

ZEIT CONTEMPORARY ART



SEEING NATURE

April 28th – July 15th, 2021

Seeing Nature is an online viewing room showcasing modern, postwar, and contemporary works related to being in, looking at, and interacting with nature. These artists represent their personal emotions and associations regarding the natural world; as revealed, the experience can result in a range of feelings, alternately joy, awe, wonder, peace, spiritual resonance, or even fear. As nature also invites introspection, many artists included use nature as a way to deepen into their subjective world. Also, in light of the current climate change crisis as well as cultural and geographical specificity, embracing representations of nature is a way of taking a political stand. As such, this exhibition aims to present a variety of mediums, from works on paper to photography, that are engaged with the experience of nature from Modernism to our contemporary world.

Depictions of nature are inextricable from the purpose of art to reflect on beauty, justice and humankind. However, it was only with Romanticism and, on its heels, Impressionism, that artists' personal emotions and subjectivities regarding nature came into play. Impressionism was inspired by the joy of being in nature and sought to elevate the genre; the movement is marked by an emphasis on painting *en plein air* with spontaneous, rapid brushstrokes in order to capture the changing effects of light and color. Paul Gauguin is particularly notable in that while he started out painting as an Impressionist, he ultimately shifted to used color expressively in his landscapes. He was an important precursor for Modernism, and postwar painting in North America is predominantly characterized by abstraction inspired by nature.

Joan Mitchell, one of the artists included in this project and an exponent of the second generation of Abstract Expressionism, stated: "I paint from remembered landscapes that I carry with me—and remembered feelings of them, which of course become transformed."

Artists' depictions of their experience in nature continue to have a political dimension. While Ansel Adams was so fervently passionate concerning nature's beauty his experiences bordered on spiritual, his work also has a political component in that he captured dwindling areas of wilderness in order to extol his fellow Americans to protect and preserve the landscape he so loved. The work of other artists is also a statement regarding the difficulty of mediating one's identity with regard to gender, identity, and sexuality, while still rooted in nature. For instance, Bryson Rand, believes that "...there's a connection between the incredible beauty and strength the planet holds and that queer people hold and historically have been able to maintain despite whatever sort of nonsense was happening around them."

As this online viewing room reveals, artistically, human subjectivity concerning nature has a broad range. While some artists carry on the modernist legacy of representing their delight and love for nature, others utilize the representation of nature as a way to explore identity in today's world. Ansel Adams perhaps sums up the aims of *Seeing Nature* best: "The moods and qualities of nature and the revelations of great art are equally difficult to define; we can grasp them only in the depths of our perceptive spirit."

For additional information, please send an inquiry to contact@zeitcontemporaryart.com

PAUL GAUGUIN

BENITA KOCH-OTTE

JOAN MITCHELL

ANSEL ADAMS

MARTÍN CHIRINO

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

BRYSON RAND

RES



“Nature has mysterious infinities and imaginative power. It is always varying the productions it offers to us. The artist himself is one of nature’s means.”

—Paul Gauguin

Paul Gauguin
Les Chaumieres (Breton Landscape)
Watercolor monotype
12 1/10 × 7 7/10 in (30.8 × 19.5 cm)
Executed in 1894





The years 1893 and 1894 were profoundly experimental in the art of Paul Gauguin. The artist executed a series of paintings and works on paper guided by his experimental drive and exhaustive repetition of forms found in both real and imagined scenes from Tahiti, Marquesas, and Brittany. These scenes produced a novel aesthetic characterized by profuse areas of controlled watercolor appearing as translucent fragments of recalled memories.

One of the most important precursors of Modernism, Paul Gauguin embarked on his artistic career in his thirties as a result of an initial interest in Impressionism. Gauguin originally worked as a stockbroker, and viewed the 1882 stock market crash as positive in that he could devote himself full-time to art. However, he struggled to support himself and went to Pont-Aven in Brittany in search of a more frugal and simpler life. He was very drawn to the remnants of the pagan Celtic past and the unspoiled aspects of the area in contrast to Paris. His style and subject matter changed as a result of his contact with nature. Stylistically, he shifted from Impressionism to Synthetism, characterized by outlines, simplified forms, and planes of color. Gauguin actually became a mentor to many artists who gathered there, so much so that they came to be called the Pont-Aven School. He encouraged them to use color expressively and paint from feeling rather than observation.

