

SHAPE OF LIGHT:  
100 YEARS OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
& ABSTRACT ART

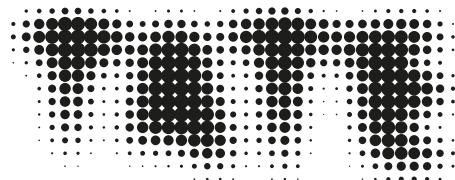
2 MAY – 14 OCT 2018

LARGE PRINT GUIDE



ROOM 1

Please return to the holder



# CONTENTS

Room 1 .....	3
Room 2.....	13
Room 3 .....	24
Room 4.....	38
Room 5 .....	52
Room 6.....	67
Room 7 .....	78
Room 8.....	92
Room 9 .....	104
Room 10 .....	122
Room 11 .....	138
Room 12 .....	153
Credit .....	165

ROOM 1

## SHAPE OF LIGHT:

### 100 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY & ABSTRACT ART

Why should the inspiration that comes from an artist's manipulation of the hairs of a brush be any different from that of the artist who bends at will the rays of light?'

— Pierre Dubreuil

The world we see is made of light reflected by the things we look at. Photography records this light, holding and shaping these fleeting images. **Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art** explores the history of artists who have worked with light to create abstract work. These photographers prioritise shape, form and expression over recognisable subject matter. Some use the camera lens to transform reality. Others work with photographic materials to create images with little obvious reference to the real world.

**Shape of Light** reveals photography's role in a wider history of abstraction. The photographic artists in the exhibition have engaged with advances in abstract art across a range of art forms; from painting and sculpture, to film and installation. At times these photographers have responded to new discoveries by their peers working in different media. Occasionally they have pre-empted them.

Throughout the exhibition key paintings and sculptures reveal the changing relationship between photography and abstract art. We start in a period when the essential qualities of painting, sculpture and photography were clearly distinct. We end with art from today, at a time when artists no longer define themselves by their choice of medium. They are free to shape light however they choose.

## **Clockwise from wall text**

Alvin Langdon Coburn 1882–1966

**Vortographs** 1917

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Wyndham Lewis 1882–1957

**Workshop** c.1914–5

Oil paint on canvas

Alvin Langdon Coburn 1882–1966

**Vortographs** 1917

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum. X36703

Tate. Purchased 1974. T01931

Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum. X36702, X36707,  
X36706

Alvin Langdon Coburn's 'vortographs' are the result of experiments carried out with fellow American, writer Ezra Pound. Pound was a member of the vorticists, a group of artists founded by Wyndham Lewis in London in 1914. The group set out to create art that expressed the dynamism of the modern world. They used hard-edged angles and

diagonals to suggest the geometry of modern machinery and the urban environment, as revealed in Lewis's painting, **Workshop**.

Coburn attempted to translate the energy of vorticism into photography. He invented a device called the 'vortoscope'. It used mirrors to create a prism that fractured the photographed surface, producing kaleidoscopic effects. In the resulting photographs objects and figures are broken down from different and simultaneous points of view until the subject disappears completely.

Marta Hoepffner 1912–2000

**Firebird** 1940

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Wassily Kandinsky 1866–1944

**Swinging** 1925

Oil paint on board

Marta Hoepffner 1912–2000

**Homage to de Falla** 1937

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Homage to Kandinsky** 1937

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Stadtmuseum Hofheim am Taunus. X70820

Tate. Purchased 1979. T02344

Stadtmuseum Hofheim am Taunus. X70358, X69465

German artist Marta Hoepffner studied painting and graphic design before turning to photography in the 1930s. She was interested in the relationship between abstract art and music and many of her titles make reference to artists and composers. In **Homage to Kandinsky** Hoepffner draws on the work of Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian artist and theorist who believed painting should aspire to be as abstract as music.



The shapes, lines and grids that make up Hoepffner's photograms recall the colourful geometric forms in Kandinsky's **Swinging**. She created the work by laying stencils on photographic paper before exposing it to light. The shapes and lines created appear to directly quote the compositional elements included in Kandinsky's 1926 book **Point and Line to Plane**. Both artists create a sense of dynamism and movement in their compositions, suggestive of the rhythms of modernity.

Piet Mondrian 1872–1944

**Composition C (No.III) with Red, Yellow and Blue 1935**

Oil paint on canvas

German Lorca born 1922

**Mondrian Window 1960**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Lent from a private collection 1981. L00097

German Lorca. X70235

This image by Brazilian photographer German Lorca draws on the history of modernist photography, using the camera to produce sharply focused images with an emphasis on the formal qualities of the medium. The title, however, makes direct reference to the work of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. The photographer invites us to look beyond the photograph as document to consider the work in relationship to an abstract painting.

Lorca believes that 'photography happens to the photographer, and he makes it happen'. He did not simply discover a window with panes of glass that mimic the strict geometry of horizontals and verticals in Mondrian's compositions. It is the photographer's careful choice of perspective, cropping and lighting that creates an image that evokes a Mondrian painting.

Georges Braque 1882–1963

**Mandora** 1909–10

Oil paint on canvas

Pierre Dubreuil 1872–1944

**Interpretation Picasso: The Railway** c.1911

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Purchased 1966. T00833

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1987. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67821

This photograph by Pierre Dubreuil was made in the same period as George Braque and Pablo Picasso's experiments with cubism. The French photographer referenced the painters in his titles suggesting a direct relationship with the cubist style. Invented around 1907–08, cubism was a revolutionary new approach to representing reality. Picasso and Braque brought different views of subjects together in the same picture, resulting in paintings that appear fragmented and abstracted. By breaking objects and figures down into distinct areas, or planes, the artists aimed to show different viewpoints at the same time and within the same space, suggesting their three dimensional form.

Dubreuil achieves this fragmentation through photographic processes, challenging the medium's ability to objectively represent reality. A photograph of a train printed on a diagonal is broken down into a complex arrangement of transparent overlapping geometric planes. Dubreuil achieved this effect by repeatedly placing a rectangular form on the surface of the print.

ROOM 2

## CAMERA WORK

Unless photography has its own possibilities of expression, separate from those of the other arts, it is merely a process, not an art. — Alfred Stieglitz

In 1903, American photographer Alfred Stieglitz launched **Camera Work**, a journal promoting photography as a fine art. Two years later Stieglitz opened 291, a gallery in New York with the same aim. Both **Camera Work** and 291 provided a platform for debate about photography and modern art. Encouraged by fellow photographer Edward Steichen, Stieglitz began promoting work by European painters and sculptors. He showed photographs alongside these works in other media, including sculptures by Constantin Brancusi, like the one displayed here. Stieglitz hoped to encourage audiences to 'discuss and ponder the differences and similarities between artists of all ranks and types'.

The relationship between different art forms influenced Stieglitz's views on photography and the direction it might take. Following an initial commitment to images that created painterly effects, he began to take photographs which embraced qualities essential to the medium. These sharply focused, high contrast images reveal the form and structure of his subjects. This approach became known as 'straight photography'. Photographers like Paul Strand pushed

this further. In Strand's compositions everyday objects are no longer immediately recognisable; he called these images 'abstractions'. In 1917, Stieglitz dedicated the last issue of **Camera Work** to Strand, whose photographs came to exemplify this new direction.

## Clockwise from wall text

### In vitrine

**Camera Work, No. 36** October 1911

Edited and published by Alfred Stieglitz, New York

Wilson Centre for Photography

X68594

**The Steerage** is often referred to as the first 'modernist' photograph. Stieglitz took the image in 1907 but it was first published in 1911, in an issue of **Camera Work** devoted to this 'new' style of photography. The image depicts men and women in steerage, the lower-class section of a steamboat.

