

Shadow Catchers: Camera-less Photography

Sponsored by Barclays Wealth

13 October 2010 - 20 February 2011

Floris Neusüss, Untitled (Körperphotogramm), Berlin, 1962
Collection Christian Diener, Berlin
© Courtesy of Floris Neusüss



This autumn, the V&A will present the first UK museum exhibition of work by contemporary camera-less photographers. *Shadow Catchers: Camera-less Photography* will display images by five leading artists who, for the past twenty years or more, have been creating exciting new photography without the use of a camera: Pierre Cordier (Belgium), Susan Derges (UK), Adam Fuss (UK/ USA), Garry Fabian Miller (UK) and Floris Neusüss (Germany).

The exhibition will include around 75 photographs that explore the simple and powerful effects of light and science with results that often appear surreal, enigmatic or abstract. These will include a series of fairy-tale landscapes by Susan Derges and exquisitely patterned images created from chemical experiments on paper by Pierre Cordier. There will be a commission by Floris Neusüss, depicting the lattice window at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, which revisits his 1978 work of the same subject. His new work is a life-sized photogram, an homage to Fox Talbot's image of the identical scene made in 1835 – the first ever negative exposure. The exhibition will also include five short films shot on location with each artist, giving an insight into their character and work processes.

Camera-less techniques were first explored by the pioneers of photography by blocking light or casting shadows on light sensitive paper or chemically manipulating its surface. These experiments were rediscovered by 20th-century artists including Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy and revived by contemporary image makers. The process of camera-less photography means each work is completely unique and created to scale, often offering a direct and unmediated relationship with the landscape, object, figure or light event it captures.

Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs at the V&A and curator of the exhibition, said: “In the age of increasingly mass-produced, snapshot digital camera imagery, this exhibition will provide a welcome and surprising alternative collection of images that are often large-scale, unique, lusciously-coloured, beautifully-crafted and haunting.”

Pierre Cordier discovered the chemigram over 50 years ago and the exhibition will include a number of his works that use painting materials such as varnish, wax and oil to manipulate the photographic image. The resulting shapes and patterns often resemble puzzles and labyrinths. Cordier is inspired by a wide range of sources including poetry, maps and chess and his titles often provide clues to the origin of the work, for example *Chemigram 31/7/01 ‘Hommage à Georges Perec’* (2001) – a nod to the experimental French writer. Also on display will be a selection of Cordier’s notebook pages and photographic paper tests documenting over forty years of his work.

Susan Derges creates otherworldly and imaginative works using a range of techniques. For the series *Chladni Figures* (1985), she sprinkled powder onto photographic paper which was shaken into a sequence of geometric patterns by exposing it to soundwaves at different frequencies, making the invisible visible. *Vessel No 3* (1995) is a series of nine photographs exploring the cycle of nature by illustrating the evolution of frogspawn to frogs in a clear glass jar. Inspired by the complex wave forms in water, Derges is interested in the elemental, capturing the hidden forces of nature. Many of her works are created by submerging large sheets of photographic paper in rivers and using the moon and flashlight to create the exposure. *Arch* (2007/8) shows the four seasons in a series of magical landscapes that take on a metaphorical dimension.

Adam Fuss is interested in ideas of alchemical transformation and he draws upon his childhood, memories and personal experience. He will be displaying a number of symbolic and figurative works that consider time and the transience of life. *Invocation* (1992) shows the outline of a baby on its back in a shallow bath of water, with its movements creating a halo of ripples. *Ark* (1990) focuses on concentric waves originating from a single water droplet. Fuss will also show photographs depicting a wide range of metaphorical subject matter, including a child’s christening dress, a flock of birds a butterfly and a column of smoke.

Garry Fabian Miller deals with the essence of photography: time and light. Works on display will explore the use of plant materials including reeds, petals, and leaves. Many of his photographs are seen in sequences which show a single motif explored in a number of ways. *Breathing in the Beech Wood, Homeland, Dartmoor, Twenty-four Days of Sunlight* (2004) shows a grid of leaves, one selected each day in the spring when the leaves turn from pale yellow to deep green. He used the leaves themselves to replace photographic transparencies, shining through them directly on to the paper to capture the image. Other worlds are made by shining light through liquids to recreate a memory of the landscape or seascape around his Dartmoor studio. These take the form stark, luminous and vibrantly coloured abstract forms.

Floris Neusüss pioneered the use of life models to make photograms. The exhibition will include a number of his photograms of nude female figures that appear to float in space. These works create exciting effects with distance, space and light. On display will be *Fotogramminstallation* (1984/97), an installation of a photogram on which a chair sits, capturing the shadowy trace of a figure that was once draped across it. Neusüss will also show pictures from the series, *Gewitterbild* (1984), where he has allowed environmental forces to take control of his work by setting down photographic paper in his garden at night and letting rain and lightning expose it naturally.

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Notes to Editors

- *Shadow Catchers: Contemporary Camera-less Photography* is at the V&A from 13 October 2010 to 20 February 2011
- The exhibition is in the Porter Gallery, the V&A's gallery for contemporary exhibitions and installations and is open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday
- The exhibition curator is Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs at the V&A
- The V&A has the oldest museum photography collection in the world and holds the UK's national collection of photography

Ticket Information

Tickets: £5 (concessions £4)

For advance bookings visit www.vam.ac.uk (booking fee applies)

Exhibition Sponsor – Barclays Wealth

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Exhibition Publication

To coincide with the opening of the exhibition, Merrell Publishing has produced a hardback book of the same title (£39.95), authored by Martin Barnes, published October 2010. For further press information about the book contact Elizabeth of Mar on 07870 276 375 or email elizabethofmarpr@yahoo.co.uk (not for publication)

For further PRESS information about the exhibition please contact Zoë Franklin or Amelia MacGregor in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2497 / 2500 or email z.franklin@vam.ac.uk / a.macgregor@vam.ac.uk (not for publication)

A selection of high resolution images is available to download from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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