These stylistic and narrative choices are evident in this work, *Les Chaumières*, which is a Breton landscape dating to Gauguin's return to France from Tahiti and his last visit to Brittany. Much like Tahiti, the region was a very important place for him artistically and spiritually. In a letter, he stated: "I love Brittany...I find wilderness and primitiveness there. When my wooden shoes ring on this granite, I hear the muffled dull, and powerful tone which I try to achieve in painting."

The artist had always been a proponent of woodcuts, and during the summer of 1894, when this work was executed, he delved into the possibilities of watercolor monotypes. These monotypes are created by painting on a flat, smooth plane and transferring the image onto a damp sheet of paper through the use of a printing process. In this unique monotype, Gauguin depicts a cluster of farm buildings situated amongst trees with a field in the distance. The palette of greens and blues, with touches of orange, mark a crucial moment in the artist's career in the use of non-mimetic color. Overall, in this image we get the sense of Gauguin's admiration for the beauty of nature and the subjective emotions it sparks in his imagination.

Benita Koch-Otte
Water Lily
Silver print
8 ¼ x 6 in. (21 x 15.2 cm.)
Executed c. 1930





"I could certainly never mirror nature. I would more like to paint what it leaves with me."

"Sunflowers are something I feel very intensely. They look so wonderful when young and they are so very moving when they are dying."