Stieglitz described his encounter with the scene and his compulsion to photograph it: 'I was spellbound. I saw shapes related to each other - a picture of shapes, and underlying it, a new vision that held me...I had but one plate holder with one unexposed plate. Would I get what I saw, what I felt? Finally I released the shutter. My heart thumping. I had never heard my heart thump before. Had I gotten my picture? I knew if I had, another milestone in photography would have been reached. Here would be a picture based on related shapes and on the deepest human feeling, a step in my own evolution, a spontaneous discovery.'



**Camera Work, No. 48** October 1916

Edited and Published by Alfred Stieglitz, New York

Wilson Centre for Photography

X68596

Alfred Stieglitz published 50 editions of **Camera Work** between 1903 and 1917. The luxurious quarterly photographic journal was designed by American photographer Edward Steichen. It featured a grey-green cover with art nouveau style typeface.

The publication was known for its high quality photogravures, a process that involves photographically transferring an image on to a metal plate before etching it into the plate and printing from it. Stieglitz believed photogravures were best placed to reproduce the complex tones and detail of a photograph. He printed from original negatives wherever possible so **Camera Work's** photogravures could be considered original prints.

**Camera Work, No. 49/50** June 1917

Edited and Published by Alfred Stieglitz, New York

Wilson Centre for Photography

X68597

Edward Steichen 1879–1973

**Between the Walls, New York** c.1922

Photograph, palladium print on paper

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Grace M.

Mayer, 1991 (1991.1310)

X67838

Edward Steichen 1879–1973

**Bird in Space 1926**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

This photograph depicts Constantin Brancusi's **Bird in Space** 1926. Steichen bought the sculpture from the artist's Paris studio and shipped it to the United States in 1927. Following its arrival, the work was involved in a court case which questioned its status as art. American law permitted artworks to be imported free from taxes, but to qualify they had to be 'imitations of natural objects'. Officials did not feel **Bird in Space** looked enough like a bird and classified it under 'Kitchen Utensils and Hospital Supplies'. Brancusi challenged this in court and Steichen testified as part of the proceedings. The judge ruled in Brancusi's favour stating, 'There has been developing a so-called new school of art, whose exponents attempt to portray abstract ideas rather than to imitate natural objects.'

Bequest of Constantin Brancusi, 1957. Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle

X67854

## Constantin Brancusi 1876–1957

### **Maiatra 1911**

Bronze on limestone base

Romanian-born sculptor Constantin Brancusi is known for his extreme simplification of form. He understood the importance of photography in documenting and publicising his work and tightly controlled the images of his sculptures. His interest in photography began when he met Man Ray in Paris in 1921. Man Ray encouraged Brancusi's photographic practice. He helped him purchase equipment and set up a darkroom in his studio.

Brancusi photographed many of his works himself. He positioned his sculptures in his studio to create complex compositions that used light, shadow, reflection and contrast to reveal new readings of his art. For Brancusi these photographs were more than documentation of his sculptures, they were works of art in their own right.

Tate. Purchased 1973

T01751

Ira Martin 1886–1960

**Abstraction #2**

**Abstraction #1**

1921

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

X67160-59

Alfred Stieglitz 1864–1946

From the series **Equivalents** 1927–31

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

In the summer of 1922 Stieglitz began taking photographs of the skies above his summer residence on Lake George in New York State. Over the next eight years, he made more than 300 of these cloud studies. He titled the series **Equivalents**. The purpose of these photographs was not to capture the forms of the clouds. He saw these works as an equivalent of his emotions, a metaphor for his 'inner resonances'. In this sense Stieglitz's images are non-representational and often discussed as abstractions. Stieglitz claimed: 'I know exactly what I have photographed. I know I have done something that has never been done... I also know that there is more of the really abstract in some "representation" than in most of the dead representations of the so-called abstract so fashionable now.'

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Alfred Stieglitz Collection. Gift of Georgia O'Keeffe.

X71603-6

Paul Strand 1890–1976

**Abstraction, Porch Shadows, Connecticut 1916**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Arthur M.  
Bullowa

X67173

Paul Strand 1890–1976

**Abstraction 1916**

Photo-etching on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Anonymous gift

X67172

ROOM 3



## NEW VISION

We have – through a hundred years of photography and two decades of film – been enormously enriched... We may say we see the world with entirely different eyes. — László Moholy-Nagy

In the 1920s artists began to use the camera lens to present a new vision of the world. This new way of looking emerged in Russia through the work of figures such as Aleksandr Rodchenko, and in Germany through the methods of the Bauhaus. Opened in 1919, the Bauhaus was a revolutionary school of art. Like similar groups working in Russia it aimed to bring art back into contact with everyday life. It encouraged its international students and teachers to work together. All art forms were treated as equal, and artists and designers worked across different media. The status of photography was elevated to that of painting and architecture. Many viewed it as the ideal medium of modernity.

Hungarian artist and theorist László Moholy-Nagy was one of the Bauhaus's most influential teachers. A painter with no formal photographic training, he was introduced to the medium by his wife, the photographer Lucia Moholy. Together they set out to create an independent photographic language. They recognised the medium's ability to capture the emblems of modern life, from skyscrapers

to the inner workings of machines. Their images incorporated strong effects of light and shadow to reproduce the world in sharp detail.

Moholy-Nagy encouraged experimentation in the darkroom and took photographs that played with perception through extreme angles, tilted horizons and fragmentary close-ups. This exploration of techniques and processes spurred a generation of photographers to break old habits of visual representation. By looking closely and exploring new perspectives their images hovered at the limits of abstraction, presenting a new vision of the modern world

**On wall**

**Clockwise from wall text**

Willy Zielke 1902–1989

**Glass Abstraction VIII**

**Staking of Glass Plates I**

1929

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57959, X57961

Aleksandr Rodchenko 1891–1956

**Lumber 1930**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the  
photographer

X67161

## **In vitrine**

### **Photo-Eye: 76 Photos of the Period 1974**

Edited by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold

Published by Thames and Hudson, London

Facsimile

### **60 Photos: László Moholy-Nagy 1930**

Published by Klinkhardt & Biermann, Berlin

Tate. Purchased with funds generously provided by the LUMA Foundation and with the assistance of Tate Members, Art Fund, Tate Americas Foundation, Tate Photography Acquisitions Committee, Tate Latin American Acquisitions Committee, Tate Asia Pacific Acquisitions Committee, Tate Russia and Eastern Europe Acquisitions Committee and Tate Middle East and North Africa Acquisitions Committee.

X69488

## **60 Photos: Aenne Biermann 1930**

Published by Klinkhardt & Biermann, Berlin

Aenne Biermann was a self-taught German photographer. Her photographic career began in 1926 when she was commissioned to create scientific photographs of geological specimens. These close-up, direct studies marked a turning point in her photography. She soon became associated with the new objectivity movement, a group of photographers who shared her sharply focused approach. In 1930, art historian Franz Roh chose Biermann as the subject of the second (and final) volume in his 'Fototek' series.

**60 Photos: Aenne Biermann** secured Biermann's place in the photographic discourse of the period.

Private Collection, London

X69486

**Clockwise from top left:**

Judith Karasz 1912–1977

**Material Structure** 1931

Jaroslava Hatlakova 1904–1989

**Untitled** 1936

Walter Peterhans 1897–1960

**Fabric** c.1930

Josef Sudek 1896–1976

**Carpet** c.1930

Iwao Yamawaki 1898–1987

**Untitled (Textile Abstraction)** c.1930–3

Peter Keetman 1916–2005

**Record** 1936

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2014. P80991

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X58008, X53819

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased 1999. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67942

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57953, X57969

László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946

**Photogram 1922**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on postcard

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X53806

**PHOTOGRAMS**

A photogram is a photographic print made without a camera by laying objects onto photosensitive paper and exposing it to light. The technique is as old as the medium of photography itself. The first 'photogenic drawings' date back to the 1830s. In the 1920s photographers began to investigate old processes and the photogram proved fertile ground for experimentation. Artists were drawn to the effects of negative imaging and the ability to create unusual juxtapositions of objects and materials. The resulting images made identifiable objects strange and created new opportunities for abstraction in photography.

