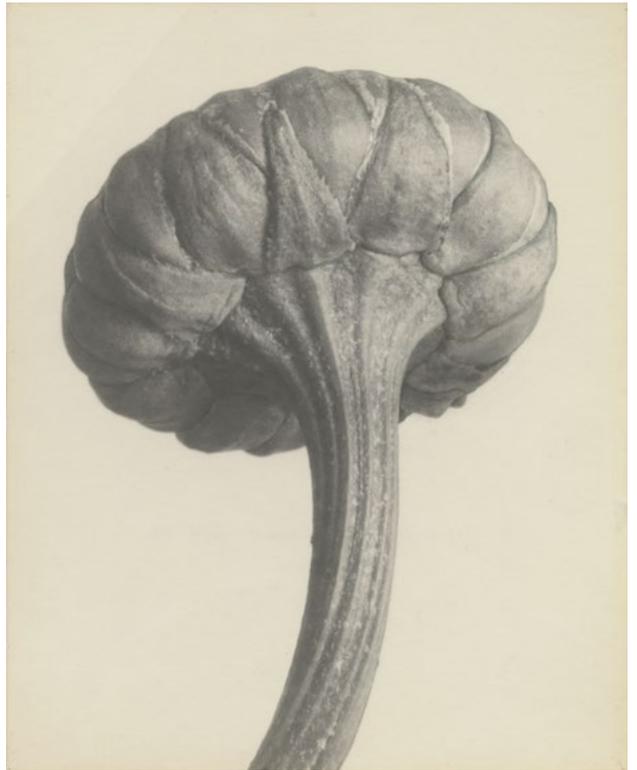


**FOTOFOCUS
BIENNIAL
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FOTOFOCUS

No Two Alike: Karl Blossfeldt, Francis Bruguière, Thomas Ruff

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

September 21, 2018–January 13, 2019

Curated by Ulrike Meyer Stump, FotoFocus Guest Curator and Independent Curator and Lecturer, Zurich University of the Arts

No Two Alike: Karl Blossfeldt, Francis Bruguière, Thomas Ruff is a curated exhibition for the 2018 FotoFocus Biennial: *Open Archive*. Now in its fourth iteration, the Biennial spans over 90 projects at museums, galleries, and universities across Greater Cincinnati; Northern Kentucky; Dayton and Columbus, Ohio; and features more than 400 artists, curators, and educators. The *Open Archive* theme emphasizes the centrality of photography and lens-based art to modernism, and examines our fundamental need to preserve photographs and to tell stories through their collection, organization, and interpretation.

**FOTOFOCUS
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31 + DAYS
ART + EVENTS**

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On the cover, left: Francis Bruguière, [Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1926. Gelatin silver print, 9⁹/₁₆ × 7¹¹/₁₆ in. (24.3 × 19.5 cm). Courtesy of George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller. Right: Karl Blossfeldt, *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*. Oxeye daisy, prior to 1928. Gelatin silver print, 11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm). Courtesy of Karl Blossfeldt Archive/Ann and Jürgen Wilde Foundation, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich.

Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932)

Unless otherwise indicated, the photographs by Karl Blossfeldt are from the holdings of the Karl Blossfeldt Archive/Ann and Jürgen Wilde Foundation, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich. All photographs are vintage gelatin silver prints; they were created over a period of three and a half decades, from 1898 to 1932. Dates provided are approximations based on publication dates. The prints were probably made in the 1920s in the context of exhibitions and the first editions of Blossfeldt's books *Urformen der Kunst* (1928, translated as *Art Forms in Nature*, 1929) and *Wundergarten der Natur* (1932, translated as *Art Forms in Nature. Second Series*, 1932). Plate numbers refer to these two publications. With few exceptions all the motifs or variants thereof were on display in the 1929 Warren Gallery show.