—Joan Mitchell

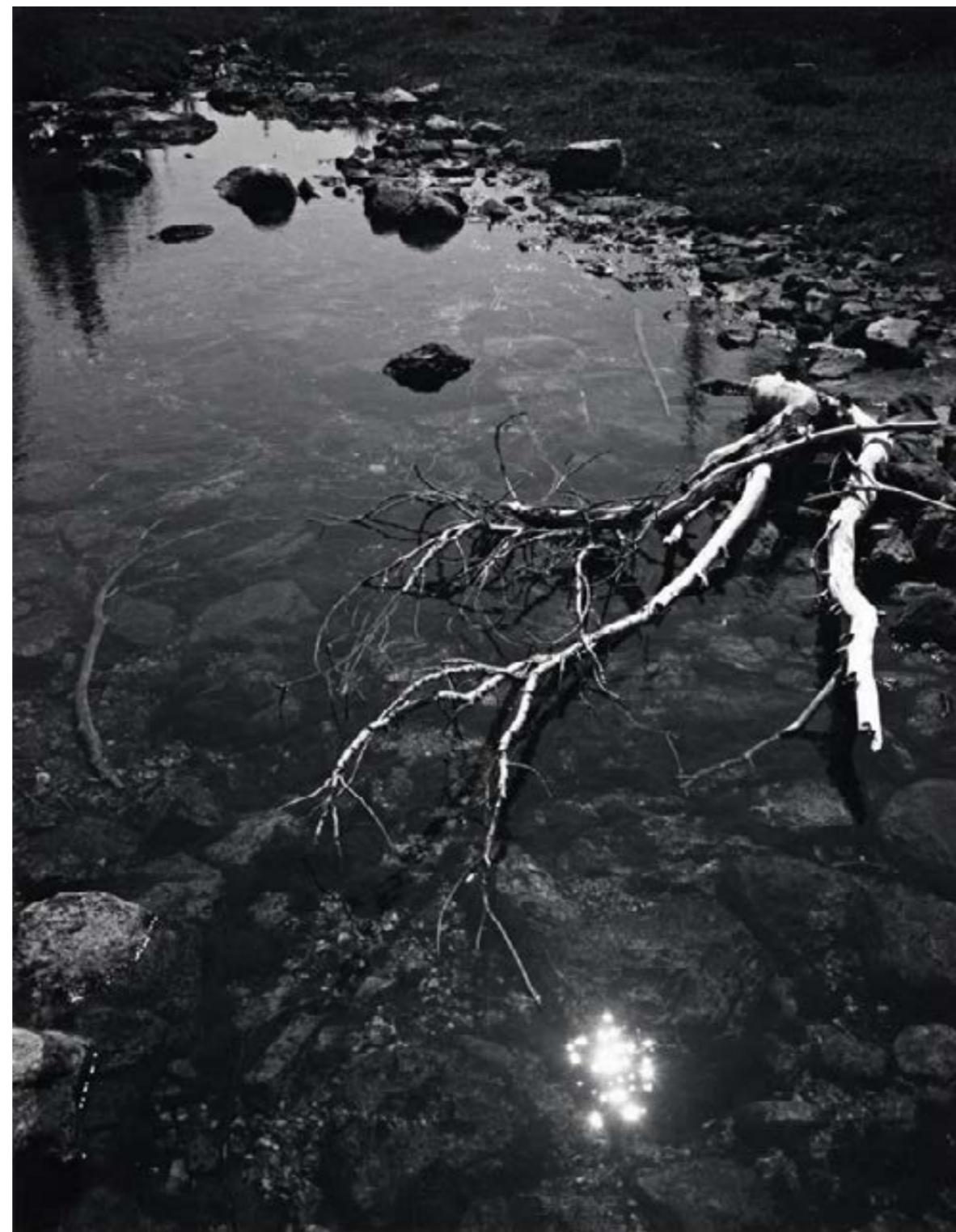


Joan Mitchell
Sunflowers I
Lithograph printed in colors on two sheets of Rives BFK paper
Signed, dated and numbered in pencil, from the edition of 34
57 x 82 1/2 in (144.8 x 209.5 cm)
Executed in 1992

“The moods and qualities of nature and the revelations of great art are equally difficult to define; we can grasp them only in the depths of our perceptive spirit.”

—Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams
Branch and Creek
Silver print
13 x 10 in. (33 x 25.4 cm), the mount 18 x 14 in. (45.7 x 35.6 cm)
Executed in 1947 and printed c. 1960



“My sculpture approaches the tool in its sources: it harmonizes perfectly with the plough, or net. What these universal primitive appliances have of human continuity could also be said to be contained in my work. The former joins man to the earth in a harmonious and necessary task; sculpture joins itself to the human spirit in its most radical dimension—the tool.”

—Martín Chirino

Martín Chirino
Raíz (28) / Root (28)
Sculpture in forged iron
5 x 12 x 12 in (12.7 x 30.4 x 30.4 cm)
Executed in 1964





Martin Chirino executed *Raíz (28)* or *Root (28)* in a critical period in the history of Spanish art, in a time marked by the upheaval of a new generation of artists and intellectuals against Francisco Franco's dictatorship. Chirino used his sculpture as a way to comment on humanity's universal connection with nature in light of political repression and lack of Humanism. The sculpture's seemingly lightweight nature contradicts the heaviness inherent to iron, expanding on the revolutionary tradition of iron sculpture started by Julio Gonzalez in the late 1920s. Iron becomes the most important material in Chirino's oeuvre, and it can be interpreted as symbolic of the strength of the Spanish people.

Born in 1925 in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, Chirino's work is imbued with the ancestral Canarian culture of his birthplace as well as the characteristic volcanic landscapes that define the geology of the Canary Islands situated on the West coast of the African continent. Volcanos, fire and iron are a key component of the poetic materiality of his work. Chirino studied at both the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid and the Royal Academy of Arts in London and traveled to Paris. He then returned to Spain, where he became a co-founder of the El Paso group in 1957, which also included Antonio Saura and Manolo Millares, among others. In their manifesto, the artists proclaimed a kinship with forms relating to tools and their relationship to the soil, citing that their art connected to the human spirit in the same way tools join humanity with the earth and the telluric.