László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946

**Untitled** 1922–5

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Museum Folkwang, Essen

X67977, X67980, X67979



László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946

**K VII 1922**

Oil paint and graphite on canvas

This painting by Moholy-Nagy reveals his interest in constructivism. Painted in Berlin in 1922 the 'K' in the title stands for the German word konstruktion (construction) and draws on the constructivist ideals of pure technical mastery and the organisation of materials.

Moholy-Nagy's painting features overlapped geometric shapes and experiments with transparency through colour. The composition closely relates to his attention to line, shape and form in his photographs of the modern city and the careful arrangement and layering of objects in his photograms.

Tate. Purchased 1961

T00432

László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946

**Photogram** c.1925

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X53807

László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946

**Untitled 1922–8**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Museum Folkwang, Essen

X67982, X67985, X67986

Florence Henri 1893–1982

**Abstract Composition** 1928–9

**Window** 1928

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Germaine Krull 1897–1985

**Metal** 1928

2 photo-etchings on paper

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Gift of the Galerie Martini and Ronchetti, courtesy of the artist, 1978. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67856, X69271  
Tate Library. From Z07854. X69491, X69489

Margaret Bourke-White 1904–1971

**NBC Transmission Tower** c.1934

Aleksandr Rodchenko 1891–1956

**Balconies** 1925

**Pine Trees** 1927

**Radio Station Tower** 1929

Werner Mantz 1901–1983

**Untitled (Staircase)** 1928

Germaine Krull 1897–1985

**Staircase** c.1930

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

The Sir Elton John Photography Collection. X59542

Wilson Centre for Photography. X68583-4

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X67845, X57985

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1986. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67840

László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946

**View from Berlin Radio Tower** 1928–30

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Theo van Doesburg 1883–1931

**Counter-Composition VI** 1925

Oil paint on canvas

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X53808

Tate. Purchased 1982. T03374

## **PERSPECTIVE**

In 1920s, 35 mm celluloid cinema film started being used to create photographs. Companies such as Leica exploited these technological developments to produce compact cameras that were capable of producing high quality enlargements. These new cameras gave photographers greater freedom of movement. They started experimenting with perspective and photographers such as László Moholy-Nagy began adopting a 'bird's-eye' and 'worm's-eye' view of the modern city. Photographs taken from the top of radio towers or looking up at buildings scraping the skies celebrated architectural innovation and presented the modern world in new and surprising ways.

ROOM 4

## OBJECTS AND CONSTRUCTIONS

I think that, instead of producing a banal representation of a place, I'd rather take my handkerchief out of my pocket, twist it to my liking, and photograph it as I wish. — Man Ray

The photographs in this room were made in the 1920s and 1930s and use objects to produce photographic abstractions. In these still life arrangements surprising combinations and close up views make everyday objects strange. These artists also defamiliarise subjects by deconstructing the photographic print through collage and photomontage. Such techniques emphasise the volume, shape and form of familiar things. In doing so they encourage us to focus on their abstract qualities.

Several images shown here were made without a camera. These photograms or 'rayographs' are created by laying objects directly on to photosensitive paper. Identifiable items are mixed with mysterious forms to create strange abstractions that look unlike anything we might find in the world around us. Other images were created by photographing compositions constructed from paper and everyday objects, their arrangement playing with scale and spatial awareness.

These photographs have visual connections with the collages and sculptural reliefs of artists such as Jean Arp. In the 1930s, Arp made work using abstract forms that resemble nature. The photographers in this room use natural forms to create abstractions. By presenting objects as fragments, traces, signs, and memories, they move beyond their medium's ability to reproduce reality. Instead these artists explore photography's capacity to create new realities through the manipulation of light, chemicals and paper.



## **Clockwise from wall text**

Edward Steichen 1879–1973

**Untitled (Cigarettes and Matches) 1920s**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57908

Luo Bonian 1911–2002

**Untitled 1930s**

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Luo Bonian is known for his kaleidoscopic collages. He cut his pictures into triangles before arranging them in geometric patterns. The graphic subjects of his original prints, which included leaves, iron fences and shadows, are broken down into unrecognisable fragments.

Luo was a banker and part of the growing photography community in China in the 1930s. As an amateur, Luo was free of the restrictions imposed on professionals who had to market their work. He lived in Hong Kong and Shanghai. These cosmopolitan cities provided Luo with access to international journals, touring exhibitions and photoclubs. He experimented with Chinese pictorial tradition alongside styles emerging from contemporary photographic practice in Europe and North America.

Courtesy of the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre,  
Beijing X68569, X68572

El Lissitzky 1890–1941

**Proun in Material (Proun 83) 1924**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57978

Oskar Nerlinger 1893–1969

**Tonseala (Tonal range) c.1928**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 2001. Musée National  
d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle

X67876

Jaromir Funke 1896–1945

**Abstraction** c.1924–7

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gilman  
Collection, Purchase, Denise and Andrew Saul Gift, 2005  
(2005.100.509)

X67877

Manuel Álvarez Bravo 1902–2002

**Paper Games** c.1926

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Wilson Centre for Photography

X43779

Francis Bruguiere 1879–1945

**Untitled** c.1927

**Untitled** c.1925

**Untitled** c.1930

**Light Rhythms C3** c.1930

Jaroslav Rossler 1902–1990

**Untitled (Composition with dish), Portfolio 4** 1923

**Light well, Prague , Portfolio 4** 1923–4

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum. X67874, X68461–2

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57935

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1998. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67914

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1983. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle, X67913

Luigi Veronesi 1908–1998

**Untitled (Spiral)**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM  
Government from Massimo Prez Oltramonti and allocated to  
Tate 2015. P13677

Kira Hiromu 1898–1991

**Circles plus Triangles c.1928**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X67878

Karol Hiller 1891–1939

**Heliographic Composition XXIV 1938**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1992. Musee National  
d'Art Moderne / Centre de Creation Industrielle

X67239

Jean Arp 1886–1966

**Constellation According to the Laws of Chance c.1930**

Painted wood

Tate. Bequeathed by E.C. Gregory 1959

T00242

Nathan Lerner 1913–1997

**Lightbox Experiment 6 (Eggs & String)**

**Paper on string 1938**

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Gift of Mrs Kiyoko  
Lerner, 2014

(AMVP 4155), (AMVP 3966). X67870, X67872



Hans Finsler 1891–1972

**Two Eggs Positive** c.1925

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57954

Man Ray 1890–1976

**Rayographs 1922–7**

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Although American artist Man Ray is associated with the surrealism movement he never became a formal member. His artistic practice included painting, assemblage and photography. He was a successful portrait and fashion photographer and pioneered innovative photographic techniques. Man Ray was known for his experiments with photograms. He titled his works 'rayographs' or 'rayograms' after himself. His application of the process drew on his surrealist sensibilities. For Man Ray the excitement lay in the transforming everyday objects so they lost their status as useful items. His approach to camera-less photography stood in contrast to Moholy-Nagy's more rational simplification of shape and form. Man Ray's combinations of objects often created absurd juxtapositions and he exposed paper several times to add further complexity to his compositions.