Silphium laciniatum. Rosinweed, compass plant, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.7 cm)
 Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 41



Delphinium. Larkspur, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.7 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 45



Silphium laciniatum. Rosinweed, compass plant, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.7 cm)
 Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 41



Vicia faba. Broad bean, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 23⁵/₈ × 5¹⁵/₁₆ in. (59.5 × 14.8 cm)



Equisetum hyemale. Rough horsetail, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 23⁵/₈ × 9³/₈ in. (59.6 × 23.6 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 2a



Eryngium bourgatii. Eryngo, sea holly, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 23⁵/₈ × 11¹³/₁₆ in. (59.7 × 30 cm)
 Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 32



Equisetum arvense. Field horsetail, prior to 1928
 Gelatin silver print
 23⁵/₈ × 7¹/₂ in. (59.7 × 18.7 cm)



Delphinium. Larkspur, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
23⁵/₈ × 9³/₈ in. (59.7 × 23.8 cm)



Cornus nuttallii. Dogwood,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
23⁵/₈ × 7¹/₂ in. (59.3 × 18.7 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 15b



Dipsacus laciniatus. Teasel,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
23⁵/₈ × 9¹³/₁₆ in. (59.8 × 25 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 44



Aristolochia clematitis. Birthwort,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.6 × 23.7 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 59c



Phacelia congesta. Blue curls,
prior to 1932
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.8 × 23.8 cm)
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen,
Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich
Art Forms in Nature. Second Series, pl. 41



Acanthus mollis. Bear's-breech,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.7 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 92



Equisetum hyemale. Rough horsetail,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
23⁵/₈ × 9³/₈ in. (59.6 × 23.7 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 3a



Cucurbita. Pumpkin, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 4³/₄ in. (29.7 × 11.9 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl.
53a or c



Cucurbita. Pumpkin, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 4³/₄ in. (29.7 × 11.9 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl.
53a or c



Physostegia virginiana. Obident plant,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen,
Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 24



Sanguisorba canadensis. Canadian
burnet, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.9 × 23.7 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 71a



Salvia. Sage, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 99



Cucurbita. Pumpkin, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl.
53b



Cucurbita. Pumpkin, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 4³/₄ in. (29.8 × 12 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl.
53a or c



Cucurbita. Pumpkin, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 3¹/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 9.4 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl.
53a or c



Phacelia tanacetifolia. Lacy
phacelia, blue tansy, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 98



Salvia argentea. Silver sage,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 7³/₄ in. (30.3 × 19.7 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 61



Aquilegia chrysantha. Columbine,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.8 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 95



Papaver orientale. Oriental poppy,
prior to 1932
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.6 × 23.9 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 104b



Papaver orientale. Oriental poppy,
prior to 1932
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 24 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 104a



Chrysanthemum segetum. Corn
daisy, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.9 × 23.8 cm)



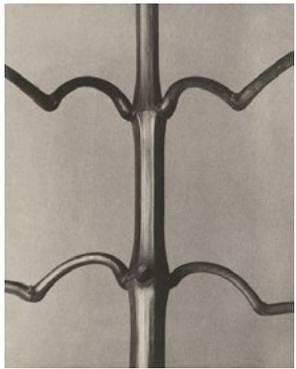
Eranthis hyemalis. Winter aconite,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 76



Geum rivale. Water avens,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 12



Chrysanthemum leucanthemum.
Oxeye daisy, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 28b



Impatiens glandulifera. Indian
balsam, prior to 1926
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.6 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 19



Adiantum pedatum. Maidenhair fern,
prior to 1926
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.7 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 55



Aconitum. Monkshood,
prior to 1926
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.6 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 96



Scabiosa columbaria. Pigeon
scabious, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.6 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 91



Papaver orientale. Oriental poppy,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 80



Centaurea kotschyana. Knapweed,
prior to 1932
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (30.3 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature. Second Series,
pl. 88



Caiophora lateritia. Brick-red
caiophora, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.3 × 23.7 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 27