Chirino himself stated: "My sculpture approaches the tool in its sources: it harmonizes perfectly with the plough, or net. What these universal primitive appliances have of human continuity could also be said to be contained in my work. The former join man to the earth in a harmonious and necessary task; sculpture joins itself to the human spirit in its most radical dimension—the tool." As such, there is an integral poetical identification with nature.

This sculpture is particularly significant in that the root is entrenched with the land. As the work is intended to sit directly on the floor or on a table, as if the forged iron grows from the earth itself. *Root (28)* features a consolidation of rugged shapes as well as suggestions of the more organic lines that would come to fruition in his later work. Though abstract, these fluid lines hint at the human form and human presence. As such, it powerfully seeks inspiration in nature to speak to the resilience of humankind.

“To make pictures big is to make them more powerful.”

“I am obsessed with beauty. I want everything to be perfect, and of course it isn't. And that's a tough place to be because you're never satisfied.”

—Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe

Orchid

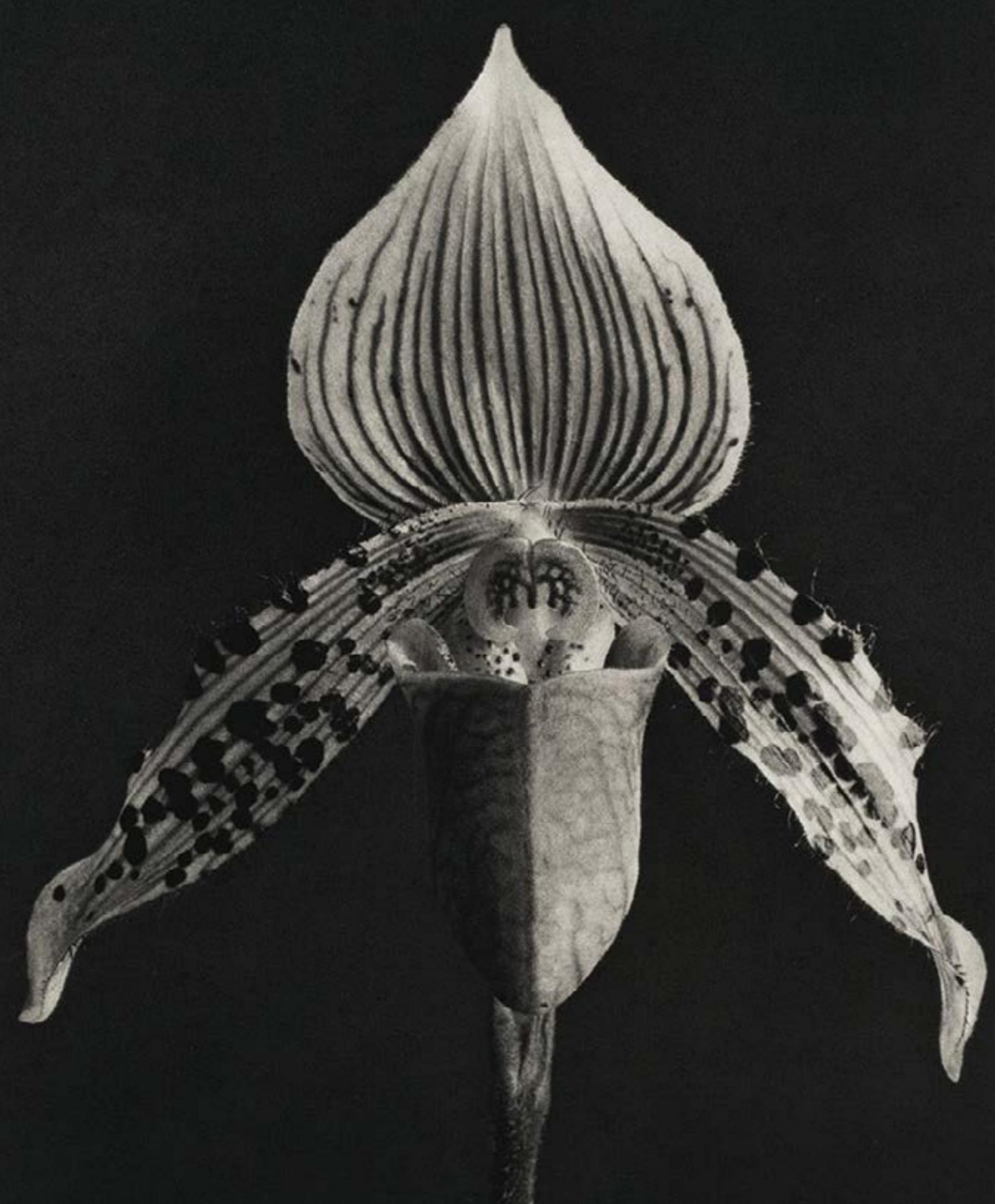
Photogravure on Arches Cover White paper