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. X70499, X70497-8  
Courtesy of Curating Muse Foundation. X70788

Christian Schad 1894–1982

**Untitled Schadograph No.16** 1919

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57894

ROOM 5

## FINDING FORM

My only aim was to express reality, for there is nothing more surreal than reality itself. If reality fails to fill us with wonder, it is because we have fallen into the habit of seeing it as ordinary. —Brassaï

In 1924 French poet André Breton published the first Surrealist Manifesto. Surrealism hoped to revolutionise human experience by rejecting a rational vision of life in favour of one that valued the role of the unconscious and dreams. Its writers and artists found beauty in the unexpected, the overlooked and the uncanny.

The movement embraced photography of all kinds, from found images to conscious abstractions. Photography offered the opportunity to look closer at the world, uncovering the latent surrealism in everyday life. In the hands of surrealist artists, photography was liberated from the ordinary task of description. Their images rendered familiar subjects strange and revealed unexpected resemblances.

The photographs shown here find form in darkroom experiments and create abstractions through the distortion of the human body. These artists employed mirrors and

extreme cropping, painted with chemicals, produced photograms and used double exposures. The resulting images encourage us to engage the creative powers of our imagination.

## **Clockwise from wall text**

Brassaï 1899–1984

### **Involuntary Sculptures**

1932, printed c.1960

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

In 1933, Hungarian-French photographer Brassai published his photo-essay, 'Involuntary Sculptures' in surrealist journal *Minotaure*. The publication features photographs by Brassai alongside captions written by surrealist artist Salvador Dalí. Brassai's images included a rolled-up bus ticket, toothpaste and a curled soapflake. Captured close-up and in strong light Brassai's photographs present these everyday items as monumental sculptures. Unrecognisable as the everyday items from which they were constructed, these images demonstrate the transformative nature of photography. They draw on surrealist interests in estrangement and resemblance and challenge the notion of photography as a mere mirror of reality.

Philippe Ribeyrolles - Mandataire de l'Estade Brassai

Succession

X72002, X72004, X72006, X72005

Brassaï 1899–1984

**Nude** c.1933

**Nude** 1934

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Purchased, 2006  
(AMVP 3209). X68131

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Gift of Mrs Gilbert Brassaï, 2002.

Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création  
Industrielle.

X68130



André Kertész 1894–1985

**Distortion 200** 1933

**Distortion 88** c.1933

**Distortion 118** 1933

**Distortion 60** 193

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Wilson Centre for Photography. X68582, X68580

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased with funds generously provided by Yves Rocher, 2011. Musée National d'Art

Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67949

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Gift of the artist, 1968. Musée

National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle.

X67952

Imogen Cunningham 1883–1976

**Triangles** 1928, printed 1947–60

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Pierre Brahm

X61737

Joan Miró 1893–1983

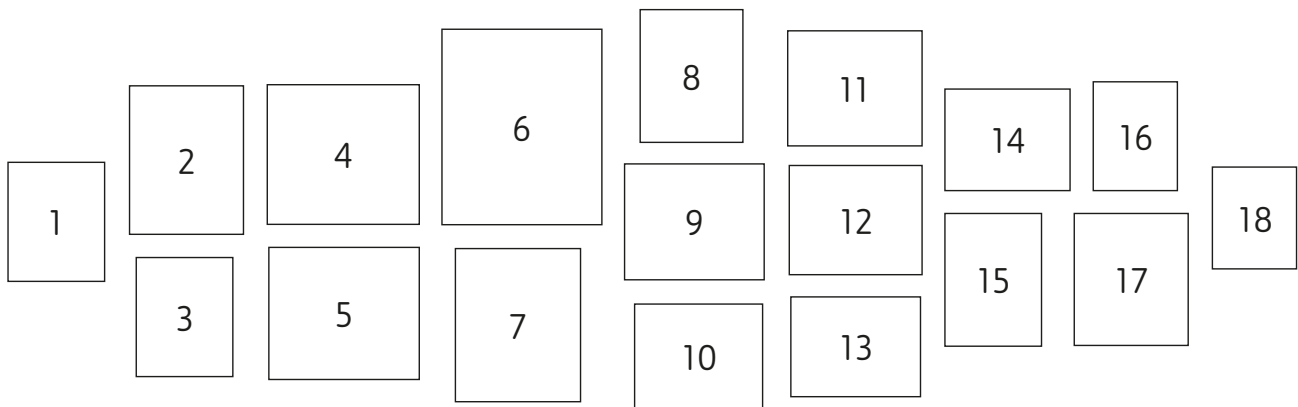
**Painting** 1927

Tempera and oil paint on canvas

Tate. Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate  
Gallery 1971

T01318

## Large numbered display



- 1 György Kepes 1906–2001  
**Brush and Form** c.1939–40  
The Michael G. and C. Jane Wilson 2007 Trust. X54410
- 2 Emeric Feher 1904–1966  
**Untitled** c.1935  
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1991. Musée  
National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle.  
X67891
- 3 György Kepes 1906–2001  
**Hand 2** c.1939–40  
The Michael G. and C. Jane Wilson 2007 Trust. X54406

- 4 Raoul Ubac 1910–1985  
**Revealed Photo** c.1939  
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased with funds generously provided by Yves Rocher, 2011. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X69273
  
- 5 György Kepes 1906–2001  
**Branches** c.1939–40  
European Acquisitions Committee and the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2013. P80557
  
- 6 György Kepes 1906–2001  
**Blobs and Circles** c.1939–40  
Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Russia and Eastern European Acquisitions Committee and the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2013. P80559
  
- 7 György Kepes 1906–2001  
**Circles and Dots** c.1939–40  
Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Russia and Eastern European Acquisitions Committee and the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2013. P80556

- 8 Francis Bruguiere 1879–1945  
**Untitled** c.1932  
Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum. X67893
- 9 Hannes Beckmann 1909–1977  
**Untitled** c.1929–31  
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Bequest of Mrs Nina Kandinsky,  
1981. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de  
Création Industrielle. X67881
- 10 Hannes Beckmann 1909–1977  
**Untitled** c.1929–31  
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Bequest of Mrs Nina Kandinsky,  
1981. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de  
Création Industrielle. X67882
- 11 Willy Zielke 1902–1989  
**Photogram, Solarised** c.1930  
Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57963
- 12 Francis Bruguiere 1879–1945  
**Untitled** c.1932  
Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum. X67893
- 13 Andreas Walser 1908–1930  
**Photogram** 1929  
Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X67895

- 14 György Kepes 1906–2001  
**Bas Relief** c.1939–40  
The Michael G. and C. Jane Wilson 2007 Trust. X54402
- 15 Jaroslav Rossler 1902–1990  
**NEG 71** 1930s  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ford Motor Company Collection, Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell, 1987 (1987.1100.288). X67944
- 16 Tato (Guglielmo Sansoni) 1896–1974  
**Untitled** 1928–9  
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 2008. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle. X67885
- 17 Jaroslav Rossler 1902–1990  
**NEG 71** 1930s  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ford Motor Company Collection, Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell, 1987 (1987.1100.288). X67945

18 Roger Parry 1905–1977

**Untitled** 1929–30

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Purchased, 1992. Musée  
National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle.  
X67879

## **CHEMIGRAMS**

Bringing together aspects of both painting and photography, chemigrams are made without a camera, in full light, by manipulating photographic chemicals and light-sensitive paper. Embracing chance, different effects can be achieved by altering the light that reaches the paper and by using materials such as wax, polish or varnish to block chemical reactions. The resulting images are truly abstract, produced only to be captured on film with no referent in reality. These abstract forms invite the viewer to use their imagination and interpret them as they wish.

## PHOTOGRAMS

As seen in earlier rooms, in the 1920s and 1930s many photographers turned to the photogram as a means of exploring abstraction in photography. These camera-less photographs are produced in the darkroom by placing objects on photographic paper before exposing it to light. The resulting images reduce objects to two dimensional shapes and outlines often rendering them unrecognisable.

