

Press Release

Unearthed: Photography's Roots

Dulwich to re-open with major new exhibition shining a fresh light on the history of photography



This autumn, Dulwich Picture Gallery will present the first exhibition to trace the history of photography as told through depictions of nature, revealing how the subject led to key advancements in the medium, from its very beginnings in 1840 to present day. *Unearthed: Photography's Roots* will be the first major photography show at Dulwich Picture Gallery, bringing together over 100 works by 35 leading international photographers, many never seen before.

Presenting just one of the many possible histories of photography, this exhibition follows the lasting legacy of the great pioneers who made some of the world's first photographs of nature, examining key moments in the medium's history and the influences of sociological change, artistic movements and technological developments, including Pictorialism through to Modernism, experiments with colour and contemporary photography and new technologies.

Arranged chronologically and with a focus on botany and science throughout, the exhibition will highlight the innovations of some of the medium's key figures, including William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976) and Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) as well as several overlooked photographers including Japanese artist, Kazumasa Ogawa (1860-1929) and the English gardener, Charles Jones (1866-1959). It will be the first show to publicly exhibit work by Jones, whose striking modernist photographs of plants remained unknown until 20 years after his death, when they were discovered in a trunk at Bermondsey Market in 1981.

Questioning the true age of photography, the exhibition will open with some of the first known Victorian images by William Henry Fox Talbot, positioning his experimentation with paper negatives as the very beginning of photography. It will also introduce a key selection of cyanotypes by one of the first women photographers, Anna Atkins (1799-1871), who created camera-less photograms of the algae specimens found along the south coast of England. Displayed publicly for the first time, these works highlight the ground-breaking accuracy of Atkins' approach, and the remarkably contemporary appearance of her work which has inspired many artists and designers.

Image credits:

From left to right:: Charles Jones, *Bean Longpod*, c.1895 -1910, © Sean Sexton, Photo copyright Dulwich Picture Gallery. Anna Atkins *Plate 55 – Dictyota dichotoma, on the young state and in fruit, Photographs of British algae: cyanotype impressions*, 1853, Volume 1 (Part 1). With kind permission of the Horniman Museum and Gardens. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Tulips*, 1984. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission

The exhibition will also foreground the artists who produced unprecedented photographic art in the twentieth century without artistic intention. The medium allowed for quick documentation of nature's infinite specimens, making it an important tool for scientists and botanists such as the German photographer and teacher Karl Blossfeldt (1865-1932) who captured close-up views of plant specimens in order to study and share an understanding of nature's 'architecture'. A selection of Blossfeldt's 'study aids' will be displayed alongside work by the proud gardener Charles Jones, who used a glass plate camera to keep a meticulously illustrated record of his finest crops. Seen together for the first time, the two artists will be examined for their pragmatic approach that set them apart from the romanticised style of their time.

A central focus for the show and a truly rare opportunity for visitors will be a display of 11 works by the inventor and pioneer, Kazumasa Ogawa, whose effectively coloured photographs were created 30 years before colour film was invented. Ogawa combined printmaking and traditions in Japan to create truly original and pioneering photographs. By developing up to 16 different colour plates per image from expertly hand coloured prints he made Japan the world's leading producer of coloured photographs, the display of which is hoped to be a revelation for many.

Unearthed: Photography's Roots will aim to highlight how nature photography has remained consistently radical, inventive and influential over the past two centuries with the final rooms in the dedicated to more recent advancements in the medium. A selection of work by the renowned symbolist photographers Imogen Cunningham and Robert Mapplethorpe will highlight the coded language of nature in photography. Both artists used nature to tackle the oppression experienced in their lives by channelling the strength, and the sexuality, of the natural subjects they photographed. This powerful symbolism, in works such as Mapplethorpe's *Tulips* (1984) and Cunningham's *Agave Design I* (1920s), allowed both artists to express themselves at a time when homosexuality was criminalised and women artists fought for recognition.

The final room culminates with contemporary works that reveal the enduring influence of early forms of photography and still life, with a spotlight on the artists today who are re-shaping the definition of these mediums through digital processes. Mat Collishaw's (b.1966) *Auto-Immolation* (2010) combines new technology and ancient religious ideals, whilst Richard Learoyd's (b.1966) camera-obscure photographs present a new dimension in the traditional still life genre pioneered by the artists of the Dutch Golden Age. The Gallery's Mausoleum will host *On Reflection* (2014), by renowned Israeli video artist, Ori Gersht (b.1967), displayed publicly for the first time in the UK. An homage to the work of Flemish still-life painter Jan Brueghel the Elder, this ambitious work uses modern technology to capture the dynamic explosion of mirrored glass reflecting meticulously detailed floral arrangements by the Old Master. Brueghel's *Still Life A Stoneware Vase of Flowers*, 1607-08, will also be included in the exhibition, on loan from St John's College, Oxford for the first time in 300 years.