Image: 32 1/4 x 31 1/2 in. (81.9 x 80 cm)

Edition of 30 + Proofs

Executed in 1986-1987





Orchid is amongst the most important works created by Robert Mapplethorpe in the last years of his brief but consequential career. Celebrated as one of the most groundbreaking photographers of the 20th century, Mapplethorpe initially photographed images to include in collages before deciding to dedicate his career to the medium. In the 1980s the artist turned his focus to traditional genres of the history of art, creating series of celebrity portraits, self-portraits, male and female nudes, and flower still-lives.

Mapplethorpe initially photographed flowers as a way to refine his technique, but continued to photograph them for the rest of his career. His technical virtuosity is clear in that he experimented with various techniques, ranging from platinum prints on paper and linen, Cibachrome, dye transfer, and photogravure, as in *Orchid*. Notably, Mapplethorpe rediscovered the photogravure technique, which dates to the late 19th century, and brought it into contemporary art. The specificity of this technique presents a range of detail and tones which are exceptionally well suited to his images of flowers.

In this work, the neutral background created by the photogravure results in a velvety deep black that really sets the flower apart, underscored by its monumental, upright position. There is an emphasis on the symmetry of the delicate inner organs and petals, and, as in many of his photographs, there is a certain sense of voyeurism and eroticism, here particularly in that he captures the ephemeral moment of the flower at full bloom.

This powerful work is characteristic of all of Mapplethorpe's photographs, which were always harmonious yet spare. Their austerity brings to mind Josef Albers' famous notion that minimal means result in maximum effect.

This photogravure presents an image which is both a reflection on the beauty of nature but also on the fragility of life. It dates to 1986-87, which was the height of the AIDS epidemic and a period of great personal loss for the artist. When he was diagnosed with the disease, Mapplethorpe accelerated his artistic practice. Concurrently with flower still lifes, he also created a series of self-portraits that are revelatory of his preoccupation with mortality. Shortly prior to his death, he sent friends a still-life of tulips in a vase as a token to remember him by. As such, this exquisite photogravure depicting an orchid can uniquely be viewed as a meditation on the beauty of nature as well as in line with his musings on life, death, and loss.