Imogen Cunningham 1883–1976

**Pebbles** c.1922–9

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper  
mounted on cardboard

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Bequest of Constantin Brancusi,  
1957. Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création  
Industrielle

X69268



Bill Brandt 1904–1983

**East Sussex Coast 1958**

**East Sussex Coast 1960**

**Nude, Baie des Anges, France 1959**

**East Sussex Coast 1960**

**Nude, Baie des Anges, France 1959**

**Baie des Anges, France 1958**

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Bill Brandt Archive

X68565, X68568, X68571, X68567, X68570, X68563

## **BODIES**

The images shown here create abstractions from the human body. These artists distort flesh through the use of funhouse mirrors, extreme camera angles, severe cropping and the manipulation of limbs to create unusual shapes. These photographs of contorted figures resemble the kind of objects found in surrealist paintings and sculptures and encourage us to search for resemblances in other organic objects. These twisted, truncated forms are far from portraits of the models whose bodies have been photographed. Instead these photographers treat their human subjects like inanimate objects focusing on shape, line and texture.

ROOM 6

## DRAWING WITH LIGHT

I wanted to experience light in the same way you'd experience a brush and pigment and learn how to apply it.  
—Nathan Lerner

The word photography comes from 'phōtos', the Greek for light, and 'graphé', meaning drawing. From the first announcement of the medium in 1839, photographers have used light as a tool of graphic expression. The photographs shown here harness the medium's essentials: photosensitive chemicals trace the movement of light and the duration of exposure on to paper.

These works draw on ideas of automatism, creativity that is not consciously controlled. The surrealists believed that by applying chance to mark making artists could be released from the constraints of rational thought and become free to express their unconscious. In the 1940s experiments in automatism took place across different media. Action painters such as Jackson Pollock explored free movement to create works celebrated for their gestural mark making. Photographers moved their cameras and light sources to create dynamic images that embraced motion blur.

Whether through automatic drawing, the splatter of paint across a canvas or the movement of a sparkler in the night

sky, it is the human compulsion to make spontaneous gestures that links the works in this room. They demonstrate that abstraction comes as naturally to photography as it does to any other medium.

## **Clockwise from wall text**

Hanaya Kanbee 1903–1991

**Light B**

**Light C**

**Light A**

1930, printed 1970s

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Presented anonymously 2015. T14390

Presented anonymously 2015. T14391

Tate. Presented anonymously 2015. T14389

William Klein born 1928

**Untitled (Rotating Painted Panels), Milan 1952**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Artworkers Retirement Society

X67934

Luigi Veronesi 1908–1998

**Kinetic Study** 1941

**Photo n.145** 1940, printed 1970s

**Photo n.152** 1940, printed 1970s

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government from Massimo Prez Oltramonti and allocated to Tate 2015. P13678

Tate. Accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government from Massimo Prez Oltramonti and allocated to Tate 2015. P13675, P13676

Willy Kessels 1898–1974

**Spiraling Coil** 1930s

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ford Motor Company Collection, Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell, 1987 (1987.1100.324)  
X67926

Jackson Pollock 1912–1956

**Number 23** 1948

Enamel on gesso on paper

Tate. Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery (purchased out of funds provided by Mr and Mrs H.J. Heinz II and H.J. Heinz Co. Ltd) 1960. T00384



## Middle Wall

### First column, top to bottom

Nathan Lerner 1913–1997

**Light Tapestry** 1939

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Arthur Siegel 1913–1978

**Untitled (Motion-Light Study)** c.1940

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris Gift of Mrs Kiyoko  
Lerner, 2014 (AMVP 4153). X67924

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57895

## Second column

Sameer Makarius 1924–2009

**Untitled (Luminogram)** c.1950

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Otto Steinert 1915–1978

**Lamps of the Place de la Concorde III** 1952

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Fritz Henle 1909–1993

**New York at Night** c.1945

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57980, X57560

Estate of the artist, Courtesy Kicken Berlin. X69497

## Third column

Harry Callahan 1912–1999

### **Chicago (light abstraction)**

1946, printed 1979–89

Photograph, dye transfer, on paper

Otto Steinert 1915–1978

### **Luminogram 1** 1952

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Nathan Lerner 1913–1997

### **Car Light Study – Japanese Landscape** 1938

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of J. Patrick Kennedy and Patricia A. Kennedy 2016.

P14531

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57915

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris Gift of Mrs Kiyoko  
Lerner, 2014 (AMVP 4154). X67925

## Fourth column

Pim Van Os 1910–1954

**Light Abstraction** c.1950

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Otto Steinert 1915–1978

**Luminogram 2** 1952

**Ghost Writing** 1949

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57920, X57556,  
X57566

Peter Keetman 1916–2005

**Oscillation** 1952–3

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Emil Otto Hoppe 1878–1972

**Rhythm** c.1930

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Peter Keetman 1916–2005

**Experiment with Neon Sign  
and Moving Camera** 1953

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57920  
Private Collection, Dusseldorf. X68129  
Wilson Centre for Photography. X68576  
F.C. Gundlach Foundation. X70109

ROOM 7

## SUBJECTIVITY AND EXPRESSION

The making of a picture will always take place in the realm of the conscious, the degree of consciousness depending on the nature of the photographer's personality. — Otto Steinert

In the 1940s German photographer Otto Steinert became interested in the expressive potential of his medium. Steinert was part of a generation of German photographers keen to continue the ideas that had emerged from the Bauhaus before the Second World War. They called themselves *fotoform* and aligned themselves with modernist ideals. The group promoted innovation and experimentation with form and an emphasis on materials and processes. Brazilian photographer Geraldo de Barros developed similar ideas independently as '*fotoformas*'.

Steinert began to look beyond the formal qualities of photographic images. He felt that the creative decisions taken by the photographer – from choice of equipment, to perspective and printing technique – provided the photographic subject with new meaning and significance. In 1951, Steinert organised an exhibition to promote this way of looking. He called it **Subjective Photography**. He accepted any style of photograph, from cityscapes to darkroom abstractions. The exhibition featured photographers from across the world and travelled internationally.

The broad range of artists who participated reflected a shared consciousness across continents. Similar projects in other countries, touring exhibitions and international publications suggested many photographers were looking beyond the formal concerns of previous generations. Some continued to make images with a strong visual connection to modernist photographs from the 1920s and 1930s. But these new works celebrated the medium's ability to express the subjective experiences of the photographer.



## Clockwise from wall text

### Top Row

Thomaz Farkas 1924–2011

**Facade of the Brazilian Press Association Headquarters, Rio de Janeiro** c.1945

Paulo Pires born 1928

**Men Working III** 1959

**Manoeuvring Yard II** 1961

Ivo Ferreira da Silva 1911–1986

**Light and Geometry** date unknown

Geraldo de Barros 1923–1998

**Untitled (Telegraph Wires)** c.1950s

5 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X53803, X69469, X69470, X69467

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery, courtesy of the Latin American Acquisitions Committee 2016.