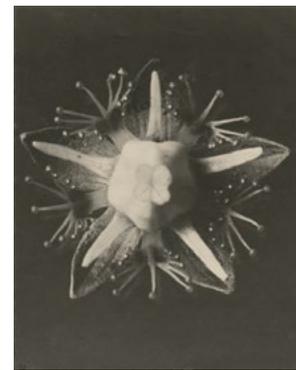
Achillea umbellata. Yarrow,
prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.9 × 23.6 cm)
Variant of *Art Forms in Nature*, pl. 37



Centaurea macrocephala. Big-
headed knapweed, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.5 × 23.6 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 112



Saxifraga willkommiana.
Willkomm's saxifrage, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.8 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 47



Parnassia palustris. Grass-of-
parnassus, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 68



Cobaea scandens. Cup-and-saucer
vine, prior to 1928
Gelatin silver print
11¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (29.8 × 23.8 cm)
Art Forms in Nature, pl. 74

Francis Bruguière (1879–1945)

The photographs by Francis Bruguière are vintage gelatin silver prints from the collection of the George Eastman Museum, Rochester, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. They were not dated by the artist, the given dates are thus approximations based on exhibition or publication dates. A large number selected for the exhibition was published in Francis Bruguière, Lance Sieveking, *Beyond This Point* (London: Zwemmer, 1929). The 1929 Warren Gallery exhibition list mentions fourteen unspecified photographs from this publication and fourteen unspecified papercuts listed as “Various Designs”, as well as seven staged stills from an unrealized film project, *The Way*, not included in this exhibition.



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
9⁵/₈ × 7⁵/₈ in. (24.4 × 19.4 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 4



[Portrait of Cynthia Fuller], [print
marked] 1944
Gelatin silver print
9³/₈ × 7⁷/₁₆ in. (23.8 × 18.9 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles
Variant of *Beyond This Point*, p. 79



[Couple Embraced], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
9⁷/₁₆ × 7⁷/₁₆ in. (24 × 18.9 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles
Beyond This Point, p. 101



[Experiment], ca. 1926
Gelatin silver print
9⁵/₁₆ × 7⁵/₁₆ in. (23.7 × 18.5 cm)
George Eastman Museum, museum
accession
Beyond This Point, p. 107



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
9⁵/₈ × 7⁵/₈ in. (24.4 × 19.3 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 67



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
7³/₈ × 9³/₈ in. (18.8 × 23.8 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 51



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
9⁵/₁₆ × 7¹/₂ in. (23.7 × 19.1 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 57



[Experiment], ca. 1926
Gelatin silver print
9¹/₄ × 7¹/₄ in. (23.5 × 18.4 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles
Variant of *Beyond This Point*, p. 107



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Toned gelatin silver print
9¹/₈ × 7³/₁₆ in. (23.2 × 18.3 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles
Beyond This Point, p. 47



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
7⁵/₁₆ × 7¹³/₁₆ in. (18.5 × 19.8 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Variant of *Beyond This Point*, p. 47



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1926
Gelatin silver print
9¹/₂ × 7⁷/₁₆ in. (24.2 × 18.9 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 153



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
9³/₁₆ × 7³/₁₆ in. (23.4 × 18.2 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 37



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1926
Gelatin silver print
9¹/₂ × 7¹/₂ in. (24.1 × 19 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift
of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 147



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Toned gelatin silver print
9³/₈ × 7⁵/₁₆ in. (23.8 × 18.6 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles
Beyond This Point, p. 29



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
13⁹/₁₆ × 10³/₄ in. (34.4 × 27.3 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
7⁵/₁₆ × 9⁵/₁₆ in. (18.6 × 23.7 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los
Angeles



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
9³/₁₆ × 7³/₁₆ in. (23.3 × 18.3 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



[Cut paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 27.9 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1926
Gelatin silver print
9⁹/₁₆ × 7¹¹/₁₆ in. (24.3 × 19.5 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
9³/₁₆ × 7⁵/₁₆ in. (23.4 × 18.5 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller
Beyond This Point, p. 159



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
9⁵/₁₆ × 7³/₈ in. (23.6 × 18.7 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller
Variant of *Beyond This Point*, p. 159