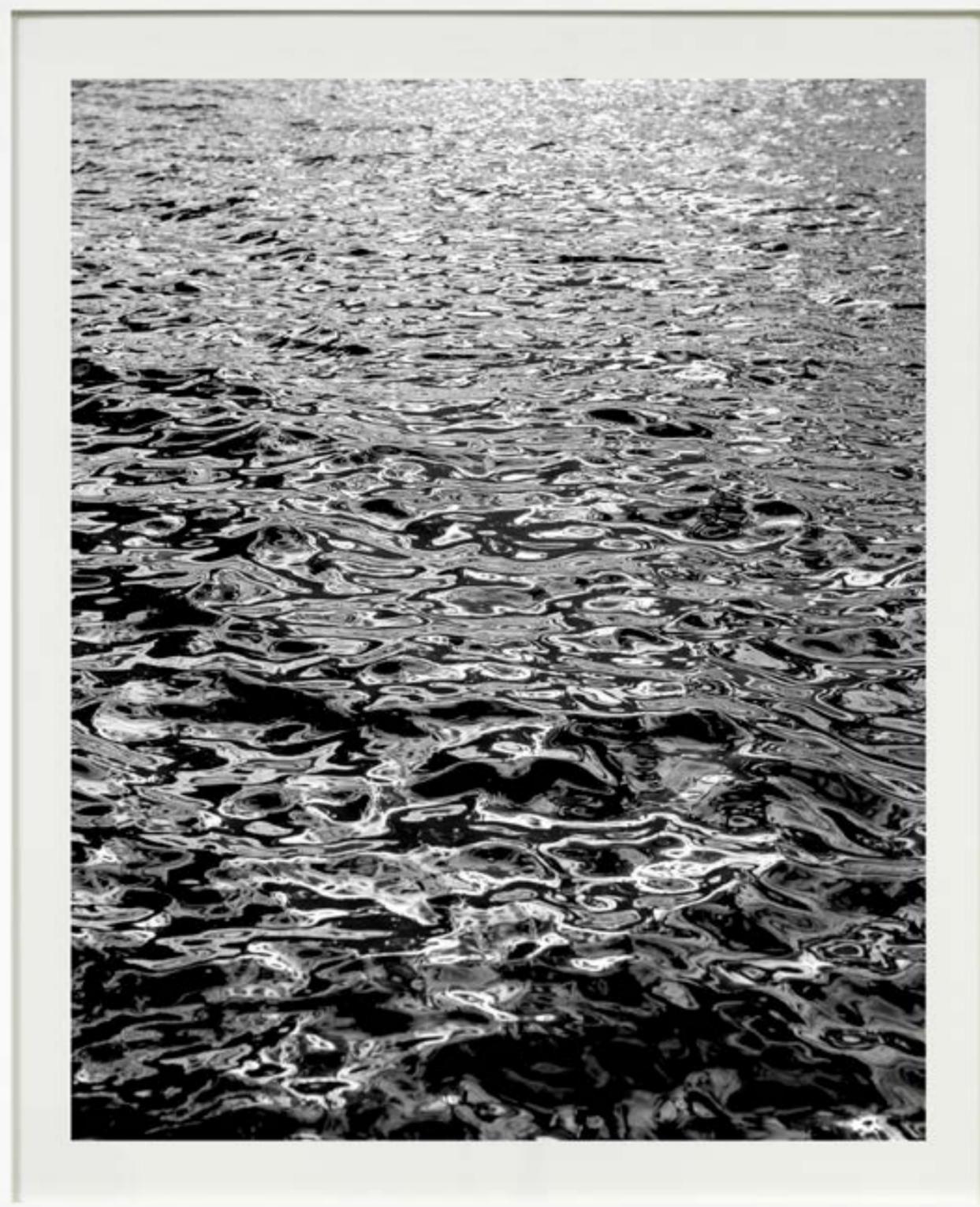
"I think there's a connection between the incredible beauty and strength the planet holds and that queer people hold and historically have been able to maintain despite whatever sort of nonsense was happening around them."

—Bryson Rand

Bryson Rand
Untitled/Trees and Light (Skowhegan)
Archival inkjet print
40 x 32 in (101,6 x 81,3 cm)
Edition of 3 + 2AP
Executed in 2019



Bryson Rand
Untitled/Lake Water (Skowhegan)
Archival inkjet print
40 x 32 in (101,6 x 81,3 cm)
Edition of 3 + 2AP
Executed in 2019





"We feel a connection to flowers, we relate, we yearn, we want to hold on to them, to keep them. We see life, we see our youth, we see our longing, we see our sex, we see joy, we nourish them and we watch them die. We give them for peace, for hope, for memory, for lust, for business, for a specific time, for more time, and for when we don't know what to do. I love spending time with them, I love looking at them and I can find myself in them."