P14628

## Middle Row

Thomaz Farkas 1924–2011

**Ipiranga Cinema, Snapshots, São Paulo 1945**

Ivo Ferreira da Silva 1911–1986

**Warp and Weft** date unknown

Gaspar Gasparian 1899–1966

**Peace!!!** 1954

Geraldo de Barros 1923–1998

**Abstraction (São Paulo)** 1949

Ivo Ferreira da Silva 1911–1986

**Lines Traced by the Sun** date unknown

Geraldo de Barros 1923–1998

**Granada, Spain** 1951

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X53805, X68496,  
X67932

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of the Latin American Acquisitions Committee and

Susana and Ricardo Steinbruch 2016. P14600  
Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X69466  
Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of the Latin American Acquisitions Committee 2016.  
P14627

**Bottom row:**

Sameer Makarius 1924–2009

**Nets of Mar del Plata's Fishermen** 1956

José Yalenti 1895–1967

**Undulating** date unknown

Geraldo de Barros 1923–1998

**Untitled (São Paulo) Composition II** 1949

Sameer Makarius 1924–2009

**Kavanagh Building under the Fog** 1954

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Presented by Karim Makarius 2011. P13171

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X68497

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of the Latin American Acquisitions Committee and  
Susana and Ricardo Steinbruch 2016. P14601

Tate. Lent by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery, courtesy  
of Mauro Herlitzka 2011. L02987

Fernando G. Barros

**Men and Ropes** c.1960s

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X69468

Kansuke Yamamoto 1914–1987

**The Thrilling Game Related to Photography** 1956

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper  
and glass on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X68615

Kaoru Ohto born 1927

**Untitled (Light Bulb)**

**Untitled (Mountain)**

**Untitled (Roof)**

1950s

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X69482, X69479, X69483

Yasuhiro Ishimoto 1921–2002

**Untitled** c.1950

Iwase Sadayuki 1904–2001

**Concrete Edge and Water** c.1940

Kansuke Yamamoto 1914–1987

**Title Unknown** 1940

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tamara Corm Collection. X70662

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X69481, X68617

Otto Steinert 1915–1978

**Tiled Roof**

**Roof Shingles**

**Black Forest Slope**

1956

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57561–3



## **In vitrine**

### **Subjective Photography 1952**

Published by Brüder Auer Verlag, Bonn

Tate. Purchased with funds generously provided by the LUMA Foundation and with the assistance of Tate Members, Art Fund, Tate Americas Foundation, Tate Photography Acquisitions Committee, Tate Latin American Acquisitions Committee, Tate Asia Pacific Acquisitions Committee, Tate Russia and Eastern Europe Acquisitions Committee and Tate Middle East and North Africa Acquisitions Committee.

X69633

### **Subjective Photography 2 1955**

Published by Brüder Auer Verlag, Bonn

Tate. Purchased with funds generously provided by the LUMA Foundation and with the assistance of Tate Members, Art Fund, Tate Americas Foundation, Tate Photography Acquisitions Committee, Tate Latin American Acquisitions Committee, Tate Asia Pacific Acquisitions Committee, Tate Russia and Eastern Europe Acquisitions Committee and Tate Middle East and North Africa Acquisitions Committee.

X69634

Fritz Kuhn 1910–1967

**Compositions in Black and White 1959**

Photobook

Published by Gibert Jeune, Paris

Private Collection, London

X68501

Otto Steinert 1915–1978

**Composition of Forms 1949**

**Photogram I 1947**

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57552, X57553

Peter Keetman 1916–2005

**Structure Paint on Wood 1950**

**Highrise at Night 1958**

**Window Frame 1937**

**Chiemsee at Breitbrunn 1958**

**Steel Pipes, Maximilian Smelter 1958**

5 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

F.C. Gundlach Foundation

X70103, X70104, X70116, X70110, X70115

Raymond Hains 1926–2005

**The two crosses**

**The grill**

1948

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Gift of the artist, 1981. Musée  
National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle

X69269, X69270

ROOM 8

## **SURFACE & TEXTURE**

When a painter paints a picture it can be immediately abstract. They have no problem making abstractions. A band of paint is simply a band of paint. It is not derived from realistic photographic images. When a photographer makes nature abstract, an attempt is made to transform a realistic scene into an abstraction. — Aaron Siskind

This room presents found abstractions lifted from nature and the urban environment and repurposed for the gallery wall. Through selection, framing and emphasis of tone and contrast, photography casts a new light on the everyday. These photographs encourage us to look closer. They present peeling paint and scratched surfaces as worthy of aesthetic appreciation.

These photographic 'found paintings' visually connect with the tangles of line and colour associated with abstract expressionist paintings from the 1940s and 1950s. Photographers were central to the developments in American art in this period. Works by figures such as Aaron Siskind were exhibited alongside paintings and assemblages of found objects. Many noted the resemblance between images of street markings and graffiti and the gestural brush strokes of contemporary painters. However, in using the world around us to make images that highlight texture and

surface, photography retains a sense of subject that painting does not. These photographs have more in common with assemblage, the repurposing of everyday objects as art.

## Clockwise from wall text

Brassaï 1899–1984

### **Graffiti** c.1950s

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Brassaï is best known for his photographs of Parisian nightlife. In 1933 he began taking photographs of graffiti in the French capital, a series he continued for more than 20 years. These images feature representational markings depicting faces, animals and hearts alongside abstract patterns, grooves and cracks. Brassaï organised his images into nine categories: The Wall as Inspiration; The Language of the Wall; The Birth of the Face; Masks and Faces; Animals; Love; Death; Magic; Primitive Images. The photographs appealed to surrealist sensibilities. Brassaï brought attention to the overlooked and unusual and his treatment of these markings encouraged viewers to find resemblances and hidden meanings. But while Brassaï enjoyed blurring the line between reality and the surreal, his photographs still document the streets of Paris.

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2014

P80986, P80981, P80987

Guy Bourdin 1928–1991

**Untitled** c.1950s

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography  
Acquisitions Committee 2015

P81206, P81217, P81208–9, P81229, P81204



Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé  
born 1926

### **Jazzmen 1961**

Printed papers on canvas

This work is made from a section of posters and advertisements stripped from the rue de Tolbiac in Paris. French artist Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé started making works using torn posters in the late 1940s. He wanted to emphasise the actions of anonymous passers-by who had torn and stripped the posters, a process that he regarded as a spontaneous art of the street. Villeglé uses original posters in his work in the same way the photographers in this room photograph found textures and surfaces. These fragments are then layered and arranged to create new compositions just as photographers frame, crop and print their images to reveal new details and unusual textures.

Tate. Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery 2000  
T07619

Harry Callahan 1912–1999

**Chicago (abstraction) 1951,**  
printed 1979–89

Photograph, dye transfer print on paper

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of J. Patrick Kennedy and Patricia A. Kennedy 2016  
P14533

Frederick Sommer 1905–1999

**Found Painting 1949**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the  
photographer  
X67171

Aaron Siskind 1903–1991

**New York 1950**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Aaron Siskind is often described as ‘a painter’s photographer’. In the early 1950s he taught at Black Mountain College in North Carolina with artists such as Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg. The American photographer’s work was also exhibited at the Egan Gallery in New York, alongside paintings by Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline. De Kooning is thought to have used this specific Siskind photograph when working on his painting

**Woman 1 1950.**

Siskind was interested in the treatment of his photographs as art objects rather than reproducible images. He often mounted his prints on blocky Masonite hardboard, as shown in **Chicago 1952** and **Peeling Paint c.1950**, which are both hung nearby. This treatment marked a departure from the flatness of photography’s traditional window mount and frame.

