

ANNA & BERNHARD BLUME

THE TRANSCENDENTAL PHOTOGRAPHY

1 JULY - 21 SEPTEMBER 2015

The work of Anna and Bernhard Blume is an ode to the union of the spectacular with the commonplace, subtle irony with the comical, social satire with the absurd and rationalism with the occult. The Galerie de Photographies is devoting an exhibition to this husband and wife team of German photographers, which casts a quizzical eye on photography's supposed objectivity.

The selection includes works by the two artists from the museum's collection and a number of private collections, together with an exceptional group of photographs of medium-oriented phenomena from the archives of the IGPP (Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und der Psychohygiene) in Fribourg-im-Brisgau.

This presentation emphasises how far transcendental photography influenced the couple's own approach, particularly various images in the IGPP, which the Blumes visited several times.

The most monumental photographic work in the museum's collections is deployed at the heart of this dialogue of influences: *Im Wahnzimmer*, a series that entered the Centre Pompidou in 2012 and is now being shown for the first time. In total contrast to their contemporaries, the two artists deliberately turned away from the documentary and conceptual aesthetic in vogue during the Seventies and Eighties in favour of a decidedly subjective, jubilatory and humoristic approach.

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PHOTOGRAPHING THE INVISIBLE “IM WAHNZIMMER”

In the Seventies, Anna and Bernhard Blume borrowed the term “transcendental photography” from the Russian author Alexander Aksakof, which he used in his book of 1890, *Animism and Spiritualism*. At that time, they shared the teacher Joseph Beuys’ deep interest in Shamanism at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, where they met. While the Blumes found a way of re-enchanting the everyday and giving it new magic in staged paranormal events, they in no way believed in the reality of the phenomena that inspired them. What they saw in these spiritualist images was an opportunity to open up a new artistic path making a radical break with photography’s so-called faithfulness to reality. Alone capable of revealing the invisible (levitations, trances, unknown forces and so on) through its technical properties (exposure of the negative, blurredness, developing spots, refraction, movement and so on), photography in their eyes became a pretext for giving shape to an artificial transcendence, and above all for constant visual experimentation. Originally specialists in painting and drawing, they constructed an off-beat, hallucinatory reality, where enclosed interiors became genuine “photographic tableaux”. Their pictures, in which they are the main protagonists, reflect amateur practices in order to give a sense of realism and immediacy. And yet in their writings, the artists frequently allude to the tricks they use, ironically removing all the mystique from their photographs.

In the *Im Wahnzimmer* series dating from 1984, bodies levitate and contort, plates fly, vases enter a state of ecstasy and furniture moves around as though with a life of its own, sucking the owners of the house into this madness.

The title is a pun on the German words “Wohnzimmer” (dining room) and “Wahn” (madness, delirium). This “dining room of madness” symbolises the Blumes’ desire to stage a domestic paranormal. A pivotal work in several respects, the series marked the intensification of the two photographers’ artistic collaboration and their move over to large format. With this gigantic polyptych, the couple developed a new field of expression, “photographic actionism”, combining performance and staging. They thus expressed their desire to link art with the occult. Above all, the Blumes’ imagination enabled them to transgress reality. The rebellion of petit-bourgeois interiors against their occupants was a means of subverting the rationalism and relationship with consumerism of the German middle class, whose codes and stereotypes they took up in order to subvert them more effectively. The “enchantments” that victimise the artists, playing their own roles, suggest that the reassuring order of everyday life can be upended at any moment, and sink into chaos and the supernatural.

"When asked about the aim and meaning of this sort of sacred little actions, I would emphasise the pressing need to seek enlightenment on myself, rather. Photographic mysticism uses very simple means to work on the demystification of photographic images, their claims to authenticity and their pseudo-objectivity."

"Through this kind of photographic game, I nonetheless succeeded at that moment in achieving a kind of psychoanalysis and self-therapy which has liberated me from the demands of an overweening rationality, has eliminated exteriorisations and brought about a new joy in living."

"Our living spaces are places of madness, and the things that inhabit them are objectifications of muted impulses. The remobilisation of furniture is thus essential."

Bernhard Johannes Blume,
Seeing in the dark in order to see clearly.
Some virtually biographical comments
on a few photographic sequences, 1971-1984

EXHIBITION

CURATORS

Clément Chéroux
and Andreas Fischer
assisted by
Emmanuelle Etchecopar-Etchart

ARCHITECT/STAGE DESIGNER

Jasmin Oezcebi

PRODUCTION

Véronique Labelle

CATALOGUE

Anna & Bernhard Blume

La photographie transcendante

Clément Chéroux and Andreas Fischer

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INFORMATION

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EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

1 July - 21 September 2015

Galerie de photographies, Forum -1

Every day ex. Tuesday and 1 May,

11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Admission free

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LA GALERIE DE PHOTOGRAPHIES

Located in the Forum, at the heart of the Centre Pompidou, the 200-square-metre Galerie de photographies is free to enter. Its role will be to offer a window onto the great wealth of the photographic collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, with changing exhibitions drawing on its 40,000 prints and more than 50,000 negatives. This collection is one of the few in the world to offer a complete history of modern and contemporary photography in all its diversity. Photography will find a new visibility in this gallery dedicated to the medium, which is to host three thematic or mono-graphic exhibitions a year – historical, contemporary or cross-cutting.

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