—Res



Res
Blåsippor Smiley, 2020
Archival Pigment Print
12.5 x 10 in (31.8 x 25.4 cm)
Edition of 3 + 2AP
Executed in 2020

Res
Lily (Day)
Archival Pigment Print
12 1/2 x 10 in (31.8 x 25.4 cm)
Edition of 3 + 2AP
Executed in 2020



BIOGRAPHIES

Ansel Adams (San Francisco, California, 1902 – Monterey, California, 1984) is a renowned photographer and environmentalist best known for his breathtaking black and white photographs of the American West. Born four years before the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, he was thrown to the ground and broke his nose, which marked him for life. He had an unusual childhood and faced difficulty in school, but found solace in long walks in nature. Adams visited Yosemite Valley for the first time in 1916 and was transfixed by the beauty. He took a job as the custodian of the Sierra Club and was later hired as the official photographer of trips, during which time he developed a fervent attachment to the land. In the 1930s Adams decided to dedicate his life to photography, and in 1932 he founded the group f/64 with contemporaries Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston, dedicated to what they termed “straight photography” and the elevation of photography to high art. By the mid 1930s, he was well-known for his technically precise and remarkable images as well as his determination to raise awareness for the need to protect the natural landscape. As a result of his efforts, President Jimmy Carter awarded him the 1980 Presidential Medal of Freedom for his work as a photographer and environmentalist.

Martín Chirino (Las Palmas, Spain, 1925 – Madrid, Spain, 2019) is best known for his abstract iron sculptures, in which he sought maximum expression with a minimum of matter. Chirino’s work is characterized by references to the Canarian islands and the ancestral culture of the region, primarily seen in his works featuring spirals. In 1948, he went to Madrid and studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando before traveling to London and finishing his studies at the Royal Academy of Arts. He went to Paris shortly after this and became acquainted with iron sculptures by Julio González, which had a great influence on his work. Upon returning to the Canary islands, he created his “Black Queens” series, which were highly influenced by African art and surrealism. In 1957, he was a co-founder

of the El Paso group, which included artists such as Antonio Saura, Manolo Millares, and Luis Feito. A two month trip to Greece in 1964 inspired Chirino’s “Mediterránea” series, which featured hollow sculptures characterized by iron sheets painted in vibrant colors. The artist won a number of awards and also held many administrative positions related to the arts.

Paul Gauguin (1848, Paris, France – 1903 Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia) is a Post-Impressionist artist acclaimed for his experiments in color and form as well as his interest in living a lifestyle away from the large metropolis, which he expressed in his paintings, prints, ceramics, and sculptures. Gauguin initially worked as a stockbroker before embarking on an artistic career as a result of an interest in Impressionism. He struggled to make ends meet and traveled to Brittany in pursuit of a more frugal life, wherein he began to depict the peasants and natural landscape of the area. The artist then sailed to Martinique and began his first experiments with non-mimetic color. He returned to Brittany in 1888 and became a mentor to many artists there, whom he encouraged to paint from emotion rather than observation. In 1891, he traveled to Tahiti for the first time as part of his continuing desire to live a life pared down to its essentials. He began to title his works in Tahitian, utilize Oceanic iconography, and portrayed the landscapes and native Tahitians in an idyllic fashion. Gauguin came to prominence posthumously and is today celebrated as a precursor of Modernism.

Benita Koch-Otte (Stuttgart, Germany, 1892 – Bielefeld, Germany, 1976) is rightfully beginning to receive the recognition she deserves along with other women artists of the Bauhaus. Koch-Otte was best known for her weaving and abstract textiles but enjoyed other artistic pursuits as well. Initially, she taught drawing, physical education, and handicrafts at a school for girls before leaving the position to study weaving at the Bauhaus, much to her father’s cha-

grin. Koch-Otte was one of the most talented students of weaving along with Gunta Stölzl; both also attended classes for dying and textiles at technical schools. From 1925-1933 she directed the weaving department of the City of Halle, State-Municipal School of Applied Arts at Burg Giebichenstein. In 1929 she became reacquainted with Heinrich Koch, a photographer and interior designer who had also studied at the Bauhaus, and they married that same year. It is likely that she began to explore photography at this time as a result. They fled for Prague upon being dismissed from their positions when the Nazis came to power. He tragically died of an accident in 1934 and Koch-Otte returned to Germany, where she directed the weaving mill at Bodenschwing Foundation Bethel for over 20 years until her retirement in 1957. Her textiles are characterized by non-figurative compositions and reveal her in-depth knowledge of shape and color theory, which she also taught to her students. Like Anni Albers, she blurred the distinctions between craft and art.