Collection of Saadi and Zeina Soudavar

X67168

Aaron Siskind 1903–1991

**Chicago 22 1949**

**Kentucky 13 1951**

**Los Angeles 3 1949**

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Presented by J. Patrick Kennedy and Patricia A. Kennedy  
(Tate Americas Foundation) 2017

X70285, X70281, X70280

Aaron Siskind 1903–1991

**Jerome 2** 1949

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Peeling Paint** c.1950

Photograph, gelatin silver print mounted on board

**New York** 1946

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Chicago** 1952

Photograph, gelatin silver print mounted on board

**Seaweed 13** c.1940s

Photograph, gelatin silver print mounted on board

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Robert and Joyce Menschel. X67170

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the photographer. X67169

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Robert and Joyce Menschel. X67168

Collection David Knaus. X68573, X68577

**Clockwise from top left:**

Brett Weston 1911–1993

**Broken Car Window, California**  
1937, printed later

**Ice Formation** 1955

**Cracked paint** 1937, printed later

**Mud Cracks** 1955

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate. Lent by the Tate Americas Foundation, courtesy  
of Christian Keese Collection 2013  
L03516, L03514, L03517, L03510

Jean Dieuzaide 1921–2003

**Brai Landscape** 1960  
Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris Purchased,  
1971  
(AMPH 1835)  
X67929

Minor White 1908–1976

**Ritual branch (72N Union Street, Rochester) 1947**

**Metal Ornament, Pultneyville, New York 1957**

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Wilson Centre for Photography

X68592, X68591

ROOM 9



## THE SENSE OF ABSTRACTION

The many techniques and devices apparent in the exhibition are not new. What is significant is the fresh surge of interest in using familiar tools of the photographic medium to produce works whose sole function is to delight – or affront – the eye. —Grace Mayer, curator of *The Sense of Abstraction*

This room is a homage to and partial recreation of **The Sense of Abstraction**, a photography exhibition which opened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York in 1960.

The works included ranged from 'accidental' abstractions to experimental photographs that sought to break new ground. The variety of images spoke to photography's complex relationship with abstract art. In fact, some of the artists shown questioned their inclusion. American photographer Minor White wrote to curator Grace Mayer to express his concerns: 'I feel that these photos of mine that you have chosen are not abstractions in any sense whatsoever. True they resemble paintings that go under this title, but this is coincidental, not intentional.'

The exhibition included artists from Asia, Europe and North America. Its international scope revealed both the shared interests and unique concerns of photographers across

the world. The MoMA curators grouped works with similar formal qualities and technical ambition. Several groups from the 1960 show are recreated here and a number of series are shown in the order they were displayed at MoMA. In highlighting the diversity of photographic abstraction, the exhibition paved the way for a further 60 years of experimentation.

## Clockwise from wall text

### On wall

László Moholy-Nagy 1895–1946  
**From the Radio Tower, Berlin 1928**

Harry Callahan 1912–1999  
**Aix-en-Provence 1957**

Aaron Siskind 1903–1991  
**Martha's Vineyard 108 1954**

Edward Weston 1886–1958  
**Rock Erosion, Point Lobos c.1955**  
**Rock Erosion, Point Lobos 1935**  
**Dunes, Oceano 1936**  
**Pelican Wings c.1940**  
**Shells 1927**

Man Ray 1890–1976  
**Anatomies 1930**

Lotte Jacobi 1896–1990  
**Untitled (Photogenic) c.1948**

Minor White 1908–1976

**Frost Forms: Sound of One Hand 1959**

Frederick Sommer 1905–1999

**Configurations on Black 7 1957**

Bronislaw Schlabs 1920–2009

**Untitled 1957**

**Untitled 1957**

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Anonymous gift.

X67742

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of J. Patrick Kennedy and Patricia A. Kennedy 2016.

P14528

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. X67744

Wilson Centre for Photography. X68586–7, X68590,

X68588–9

The Sir Elton John Photography Collection. X60465

Courtesy Kicken Berlin. X68566

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. X67746 ,

X67745, X67165–6

## In vitrine, left to right

**The Sense of Abstraction** was MoMA's third exhibition dedicated to abstract photography. It followed **In and Out of Focus** in 1946 and **Abstraction in Photography** in 1951. Photographer Edward Steichen was the Director of the Department of Photography at MoMA from 1947 to 1962. He curated the 1951 exhibition and his Personal Assistant, Grace Mayer, was one of the lead curators for **The Sense of Abstraction**. Mayer started her career in 1934 as Curator of Prints at the Museum of the City of New York. In 1959 Steichen invited her to work with him at MoMA.

In **The Sense of Abstraction** Mayer built on Steichen's definition of abstraction as a 'convenient handle' to describe a broad range of photographic practice. She included work from three categories: 'the experimental or avant-garde', 'abstractions produced as a stimulating exercise' and 'accidental' abstract images 'in which reportage is transformed through a strong sense of design'.

## **Abstraction in Photography**

October 1951

Published by Foto Digest, New York, 1951

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Museum of  
Modern Art Library

X71457

## **Exhibition installation view**

1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic  
Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art  
Archives, New York. Cat. no.: IN659.15. © 2018. Digital image,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence  
Z08633

## **Exhibition installation view**

1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.: IN659.1. © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.  
Z08630

## **Exhibition installation view**

1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.: IN659.4. © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence  
Z08632

**'The Sense of Abstraction in Contemporary Photography',  
essay by Grace Mayer 1960, printed 2018**

The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 659.15. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence Z08652

**Exhibition installation view**

1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.: IN659.31. © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence Z08635



Man Ray 1890–1976

**Unconcerned Photographs 1959**

8 photographs, Polaroid print

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the  
photographer

X71395, X71667–73

**Atelier: Subjective Photography in Japan: 130 Works by 29  
Modern Photographers, Volume 5, No. 34 1957**  
Published by Atorie Shuppan, Tokyo

Tate  
Z08602

**Exhibition installation view**  
1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic  
Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art  
Archives,  
New York. Cat. no.: IN659.10. © 2018. Digital image, The  
Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence  
Z08636

## **The Sense of Abstraction:**

**An Exhibition July-August 1960**

Published by Thomas M. Hill, Ohio, USA

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Museum of  
Modern Art Library

X71458

Between 1952 and 1976, photographer Minor White edited the popular photography magazine **Aperture**, which is still in publication today. He dedicated an issue of **Aperture** to **The Sense of Abstraction**.

Much like Steichen's position at MoMA, White's role at the magazine gave him creative control over the presentation of his work, as well as that of his peers. Work by both photographers was included in the 1960 MoMA show.

**Letter from Minor White to  
Grace Mayer 1960, printed 2018**

The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 659.17.  
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.:  
ARCH.1158.1. & ARCH.1158.2 © 2018. Digital image, The  
Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence  
Z08651

**Aaron Siskind: Photographer 1960**

Published by Horizon Press: 156 Fifth Avenue, New York

Tate  
X71593

**Letter from Minor White to  
Grace Mayer 1959, printed 2018**

The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 659.13.  
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.:  
ARCH.1157.  
© 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New  
York/Scala, Florence  
Z08650

## **Exhibition installation view**

1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.: IN659.27. © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence Z08634

**Under the Sun** was produced by American photographers Walter Chappell, Syl Labrot and Nathan Lyons. The publication includes texts and photographs by the three artists. In Lyons's introduction to the book he argues that abstract photographs of nature can change the way we engage with the world around us. He claims that through selective observation 'attention moves towards a freedom beyond fixed habits'.

Photographs by all three photographers were included in **The Sense of Abstraction**.

Nathan Lyons 1930–2016

Syl Labrot 1929–1977

Walter Chappell 1925–2000

## **Under the Sun: The Abstract Art of Camera Vision 1960**

Published by George Braziller, Inc. New York

Tate. Z08643

Z08643

Many of the works included in **The Sense of Abstraction** used darkroom experimentation. American artist Ted Davies created images without a camera by placing ink and dyes between sheets of glass, before exposing these glass plates in the darkroom. Davies claimed, 'This is nature too, but we have captured and recorded it in a unique way'.

Artists such as German-American photographer Lotte Jacobi and Frederick Sommer, who lived and worked in the United States, focused on the tools of the medium rather than real world objects. They used photography to consider the inner mechanisms of the world and explored the possibility of creating photography that could break free from subject matter altogether.

