

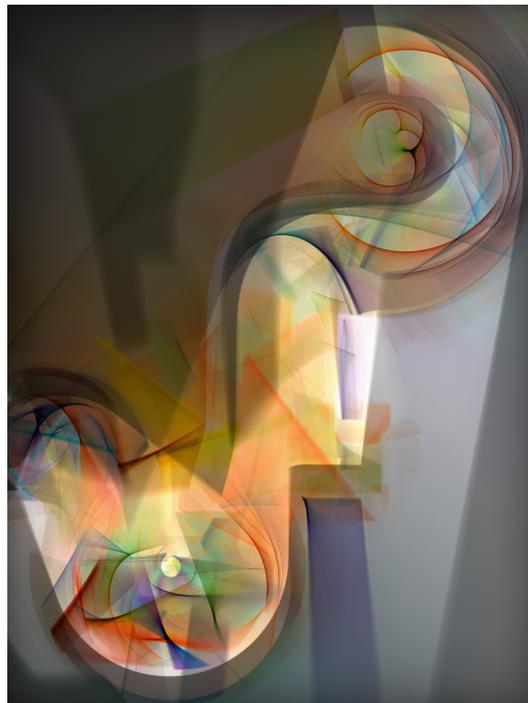
GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Photograms And Negatives Exemplifies Thomas Ruff's Innovative Ingenuity

Two new and distinct series by the renowned German photographer Thomas Ruff, whose career spans more than three decades, comprise the exhibition 'Photograms and Negatives,' which just opened at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills this past Saturday.

Anise Stevens



All images are (C) Thomas Ruff. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Located on the first floor, Thomas Ruff's Photograms are a stunning site to see. Each sizable chromogenic print features an abstract yet fluid intermingling of ill-defined shadows, hard lines, and sleek edges that collectively convey an almost ethereal dynamism. The innovative process Ruff undertook to create these epic works required the assemblage of a virtual darkroom where he could expand upon the traditional photogram with the assistance of a 3-D imaging expert. The freedom to invent forms that he could manipulate without concrete constraints is what ultimately provided him with access to a world of new and boundless possibilities.

Traditional photograms are photographic images created without the use of a camera. The technique entails the placing of one or more objects onto a piece of photosensitive paper, which is then exposed to light to produce a shadow or silhouette of the selected object(s). The process is rooted in the work of German physicist Johann Heinrich Schultz, who, in the 18th century,

learned "the potential for the action of light to capture the result of a chemical reaction to produce an intended image" as explained in *Captured Shadows* by Les Rudnick. It wasn't until the early 1900s, however, that the photogram was recognized as a tool worthy of creative expression when Christian Schad's "photogenic drawings" were published by Tristan Tzara in *Dadaphone*.

Man Ray and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's experimentations with the photogram were also critical in the technical advancement of this technique. Using translucent and three-dimensional objects along with limited and moving light sources, both artists worked to advance the craft by adding a sense of dimension. When asked in an interview Ruff did for *Aperture* whether he intended for his images to embody characteristics inherent in Moholy-Nagy's color photograms from the 1930s, Ruff explained that while his "goal was really to make a new generation of the photogram," he wanted to be sure that they contained recognizable historical references. As an avid collector of photography, Ruff has always been a fan of the photogram, and it was his captivation with the method that ultimately prompted him to strive beyond its limitations. The series "Negatives", which is on display upstairs at the gallery, greatly differs from Ruff's larger-than-life Photograms located downstairs. For one, they are much smaller in size. For another, they do not feature abstract imagery. Rather, they feature the female nude. A characteristic that the two series share, however, is the way in which each demonstrates Ruff's talent as an innovative originator, using old photographic techniques to generate new ones.

As explained in the gallery's press release, "Negatives are a direct result of Ruff's photogram process, during which he...explored the dynamics of positive and negative imagery." These blue and white images appear as true negatives of the 100-year-old series of master photographs that Ruff sourced from his extensive photographic collection. Interestingly, unlike the familiar negative, which allows for the creation of a photograph, these images are the end product of a reverse process in which "Ruff digitally transform[ed] sepia-toned albumen prints into dramatically contrasting negative portraits."

Born in Germany in 1958, Thomas Ruff is a member of the first generation of photographers to study the genre and witness its elevation as an art form worthy of merited recognition. In the company of his contemporaries Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Candida Hofer, and Axel Hutte, Ruff studied at the Arts Academy of Dusseldorf in the late 1970s, where, nearly 25 years later, he was chosen by Bernd Becher to act as his successor.

Ruff currently works and lives in Dusseldorf, Germany. His first major retrospective was organized by the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden and traveled to nine museums between 2001 and 2004, including the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, and the Tate Liverpool. His work can be found in the public collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Tate Gallery in London, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, and Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. He also has had numerous solo exhibitions of note at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2007), the Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna (2009), the Museum für Neue Kunst in Freiburg (2009), the Castello di Rivoli in Turin (2009), the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2011), Centro de Arte Contemporaneo de Malaga in Spain (2011), Haus der Kunst in Munich (2012) and Sala Alcalá 31 in Madrid (2013), among others.

“Photograms and Negatives” officially opened on April 19th and is scheduled to run through May 31st at the Gagosian Gallery, located at 456 North Camden Drive in Beverly Hills. The Gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am until 6pm. For additional information, please call 310.271.9500 Call: 310.271.9500 or consult the Gallery’s website at www.gagosian.com.