in Tripe's use of paper negatives, which were used in the 19th century primarily for "travel photography" because they were lighter and easier to transport than glass negatives. For these paper negatives, a light-sensitive emulsion is applied to the paper, and it is then placed in the camera in the same way as a glass negative. With the cooperation of the V&A, Ruff was able to view the still extant 30.5 x 38 cm negatives and select a few for his own work. All of the negatives showed distinct traces of wear and tear due to their age. Some had been damaged by mould or foxing, water damage or chemical changes. In many cases, the thin wax coating applied to render the paper more transparent had evident traces of folding or crumbling. Ruff had these negatives reproduced and transformed into positives, whereby the sepia tint of the negative was inverted in cyan blue. In order to retain both colours in a single image, he placed two images, each in a different colour, on top of one another, and then removed areas of the sepia image so that the colority of both the negative and the positive became visible. On enlarging the image, the texture of the paper and all the processes and changes involved came to the fore. In this series, Ruff has sought to highlight the beauty and visual uniqueness of the paper negative, which played such a fundamental role in the history of photography and which might otherwise be sentenced to oblivion in this age of digitalisation.

In *flower.s*, Ruff reprises another important photographic technique that is also rarely used in the age of digitalisation. It is known as (pseudo)-solarisation or as the Sabattier effect. This is a technique, discovered purely by chance, in which the negative / positive is subjected to a diffuse secondary exposure to light during the development process in the darkroom, resulting in a partial inversion of the light and dark areas of the photograph. This technique was perhaps most famously deployed by Man Ray, who, together with Lee Miller, perfected it to an art form. In *flower.s*, Ruff transports this technique into the 21st century. First he uses a digital camera to photograph flowers or leaves, arranged on a light table. Then he applies the Sabattier effect to the images in a "digital darkroom" so that the positive and negative aspects are equally superimposed. The image is then digitally exposed on old, grimy paper. In contrast to the analogue darkroom technique, Ruff can control each individual step of the process digitally, so that chance does not come into play. As with the photogram, this is not possible in analogue exposure, in which any changes to the image during a second exposure are unpredictable.

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In both of these series, Ruff adds yet another building block to his visual exploration of the techniques and possibilities of photography, as well as to the question of how images are generated and how they are perceived. In an interview with Martin Barnes about an exhibition of images from his *tripe* series at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2018, he put it this way: "But maybe it's all about history, and the different processes, techniques and technology of photography, and how rich the photographic world is. I hope there's more to be discovered, and I'm looking forward to that. My part in this whole process is about curiosity."

For more than 35 years, Thomas Ruff's works have been exhibited in galleries and major museums throughout the world, including recent shows in London at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 2017 and at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2018, respectively. He has participated in prestigious international exhibitions such as the documenta in Kassel (1997) and the Venice Biennale (1995 German Pavilion; 2005 Main Exhibition, Italian Pavilion). His works are represented in important collections such as Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf, Tate Modern in London, Metropolitan Museum in New York, MoMA in New York and the Emanuel Hofmann Foundation in Basel. His close collaboration with Mai 36 Galerie, which regularly showcases new works by the artist, dates back to 1988. (text: Valeria Liebermann)

The opening is on Thursday, April 25, 2019, from 6 to 8 p.m. Thomas Ruff will be present.

Visual material is available on request (office@mai36.com).

We look forward to seeing you at the gallery and thank you for your interest.

Mai 36 Galerie
Victor Gisler

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