[Cut-paper abstraction], 1926
Gelatin silver print
9¹/₄ × 7⁵/₁₆ in. (23.5 × 18.6 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
13³/₄ × 10⁹/₁₆ in. (33.6 × 26.9 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1929
Gelatin silver print
13³/₄ × 10³/₈ in. (33.6 × 26.3 cm)
George Eastman Museum, gift of Rosalinde Fuller



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Gelatin silver print
13³/₁₆ × 10⁷/₁₆ in. (33.5 × 26.5 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



[Cut-paper abstraction], 1921/22
Toned gelatin silver print
13⁷/₁₆ × 10³/₈ in. (34.1 × 26.4 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



[Cut-paper abstraction], ca. 1927
Toned gelatin silver print
7⁷/₁₆ × 4¹⁵/₁₆ in. (18.9 × 12.5 cm)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Thomas Ruff (*1958)



r.phg.s.02, 2012
Chromogenic print
94½ × 72⅞ in. (240 × 185 cm)



phg.03, 2012
Chromogenic print
94½ × 72⅞ in. (240 × 185 cm)



neg◇stil_06, 2015
Chromogenic print
11⅞ × 8⅓ in. (29.4 × 22.4 cm)



neg◇stil_07, 2015
Chromogenic print
11⅞ × 8⅓ in. (29.4 × 22.4 cm)



neg◇stil_09, 2015
Chromogenic print
11⅞ × 8⅓ in. (29.4 × 22.4 cm)



ch.phg.02, 2013
Chromogenic print
94 × 72¼ in. (238.8 × 183.5 cm)



r.phg.07_II, 2013
Chromogenic print
100⅝ × 72⅞ in. (255 × 185 cm)



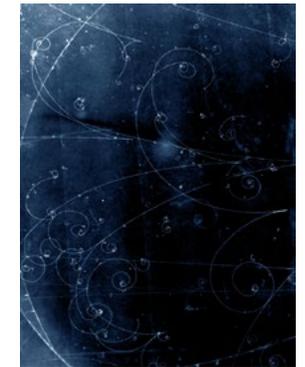
phg.02_I, 2013
Chromogenic print
94½ × 72⅞ in. (240 × 185 cm)



neg◇stil_11, 2015
Chromogenic print
11⅞ × 8⅓ in. (29.4 × 22.4 cm)



neg◇stil_13, 2015
Chromogenic print
11⅞ × 8⅓ in. (29.4 × 22.4 cm)



neg◇pro_04, 2015
Chromogenic print
11½ × 8¾ in. (29 × 22 cm)



em.phg.01, 2013
Chromogenic print
94⅞ × 72½ in. (239.1 × 184.2 cm)



r.phg.10, 2014
Chromogenic print
94⅞ × 72½ in. (239.1 × 184.2 cm)



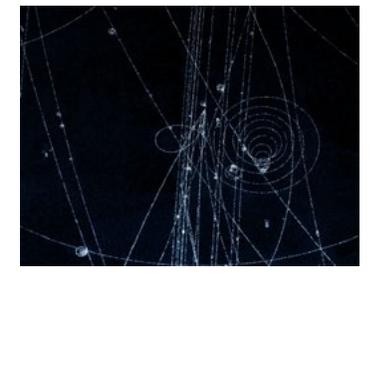
neg◇stil_03, 2015
Chromogenic print
11⅞ × 8⅓ in. (29.4 × 22.4 cm)



neg◇pro_06, 2015
Chromogenic print
11½ × 8¾ in. (29 × 22 cm)



neg◇pro_07, 2015
Chromogenic print
15⅝ × 7½ in. (39 × 19 cm)



neg◇pro_08, 2015
Chromogenic print
8¾ × 11½ in. (22 × 29 cm)

All works by Thomas Ruff © Thomas Ruff. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London/Hong Kong

Film

Francis Bruguière, Oswald Blakeston, *Light Rhythms* (1930)
35mm motion picture film transferred to digital file, black and white, silent,
5 minutes

Original music score 1930 by Jack Ellitt. Arranged 1989 by William Moritz. Realized
and performed on piano 2005 by Donald Sosin.