Robert Mapplethorpe (Floral Park, New York, 1946 – Boston, Massachusetts, 1989) is renowned for his balanced, harmonious, and unflinching black and white photographs. The artist studied drawing, painting, and sculpture at the Pratt Institute of Art. While initially drawn to conceptual art, Mapplethorpe began taking Polaroids in 1970 to incorporate into mixed media collages, which ultimately led to his decision to dedicate his career to photography. In 1973, he had his first solo exhibition at the Light Gallery. Two years later, he obtained a Hasselblad medium format camera and began to photograph his friends and acquaintances, including other artists, socialites, and members of the gay male S&M subculture flourishing in the city at the time, the latter of which partially comprised his controversial X Portfolio. In the 1980s, he shifted his focus to male and female nudes, often in classical poses, formal portraits of celebrities, and delicate flower still lifes. He was diagnosed with AIDS in 1986. Before his death, he established the

Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to promote his photography, support museums that exhibited photographic art, and fund medical research for the fight against AIDS and HIV. His work is renowned for both its social and artistic significance.

Joan Mitchell (Chicago, Illinois, 1925 – Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, 1992) is an acclaimed artist associated with the second generation of Abstract Expressionism. Born in Chicago, she initially studied art and English at Smith College in Massachusetts before transferring to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1944 to study painting. Upon graduation, she received a fellowship which enabled her to travel to Paris for a year. While there, her style became more abstract. In 1949, she moved to New York and became part of the group of artists and writers who met at The Club, a lower Manhattan artistic salon. Mitchell was subsequently included in the famed 9th Street Show in 1951, viewed as the announcement of the new American art, alongside artists such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg. After this exhibition, she was included in numerous national and international shows. In 1959, she moved to France permanently. Apart from nature, her primary inspirations were music and poetry; she once said she sought to express “the feeling in a line of poetry which makes it different from prose” in her art. She is celebrated today for her role as a female exponent of Abstract Expressionism in its prime and for her lyrical, gestural abstractions derived from nature and emotion.

Bryson Rand (Phoenix, AZ, 1982) is a contemporary American photographer interested in subjects from male bodies to nature. Working on the legacy of the history of gay men and queer people, his photographs are testimonies of the complex experiences of self-acceptance, repression, guilt, desire, shame, violence, love, and empowerment. His haunting images portray queer spaces such as night clubs and gatherings in private apartments in New York City and

Los Angeles. Violence and intolerance are confronted with eroticism and an active gaze towards the beauty of nature and the male body. The power of photography to evoke memory and create community is also at the core of his project. “Just the act of making these pictures and showing something that tends to be ignored or hidden is a powerful political statement,” the artist declares. The corpus of his work expands the mark left by pioneer figures such as Peter Hujar, Diane Arbus, and David Wojnarowicz.

Res (Paterson, NJ, 1985) is a contemporary American photographer known for their multiple visual languages. Intimate and cathartic, Res’ photographic works reinvent what it means to have artistic agency. The concept of self-portraiture is made new in many of Res’ works. From their groundbreaking early works, such as Thicker than Water and The Others, Res provided a glimpse into the artist’s personal life and chilling stills inspired by growing up as a queer teenager. At the centre of Res’ artistic practice is the power to blur the boundaries between what is personal and what is public. “So much about the art is what is not shown,” Res said in an interview with Yael Malka. Rather than paint a clear picture, many of Res’ photographs are designed to obscure and omit. A void is given for the beholder to fulfill. Res splits their time between Stockholm and New York, using photography as a “projection of identify that we can never fully predict.”



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