

Press Release

15 February 2013

Karl Blossfeldt

16 April – 14 June 2013

Gallery 8 & Victor Petitgas Gallery (Gallery 9)

The Whitechapel Gallery presents a major exhibition of Karl Blossfeldt's historic photographs and publications. Blossfeldt (1865-1932) was a pioneering German photographer who came to prominence in the 1920s. A trained sculptor, draughtsman and teacher, he created exquisitely beautiful, close-up photographs of plants.

Celebrated internationally for his significant contribution to the field of art and nature, Blossfeldt is regarded as one of the defining photographers of the twentieth century. He was committed to the study of form within nature and dedicated 35 years to exclusively photographing botanical subject matter. Developing a series of homemade cameras that allowed him to photograph plant surfaces in magnified detail, his stark, objective approach emphasised the detailed beauty of nature.

The exhibition includes over 80 original photographic prints made by Blossfeldt from the late 19th century until the end of his life alongside key archive material showing Blossfeldt's significant influence, from Georges Bataille to László Moholy-Nagy. Also presented are original copies of his widely distributed publications *Urformen der Kunst* (1928) and *Wundergarten der Natur* (1932), as well as a selection of unique *Working Collages* and five rarely-seen, large-scale prints loaned from the Karl Blossfeldt Archiv / Stiftung Ann und Jürgen Wilde, Pinakothek der Moderne, München.

Working at a pivotal moment between Art Nouveau and Modernism, Blossfeldt's work became one of the major influences in early 20th century modernist art. Praised by Walter Benjamin, adopted by the Surrealists and mass produced in magazines, his photographs formed a catalogue of patterns that reflect architectural and artistic designs throughout the ages. His work captured the spirit of New Objectivity, a cultural movement developed as a critical reaction to Expressionism that asserted a factual, direct approach to a subject.

Blossfeldt spent his life as a teacher and was a Professor of Arts in Berlin from 1898-1930. The exhibition includes his photographs which were used as reference tools in his 'Modelling from Live Plants' class, on loan from the University of the Arts, Berlin together with Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur. The prints were frequently handled by Blossfeldt's students and often inscribed with annotations by the artist.

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Notes for Editors

- Karl Blossfeldt was born in the village of Schielo in the Harz mountains, Germany in 1865. From 1881 he studied sculpture at the Unterrichtsanstalt des Königlichen Kunstgewerbemuseums, which later became the Vereinigte Staatsschulen für Freie und Angewandte Kunst and is now known as Berlin University of the Arts. In 1898 he began to teach at the same college in which he had studied. From 1892-1895 he was funded by the Prussian Government as an assistant for Moritz Meurer, a botanical painter, teacher and writer. With the latter's school in Rome he travelled to Italy, Greece and North Africa. During these trips he made some of his first photographic studies of plant forms as instructional works for sculpture. Blossfeldt's work was widely disseminated in the late 1920s and early 1930s through the publication of *Urformen der Kunst* attracting the attention of the Avant-garde.
- His work is included in major public collections including the Karl Blossfeldt Collection at the Archive of Berlin University of the Arts and the Karl Blossfeldt Archiv / Stiftung Ann und Jürgen Wilde, Pinakothek der Moderne, München. Solo exhibitions include Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, 2012; Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, 2010; The Tucson Botanical Gardens, Arizona, 2008; PhotoEspaña, Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid, 2006; Kamera und Fotomuseum, Leipzig, 2006; Museo de Historia Natural de la Ciudad de Mexico City, 2003; Musée Matisse, Nice, 1996; Centre d'art contemporain du Luxembourg, 1996; Kunstmuseum Bern & Foundation Dessau, 1995; Sammlung fotografis, Vienna, 1981; Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1978; Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, 1976 and Germanic Museum, Harvard University, 1933.
- The exhibition is curated by Kirsty Ogg, Curator, Whitechapel Gallery, with Poppy Bowers, Assistant Curator, Whitechapel Gallery.
- Transportation supported by Martinspeed.
- Karl Blossfeldt's engagement with pattern, texture and abstraction within floral forms is echoed in a Whitechapel Gallery exhibition held simultaneously of Gert and Uwe Tobias, whose large woodcut prints, collages and wall paintings of vibrant, jewel-like colours are part of a site-specific installation specially conceived for Gallery 1.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm, Thursdays, 11am – 9pm. Admission free. Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR. T + 44 (0) 20 7522 7888 info@whitechapelgallery.org whitechapelgallery.org

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