Special thanks to Roger and Shirley Horrocks, Bruce Posner

Courtesy “Unseen-Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894–1941,”
a collaborative film preservation project of Anthology Film Archives and Deutsches
Filmmuseum generously supported by Cineric, Inc. www.unseen-cinema

Books and Journals

Karl Blossfeldt, *Art Forms in Nature*. London: Zwemmer, 1929, with dustjacket.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Manfred Heiting Book Collection, museum
purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund

Karl Blossfeldt, *Urformen der Kunst*. Berlin: Wasmuth, 1928. Public Library of
Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Francis Bruguière, Lance Sieveking, *Beyond This Point*. London: Duckworth, 1929,
with dustjacket. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Manfred Heiting Book
Collection, museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions
Endowment Fund

Francis Bruguière, Lance Sieveking, *Beyond This Point*. London: Duckworth, 1929.
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Lance Sieveking, *Scrapbook*, 1929. The Lilly Library, Indiana University,
Bloomington, IN

The Architectural Review, London, March 1930. University of Cincinnati Libraries

D. H. Lawrence, *A Composite Biography*, gathered, arranged, and edited by Edward
Nehls, vol. 3, 1925–1930. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1959.
FotoFocus Cincinnati

This exhibition is organized in collaboration with the Ann and Jürgen Wilde
Foundation, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich. Additional support provided
by the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

No Two Alike: Karl Blossfeldt, Francis Bruguière, Thomas Ruff (Verlag für
moderne Kunst) is published on the occasion of the FotoFocus Biennial
2018 and the exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati.

No Two Alike: Karl Blossfeldt, Francis Bruguière, Thomas Ruff

Ulrike Meyer Stump

“No two alike” we say, awed by snowflakes, whose microscopic crystals display an infinite variety of forms.¹ Yet “no two alike” also stands for nature’s absolute diversity, a wealth of forms that fill us with wonder each new spring. And it is the theme of this exhibition that brings together three artists whose work constantly revolved or still revolves around variations on themes: Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932), Francis Bruguière (1879–1945), and Thomas Ruff (b. 1958). Blossfeldt’s enlargements of plant details, which the German sculptor and photographer produced from the 1890s to 1930 as teaching materials for his class in plant modeling, are a vast inventory of vegetal forms. Again and again, Blossfeldt, a relentless perfectionist, photographed different specimens of a species until he found the ideal form. The American Bruguière lived in England from 1927 to 1945 and experimented for years with multiple exposures and light compositions, all of them similar and none the same. In his film *Light Rhythms* (1930), piano variations specially composed for the film accompany his photographic light designs as one image after another dissolves almost imperceptibly into the next. Finally, the German artist Thomas Ruff, who works in series, experiments in his large-format photograms with photographic abstraction as did Bruguière. Ruff’s photograms are unique and at the same time related to their Modernist precursors. In addition, in his *Negatives* series he tests out the negative as an artistically viable counterpart to the positive, reinterpreting both famous and unfamiliar material from the history of photography, from Blossfeldt to scientific photographs in the field of particle physics.

Astonishingly, Blossfeldt’s enlargements of plants and Bruguière’s light abstractions came together while both artists were still alive—in a show at Dorothy Warren’s small avant-garde London gallery in November 1929. This unique historical encounter of two photographers who were so different yet similar is being restaged as part of the exhibition *No Two Alike* in the extended Lower Gallery of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati. In the context of the 2018 FotoFocus Biennial, the Lower Gallery becomes an *Open Archive* so that historical material can be shown in this institution otherwise devoted to contemporary art. From the main hall, where Thomas Ruff’s large-format color *Photograms* series is on view, the visitor descends a short broad stairway to the Lower Gallery, entering a different epoch, when two photographers addressed themes that Ruff’s works reference directly or indirectly. The viewer gains insight into the image memory of a contemporary artist who engages with the history, techniques, aesthetics, and mediatization of photography in his work. Via a narrow ramp at the far end of the gallery, the visitor reascends to a space where she is met again by Blossfeldt motifs in Ruff’s small-format *Negatives* (2015). A separate catalog volume devoted to the restaging of the Blossfeldt/Bruguière encounter (*Karl Blossfeldt and Francis Bruguière: The Dorothy Warren Show*) is complemented by a volume on Thomas Ruff (*Thomas Ruff: Photograms, Negatives, and Counterparts*). Both volumes contain Blossfeldt’s images—accompanying Bruguière’s photographs in the one, as counterparts to Ruff’s *Negatives* in the other.

