

Press kit: Thomas Ruff

Thomas Ruff
September 10 – February 7, 2021
K20

Press conference and preview
Thursday, September 10, 2020, 11 am, K20

Speakers:

- Prof. Dr. Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
- Dr. Falk Wolf, Curator
- Thomas Ruff, Artist

K21

Contents

Press text "Thomas Ruff"	2
Short biography Thomas Ruff, publication	4
Opening day program	5
Press text "Technology Transformation"	6
Exhibition preview	7

Download press information and images
www.kunstsammlung.de/presse

#ThomasRuff
#K20

Thomas Ruff

September 10 – February 7, 2021

K20

With the exhibition *Thomas Ruff*, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen presents a comprehensive overview of one of the most important representatives of the Düsseldorf School of Photography. The exhibition ranges from series from the 1990s, which document Ruff's unique conceptual approach to photography, to a new series that is now being shown for the first time at K20: For *Tableaux chinois*, Ruff drew on Chinese propaganda photographs. Parallel to Thomas Ruff's exhibition, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen is also presenting highlights from the collection at K20 under the title *Technology Transformation. Photography and Video in the Kunstsammlung*, which also deals with artistic photography and technical imaging processes in art.

“With his manipulations of photographs from many different sources, Thomas Ruff comments in an incredibly clever way on how we see images in a digitalized world. Through his virtuoso handling of digital image processing, he confronts us with a critical examination of the image material he uses and its historical, political, and epistemological significance. Some of his most important series are represented in our collection, and we are very proud to dedicate a large-scale exhibition at K20 to this prominent representative of the Düsseldorf School of Photography,” states Susanne Gaensheimer, Director of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen.

K21

Thomas Ruff (b. 1958) is one of the internationally most important artists of his generation. Already as a student in the class of the photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in the early 1980s, he chose a conceptual approach to photography which is evident in all the workgroups within his multifaceted oeuvre and determines his approach to the most diverse pictorial genres and historical possibilities of photography. In order not to tie his investigations in the field of photography to the individual image found by chance, but rather to examine these in terms of image types and genres, Thomas Ruff works in series: “A photograph,” Ruff explains, “is not only a photograph, but an assertion. In order to verify the correctness of this assertion, one photo is not enough; I have to verify it on several photos.” The exhibition at K20 focuses on series of pictures from two decades in which the artist hardly ever used a camera himself. Instead, he appropriated existing photographic material from a wide variety of sources for his often large-format pictures.

Thomas Ruff's contribution to contemporary photography thus consists in a special way in the development of a form of photography created without a camera. He uses images that have already been taken and that have already been disseminated in other, largely non-artistic contexts and optimized for specific purposes. The *modus operandi* and the origin of the material first became the subject of Ruff's own work in the series of newspaper photographs, which were produced as early as 1990. The exhibition focuses precisely on this central aspect of his work. The pictorial sources that Ruff has tapped for these series range from photographic experiments of the nineteenth century to photo taken by space probes. He has questioned the archive processes of large picture agencies and the pictorial politics

of the People's Republic of China. Documentations of museum exhibitions, as well as pornographic and catastrophic images from the Internet, are starting points for his own series of works, as are the product photographs of a Düsseldorf-based machine factory from the 1930s. They originate from newspapers, magazines, books, archives, and collections or were simply available to everyone on the Internet. In each series, Ruff explores the technical conditions of photography in the confrontation with these different pictorial worlds: the negative, digital image compression, and even rasterization in offset printing. At the same time, he also takes a look at the afterlife of images in publications, archives, databases, and on the Internet.

For *Tableaux chinois*, the latest series, which is being shown for the first time at K20, Ruff drew on Chinese propaganda photographs: products of the Mao era driven to perfection, which he digitally processed. In his artistic treatment of this historical material, the analog and digital spheres overlap; and in this visible overlap, Ruff combines the image of today's highly digitalized China with the Chinese understanding of the state in the 1960s and its manipulative pictorial politics.

From the *ma.r.s.* series created between 2010 and 2014, there are eight works on view that have never been shown before, for which Ruff used images of a NASA Mars probe. Viewed through 3D glasses, the rugged surface of the red planet folds into the space in front of and behind the surface of the large-format images. Moving through the exhibition space and comprehending how the illusion is broken and tilted, one is introduced to Ruff's concern to understand photography as a construction of reality that first and foremost represents a surface—a surface that is, however, set in a historical framework of technology, processing, optimization, transmission, and distribution.

