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Thomas Ruff's Surreal Botanic "Negatives" at Gagosian London

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THOMAS RUFF "negøstil_02," 2015 and "negøstil_07," 2015
(© Thomas Ruff. Image courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery)

"Nature Morte" at Gagosian London is an exhibition of recent "negatives" by the pioneering German photographer Thomas Ruff who is best known for employing a wide range of old and new technologies to push the boundaries of the photographic medium. Extending his recent engagement with the camera-less photogram technique, Ruff has harnessed the unique properties of the photographic negative to create surreal, spectral images of plants with amazing dimensionality, intensity, and depth.

"Nature Morte" continues Ruff's ongoing exploration of the dynamics of positive and negative imagery. By reversing the role of the negative as a means to an end, Ruff challenges the conventions of photography while at the same time proposes an engaging alternative viewing experience. According to Gagosian, by revisiting historical techniques to invent meta-photographic genres, Ruff continues to expand the subjects, possibilities, and appearance of images.

Commenting on his work, Ruff said: "Due to digital photography, the negative, which I have used nearly every day for more than twenty-five years, has almost disappeared. If I ask my daughters what a negative is, they look at me wide-eyed, for they've never seen or used one. The negative was actually never considered for itself, it was always only a means to an end. It was the 'master' from which the photographic print was made, and I think it is worth looking at these 'masters.'

"When you make photograms, without the use of a camera, you can indeed call that abstract photography, as the lens and the corresponding registration medium are lacking. No longer do you have pictures of reality or objects; you only have their shadows. It is a bit like Plato's cave, where one could only imagine reality; the objects themselves were not visible."