The 1929 Warren Gallery show in London celebrated the publication of Blossfeldt’s *Art Forms in Nature* (London: Zwemmer, 1929) and Bruguière’s *Beyond This Point* (London: Duckworth, 1929). The unusual association of image and text in the latter, a collaboration between Bruguière and the British radio writer Lance Sieveking (1896–1972), was perceived by critics as highly modern. Blossfeldt’s *Art Forms in Nature* was the English edition of his *Urformen der Kunst*, a large-format book of rotogravure prints published a year earlier in Berlin that was exceptionally successful in Germany. The gallerist Dorothy Warren (1896–1954) showed unknown young British artists as well as curiosities from the applied arts and was in touch with the London artistic and literary avant-gardes. Her eclectic program included artists who in later years became some of England’s most respected painters and sculptors: Paul Nash, for example, and Henry Moore, who held his first solo show in the Warren Gallery in 1928. In the summer preceding the Blossfeldt/Bruguière exhibition, the gallery came to public notice when a show of paintings by D. H. Lawrence

was targeted by London's vice squad. The matter attracted press attention and brought to the gallery thousands of visitors. Yet today the Warren Gallery, which ran for just a handful of years from 1927 to 1934, has been all but forgotten. Warren displayed genuine entrepreneurial courage and vision in bringing together Blossfeldt's legendary plant photographs and Bruguère's experimental multiple exposures and light abstractions. The full scope of their influence on British Modernism and its interest in biomorphism and abstraction only becomes clear with the present restaging of that encounter.

According to Walter Benjamin in his 1928 review of *Urformen der Kunst*, Blossfeldt's artistic concept was the variant. For Benjamin, the 120 plates in the book engaged with basic forms that were manifested in Blossfeldt's highly enlarged and formally abstract plant motifs: "From every calyx and every leaf inner pictorial laws leap out at us, retaining in all phases and stages of creation the final word as metamorphoses."² He took the idea yet deeper, raising it to the status of a general creative principle ruling nature:

This touches on one of the deepest, most unfathomable forms of the creative, on the variant that was always, above all others, the form of genius, of the creative collective, and of nature. This is the fruitful, dialectical opposite of invention: the *natura non facit saltus* of the ancients. One might, with a bold supposition, name it the feminine and vegetable principle of life. The variant is submission and agreement, that which is flexible and that which has no end, the clever and the omnipresent.³

Benjamin compared Blossfeldt's unstinting differentiation of form and his uniform pictorial composition (plant details are mostly symmetrical and centered against a neutral ground) with the eternal waxing and waning of nature—not the leap of invention but the adaptation of plant motifs to basic ornamental forms underlay this plant modeler's rich photographic oeuvre. But Blossfeldt's plant motifs also seem endlessly varied because they assumed so many different forms in his lifetime without significant change: modeled in clay, as plant ornaments in *Jugendstil* designs, teaching illustrations, reproductions in the illustrated press, and finally as Modernist art works.⁴

Bruguère, especially in his abstract paper-cut images, also labored certain themes over and over again. As he put it:

In making subjects of my own, I have used paper-cut designs brought into low relief, and lit, generally, by one small spot lamp of 250 watts: the same lamp has been placed in different positions through a series of exposures. The field is not limited to paper; any plastic material will answer the purpose. Then you can have the pleasure of making your own 'unnatural' world, to which it is not unpleasant to return if you are a photographer, and have been working daily with fashions, portraits, or advertising.⁵