His hitherto oldest image sources are the paper negatives of Captain Linnaeus Tripe. When Tripe began taking photographs in South India and Burma, today's Myanmar, for the British East India Company in 1854, he provided the first images of a world that was, for the British public, both far away and unknown. Since then, the world has become a world that has always been photographed. It is this already photographed world that interests the artist Thomas Ruff and for which he has also been called a 'historian of the photographic' (Herta Wolf). The exhibition therefore not only provides an overview of Ruff's work over the past decades, but also highlights nearly 170 years of photographic history. In each series, Ruff formulates highly complex perspectives on the photographic medium and the world that has always been photographed.

Further series in the exhibition are the two groups of works referring to press photography, *Zeitungsfotos* (1990/91) and *press++* (since 2015), the series *nudes* (since 1999) and *jpeg* (since 2004), which refer to the distribution of photographs on the Internet, as well as *Fotogramme* (since 2012), *Negatives* (since 2014), *Flower.s* (since 2019), *Maschinen* (2003/04), *m.n.o.p.* (2013), and *w.g.l.* (2017)—and, with *Retouching* (1995), a rarely shown series of unique pieces.

Partners and Sponsors

The exhibition is made possible by NATIONAL-BANK AG

Media partner: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Supported by the Ministry for Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

Short Biography Thomas Ruff

Thomas Ruff was born in Zell am Harmersbach in 1958 and studied with Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art from 1977 to 1985. From 2000 to 2005, he was himself Professor of Photography there. He first received international attention in 1987 with his series of larger-than-life portraits of friends and acquaintances who, as in passport photographs, gazed apathetically into the camera. In 1995, he represented Germany at the 46th Venice Biennale, together with Katharina Fritsch and Martin Honert. His works are collected internationally and are represented in numerous institutional collections.

Publications

A comprehensive catalog edited by Susanne Gaensheimer and Falk Wolf will be published to accompany the exhibition, with contributions by Martina Dobbe, Susanne Holschbach, and Falk Wolf.

Prestel Verlag, Munich/London/New York.

232 pages / price: 34 Euro

An extensive booklet will be published (free of charge with admission ticket). In addition, **K+ is a multimedia guide** with a great deal of additional information and materials about the exhibition will also be available online.

<https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/ruff>

K20

Press kit

10. September 2020

page 5/7

Opening day program

Saturday, September 10, 2020

11 am – 8 pm

K20

We invite you and your friends to the opening of the exhibition "Thomas Ruff" at K20.
Please mind, that guided tours and workshops need a registration.

11 am – 3 pm

Art Guides

Art experts give information about the exhibition
(no registration)

3 pm, 4.30 pm, 6 pm

Curator's tour

with Falk Wolf

(Booked)

12 am – 1.30 pm / 2 – 3.30 pm / 4 – 5.30 pm

Workshop for children

(aged 6 and older)

(Booked)

K21

3 pm

Guided tour for children

(aged 6 and older)

(with registration)

7 pm

Guided tour for students and trainees

(booked)

During the opening hours

Food & Drinks by Klee's

K20

Press kit

10. September 2020

page 6/7

Technology Transformation

Photography and video in the Kunstsammlung

September 12, 2020 – January 24, 2021

K20

Parallel to Thomas Ruff's exhibition, a selection of photographic and filmic works from the collection sheds light of various forms of artistic transformation. The exhibition revolves thematically around pictorial techniques, surfaces, and the shifting of visibility: from Dara Birnbaum's Video "Technology Transformation. Wonder Woman" (1978) to Akram Zaatari's essayistic video installation "On Photography, People and Modern Times" (2012). Supplemented by loans from a private collection, the exhibition layout in the Grabbe Hall highlights three aspects of photography: portraiture, technology, and archive.

With works from the collection by, among others, Ed Atkins, Dara Birnbaum, Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Jürgen Klauke, Boris Mikhailov, Carsten Nicolai, Gerhard Richter, Thomas Ruff, Katharina Sieverding, Thomas Struth, and Gillian Wearing.

As Guests: John Baldessari, Marcel Duchamp, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Wade Guyton, Spiros Hadjidjanos, Bruce Nauman, Seth Price, Kelley Walker, und Christopher Wool.

K21

K20

Press kit

10. September 2020

page 7/7

Exhibition preview

Hito Steyerl.

I Will Survive

September 26, 2020 – January 10, 2021

K21

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen is presenting the first comprehensive exhibition dedicated to the artist, filmmaker, and author Hito Steyerl (*1966, lives in Berlin). Steyerl is currently regarded as one of the most advanced artists in terms of the current reflection on the social role of art and museums, the development of artificial intelligence, and experimentation with media-based forms of presentation.

A cooperation organized by Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf and Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation.

Press conference: Thursday, Sept 24, 2020, 11 am at K21

Opening day: Saturday, Sept 26, 2020, 11 am – 8 pm at K21

K21