Unearthed: Photography's Roots is curated by Alexander Moore, Creative Producer at Dulwich Picture Gallery, and former Head of Exhibitions for Mario Testino. He said:

"I am thrilled to present this extensive survey of photography which celebrates botany in its various guises - from Robert Mapplethorpe's beautifully shot tulips, to Anna Atkins' algae specimens. There is beauty to be found in all of the works in the exhibition, which includes some new discoveries. More than anything though, this exhibition reveals nature as the gift that keeps on giving - a conduit for the development of photography, it is also a force for hope and well-being that we have come to depend on so much in recent months. I hope the energy of this timely exhibition provides visitors with a new perspective on the power of the natural world - and perhaps the encouragement to take some pictures themselves!"

Jennifer Scott, The Sackler Director said:

"What an ideal moment for a show that celebrates the reviving quality of nature. 'Unearthed: Photography's Roots' will offer visitors the chance to reconnect with art, to see photography in a new light, and to fall in love with Dulwich Picture Gallery all over again after our 8 months of closure. I can't wait."

The exhibition will include a number of major loans from public and private collections, many never displayed publicly before. Lenders include The Horniman Museum, the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Michael Hoppen Gallery and Blain Southern. A catalogue will accompany featuring essays by Alexander Moore and art historian and 17th-century still life painting specialist, Dr Fred Meijer.

The exhibition will include work by the following 41 artists (in alphabetical order):

Nobuyoshi Araki, Anna Atkins, Alois Auer, Cecil Beaton, Karl Blossfeldt, Adolphe Braun, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Mat Collishaw, Imogen Cunningham, Roger Fenton, Adam Fuss, Ori Gersht, Cecilia Glaisher, Joy Gregory, William Henry Fox Talbot, Sir John Herschel, Gyula Holics, Jan van Huysum, Henry Irving, Charles Jones, Sarah Jones, André Kertész, Nick Knight, Lou Landauer, Richard Learoyd, Pradip Malde, Robert Mapplethorpe, John Moffat, Sarah Moon, James Mudd, Kazumasa Ogawa, T Enami, Dr Albert G Richards, Scowen & Co., Scheltens & Abbenes, Helen Sear, Edward Steichen, Josef Sudek, Lorenzo Vitturi, Edward Weston, Walter Woodbury

- Ends

Notes to editors

Contact

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Listing information:

Unearthed: Photography's Roots
21 November 2020 - 9 May 2021*

Please note these dates are correct at time of writing but may be subject to change. Please check the website for up-to-date information.

Tickets

Tickets must be booked in advance. The on sale date will be announced via the website, email and social media channels. Sign up to the Gallery's newsletter to be the first to hear updates at: <https://my.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/login>

Sponsorship

Official Paint Partner: Mylands
Catalogue supported by the Elizabeth Cayzer Charitable Trust

Images

Publicity images can be downloaded from dpg.art/presspics

About Dulwich Picture Gallery

Dulwich Picture Gallery, founded in 1811, is the world's first purpose-built public art gallery. It cares for and displays an outstanding collection of Old Master paintings within Sir John Soane's pioneering architecture. As an independent gallery, which receives no regular public funding, it pursues its founders' purpose of presenting art 'for the inspection of the public' while engaging as many people as possible, of all ages and backgrounds, through a creative programme. Entering the gallery space visitors discover a surprising and contemplative experience that encourages the discovery of personal connections with historic works of art - a place to Find Yourself in Art.

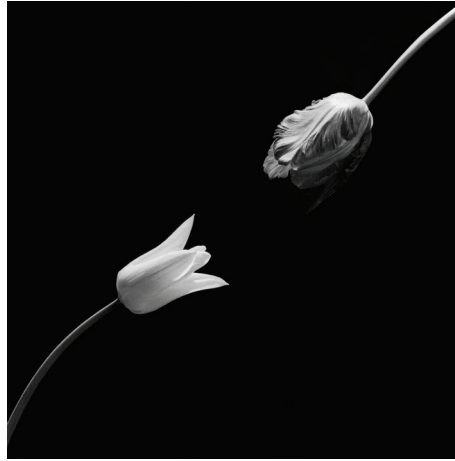
UNEARTHED: PHOTOGRAPHY'S ROOTS IMAGE SHEET

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Charles Jones, *Bean Longpod*, c.1895 -1910, © Sean Sexton, Photo copyright Dulwich Picture Gallery



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Tulips*, 1984. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission



Imogen Cunningham, *Agave Design I*, 1920s. © The Imogen Cunningham Trust.



Richard Learoyd, *Large Poppies*, 2019 © the Artist. Image courtesy of Michael Hoppen Gallery.



Kazumasa Ogawa, *Chrysanthemum* from 'Some Japanese Flowers', ca. 1894. Photo copyright Dulwich Picture Gallery.



Anna Atkins *Plate 55 – Dictyota dichotoma, on the young state and in fruit, Photographs of British algae: cyanotype impressions*, 1853



Ori Gersht, *On Reflection*, 2014. Courtesy of the Artist