Bruguère put together a world of his own, cutting lines and curves in paper, sometimes giving them anthropomorphic forms, then twisting and folding them. Shapes changed when he recut them with his scissors or just varied the light. After altering the lighting—his experience as a Broadway theater photographer made him an expert here—he rephotographed the paper-cuts. Of his working methods he wrote: "Photography is not easily mastered. One's attitude to it should be one of continual questioning and dissatisfaction."⁶ His multiple exposures—the portraits and nudes—also approach themes by means of questioning and dissatisfaction: "[Through] multiple exposure [...] compositions can be made in endless variety to suit individual taste."⁷ Finally, his film *Light Rhythms* incorporated variation in its musical dimension. Produced with his friend, the film critic Oswald Blakeston (1907–1985), this "absolute" film made history as England's first abstract movie.⁸ Under Blakeston's supervision, *The Architectural Review* published a sequence of stills with samples from the film's musical score by the young

Australian composer Jack Ellitt (1902–2001). In *Light Rhythms*, which combined Bruguère's paper-cut work and the technique of superimposition, dissolves and fade-ins effect the transitions from one still to the next. As the title indicates, light brings rhythm and movement into the film, and it is supported by the piano. A diagram in *The Architectural Review* documents the lamp motions the photographer performed in each of the film's five approximately one-minute movements, thus supplementing the musical score with a "light movement score."⁹

Thomas Ruff, a onetime pupil of Bernd Becher and a leading figure of the Düsseldorf School, has always been a great admirer of Blossfeldt's work. In his photograph *Night, Blossfeldt* (1994), Ruff paid his respect to the plant photographer. It is a night photograph of a façade panel on the Ricola building in Mulhouse by Herzog & de Meuron, which is decorated with a Blossfeldt motif. The same yarrow leaf motif appears in Ruff's *Negatives* series in 2015, this time as a shimmering bluish image against a dark ground. It is not identical with the original Blossfeldt version yet similar, thus inviting visual comparison. The invitation to compare Ruff's photograms and Bruguère's late 1920s–early 1930s light abstractions, in contrast, is a curatorial decision prompted by the Bruguère/Blossfeldt show. Ruff does not orient himself on Bruguère's paper-cuts but on other historical, abstract patterns, though as photograms they are technically different from Bruguère's works. Ruff draws on, among other things, Arthur Siegel's photograms, specimens of which are in Ruff's private collection. Bruguère himself spoke of photograms as a further technique alongside his paper-cuts for producing "unnatural" photographs, describing the process:

There is the photogram, from which photography originated. It is accomplished by placing objects on sensitive paper or film and exposing a light above them or from different angles. The shadow of the objects is cast and remains light; or, if transparent or semi-transparent objects are used, beautiful designs of multiple tones are built up.¹⁰

Ruff transfers the original photographic process to a virtual computer darkroom. He places virtual—sometimes transparent—objects on artificial paper, illuminates them with virtual light sources, and adds color to the light. To attain the perfection of refraction and reflection required, his huge format images are rendered on a supercomputer in Jülich, Germany. Ruff's hi-tech photograms are sometimes formally very similar to Bruguère's works, yet Bruguère had only simple analog materials at his disposal.

Ruff's proton images, on view with the Blossfeldt motifs of Ruff's *Negatives* series in the show, point in a different way both to Blossfeldt's and Bruguère's works. They guide the microscopic gaze Blossfeldt directed at plant details toward the dimensions of the primal form of matter. Here the disintegration of a photon, a light particle, has been photographically captured in a bubble chamber. The electrons and positrons produced by the collision of the photon and a proton generate diverging spiral traces in a magnetic field. As in Bruguère's images, what we see are light patterns representing basic physical laws. The patterns are formally akin to biological processes. Blossfeldt several times photographed the curling shapes of pumpkin tendrils and Ruff's photograms also include a spiral motif. Microcosm and macrocosm are seen to coincide, and through the observation of similar basic forms they become comparable. As a commentator on Blossfeldt's plant images wrote in *Das Magazin* in 1931:

The variety of forms in nature is infinitely great. Of the approximately two billion human beings who inhabit the Earth, no two are completely identical. The same is true of the entire world of plants and animals: variants and varieties of the basic types abound everywhere. Of course, there are far more varieties than species, more variants than basic forms.¹¹

Our delight in nature's variety stems from our fascination with the variant. The English mathematician D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson also observed this from studies of snowflakes and formulated to all intents and purposes an aesthetic of comparison: "The beauty of a snow-crystal depends on its mathematical regularity and symmetry; but somehow the association of many variants of a single type, all related but no two the same, vastly increases our pleasure and admiration."¹² A buildup of similar images as in *No Two Alike*, viewed comparatively, enables us to define basic forms and discover variants. Perceiving similarities, locating and comparing minute distinctions, as the Blossfeldt scholar Gert Mattenklott observed in his aesthetics of the similar, are in themselves an intellectual operation: "Producing similarity is not the activity of a romantically-idealistically defined subject, but the modus operandi of intelligence itself, if it is to avoid extinction in identity or alterity."¹³ Engaging with non-identical items, in other words, becomes especially interesting if it does not lead to complete alterity but to similarities that make us look more closely and notice more distinctions. Hence the exhibition title *No Two Alike* also plays with the idea that these three artists' works are perhaps not so different after all, as that they display formal similarities and are based on similar underlying working methods. And if each artist's work is in its own way a variant of the other two, this also raises the question: Perhaps no two are alike—but what about three?

Translation: Christopher Jenkin-Jones, Munich

Endnotes

- ¹ Although this popular belief is questioned by scientists today; see Nancy Knight, "No two alike?," in: *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 69, no. 5 (1988), p. 496.
- ² Walter Benjamin, "News about Flowers," in: *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings/Brigid Doherty/Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 272–73; translation modified.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- ⁴ See the author's PhD thesis, *Karl Blossfeldt: Variations—A Study in Image Replication*, Princeton University, to be published with Lars Müller Publishers in 2019.
- ⁵ Francis Bruguière, in: *Creative Photography: Modern Photography Annual, 1935–36*, reprinted in *Photographers on Photography*, ed. by Nathan Lyons/Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966, p. 35–6.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁸ On Bruguière see James Enyeart, *Bruguière: His Photographs and His Life*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977, and Anne McCauley, "Francis Bruguière and Lance Sieveking's *Beyond This Point* (1929): An Experiment in Abstract Photography, Synaesthesia, and the Cinematic Book," in: Joel Smith (ed.), *More Than One: Photographs in Sequence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 45–65. Stills from *Light Rhythms* were reproduced on the dust jacket of Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now*, the standard history of film until the 1970s (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930).
- ⁹ On Jack Ellitt's compositions see Camille Robinson, *Light and Rhythm: The Life and Music of Jack Ellitt*, BA thesis, University of Melbourne, 2010, [online].
- ¹⁰ Bruguière (1966), see n. 5, p. 36.
- ¹¹ H. A[bramovicz], "Urformen der Kunst," in: *Das Magazin*, July 1931, 6149–50.
- ¹² D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* (1917), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 154. See also the photographs of the American photographer Wilson Bentley (1865–1931), also known as Snowflake-Bentley, whose *Snow Crystals* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1931) contains 2,400 photographs of snow crystals.
- ¹³ Gert Mattenklott, "Ähnlichkeit: Jenseits von Expression, Abstraktion und Zitation," in: *Ästhetik des Ähnlichen. Zur Poetik und Kunstphilosophie der Moderne*, ed. by Gerald Funk/Gert Mattenklott/Michael Pauen, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2001, p. 169. In 1981 Mattenklott wrote the first contextualization of Blossfeldt's work, but did not mention him in the present connection. The dust jacket of *Ästhetik des Ähnlichen* bears a Blossfeldt motif, no doubt a hint laid by Mattenklott. See Gert Mattenklott, *Karl Blossfeldt, 1865–1932: Das fotografische Werk*, Munich: Schirmer Mosel, 1981.

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