## **Man Ray wall**

Man Ray 1890–1976

### **Unconcerned Photographs 1959**

7 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper mounted on board

In response to Grace Mayer's invitation to submit work for inclusion in *The Sense of Abstraction*, Man Ray sent MoMA a series of Polaroids. These 'blurred images' Mayer noted, 'were caused by swinging a Polaroid camera at random around his Paris studio'. Rather than focusing on experimentation or expression, the photographs play with chance, gesture and the absurd. Man Ray passed on cropping instructions for the images but no further printing details. The museum ordered enlargements mounted on hardboard which were hung directly on the wall. The original Polaroid prints can be seen here alongside their Masonite-mounted counterparts. Man Ray called this series of images *Unconcerned Photographs*. Their title now evokes the epitaph inscribed on his gravestone at Montparnasse cemetery in Paris, 'Unconcerned but not indifferent'.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist  
X71678, X71676, X71675, X71674, X71677, X71667, X71395

## **Aperture 8:2 1960**

Published by Aperture Inc., New York

Tate

Z08601

### **Exhibition installation view**

1960, printed 2018

New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photographic Archive, Exhibition Albums, 36.1. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Cat. no.: IN659.3. © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence  
Z08631



## Wallpaper

Syl Labrot 1929-1977

**Tree Trunk** 1959, printed 2018

Facsimile

Courtesy Barbara Wilson D'Andrea and Visual Studies  
Workshop'

ROOM 10

## OPTICAL EFFECTS

Naturally, while working in the darkroom I could not resist the magic of light, its miraculous ability to create an image of its own on photographic paper or plate – an absolute photography. How little is needed for its creation!

—Běla Kolářová

Emerging in the 1960s, op art used geometric forms to produce optical effects. These works suggest movement and play with our perception of space. The photographs shown here create similar effects to those the op artists produced through paint.

These images have a direct relationship with the experiments that produce them. Photographers created optical effects in the studio and the darkroom before capturing the results on photographic paper. They manipulated light through movement, moving materials and equipment, both by hand and using mechanical means, such as turntables. By passing light through objects and filters they could change its direction and intensity. Instruments such as oscillographs, which visually record electrical currents, were used to produce images with abstract curving lines.

Many artists worked at the edges of art and technology. Photographers developed processes that attempted to remove the human element from the act of making, setting in motion processes of creation which would continue in the absence of a 'maker'. Photography was no longer limited to reproducing images, it could generate new ones.

## Clockwise from wall text

Gottfried Jäger born 1937

**Pinhole Structures, from the series 3.8.14, 1967** 1967

11 photographs, 4 gelatin silver print on paper  
and 7 digital C-print on paper

German photographer and theorist Gottfried Jäger uses mathematics and computer programming in his work. His images focus on seriality and the logic of machines. Each of Jäger's series investigates a different photographic technique. In **Pinhole Structures** he explores the camera obscura, a forerunner of the modern camera. In his work Jäger sets out to create a 'photograph of photography'. He does not claim to represent 'external' reality, his work 'is just photography, and nothing else.'

Gottfried Jäger, courtesy Photo Edition Berlin  
X68532

Bridget Riley born 1931

**Hesitate** 1964

Emulsion on board

Tate. Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1985

T04132

Floris Neusüss born 1937

**Untitled**, from the series **Plates** 1968

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Floris Neusüss is a German photographer who has dedicated his career to the exploration of the photogram. In the 1960s he started creating large scale images, including Körperfotogramms, whole-body photograms.

Neusüss believes the camera-less photograph has the power to engage our imagination. He has stated, 'Photography works as a comfort... because it reproduces what is known. The photogram denies the observer this immediate familiarity.' Neusüss believes, 'It is not important that people know how we made a photogram, but someone who knows may have an additional kick.'

Floris M. Neussüs / Courtesy Kicken Berlin

X71595-8

Pierre Cordier born 1933

**Chemigram 28/5/61 1961**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Chemigram 24/8/61 III 1961**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper  
mounted on plywood

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Gift of the artist, 2008. Musée  
National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle  
X69266-7



Monika Von Boch 1915–1993

**Light Study (I)**

**Light Study (II)**

c.1959

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Courtesy Kicken Berlin

X69499, X69498

Alexandre Vitkine 1910–2014

**Untitled** c.1960

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

In the 1950s photographers began experimenting with technology to create new photographic forms. The oscillograph, a device used to record the movements and rhythms of currents, presented photographers with the ability to produce curved light patterns through electronic means. Using electronics, artists were able to create a wider variety of forms than had been possible through mechanical devices. Artists such as Berlin-born Alexandre Vitkine, a trained engineer, exploited the possibility of electronic instruments to create photographic abstractions.

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Gift of Robert and Marc Vitkine, 2017

X70045-6, X68678, X68681, X68680, X70044

Peter Keetman 1916–2005

**Light Pendulum Oscillation 1952**

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

F.C. Gundlach Foundation

X70174, X71231-2

Bela Kolářová 1923–2010

**Untitled (Pattern of Shells) c.1963–4**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Untitled (Pattern of Shells) 1961**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Untitled (Pattern of Beer Caps) c.1964**

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X60995, X60983, X60998

Bela Kolářová 1923–2010

**Four Sketches: Studies II-V**

from the series Five Sketches 1962

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

**Fragments of Lights 1962**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Untitled c.1962**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Objective Photograph 1962**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X60993, X60987, X60992, X60994

In 1961, Czech artist and photographer Běla Kolářová encountered the statement, 'the entire world has been photographed!' In response Kolářová turned her attention to the darkroom. She believed camera-less photography offered greater opportunity for experimentation than documentary practice. Her first experiments in the darkroom involved everyday items which were usually considered

'unworthy of being photographed'. Later Kolářová removed the need for objects altogether, using only light to create form. She achieved this by combining and controlling light with movement, either moving the head of the enlarger projector or by placing paper onto a moving surface.

**Clockwise, from top left**

**Bela Kolárova 1923–2010**

**Untitled, from Traces cycle**

**Crock from the Moon**

**And toward the cleanliness...! / Level Delta / Tomography**

**And toward the cleanliness...! / Level Beta / Tomography**

**1961**

**4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper**

**Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham**

**X60982, X60978, X60979, X60981**

**Clockwise, from top left**

Bela Kolářová 1923–2010

**Roentgenograms of Circles 1963**

**Roentgenograms of Circle c.1963**

**Roentgenogram of Circle, Untitled 1962**

**Roentgenogram of Circle IV 1963**

**Untitled c.1968–72**

**Roentgenograms of Circle with Many Centres 1963**

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X60984, X60988, X60991, X60986, X60989, X60985

## Centre

Gregorio Vardanega 1923–2007

Circular Chromatic Spaces 1967

Light panel

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

Purchased, 1968 (AMS 717)

X69478

Martha Boto 1925–2004

**Perpetual motion** 1965

Plywood, metal, acrylic sheet and lamps

In the 1930s Brazilian artist Martha Boto was part of one of the first abstract art movements in Buenos Aires, the Asociación Arte Nuevo. In the 1950s she began creating structures and mobiles using transparent materials such as Plexiglas and coloured water. In 1960, she started experimenting with movement, producing works using motors and



coloured lights. Boto was particularly interested in the potential of materials that could modify, absorb and reflect light. Her experiments with movement, illumination and colour played a key role in the development of kinetic and op art.

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Purchased, 1966 X69477

ROOM 11

## MINIMALISM AND SERIES

I had no restrictions on how to approach photography. I felt free to incorporate any of these concepts into my thinking. I wasn't breaking rules; I was actually making up my own. —Barbara Kasten

The artists in this room arrange objects, construct scenes and find order in the world around us. Produced in the 1960s and 1970s, their works reduce what we see to its essentials and prioritise form over creative expression.

Several works displayed here respond to the themes of minimalism. Minimalism claims that art should have its own reality and not be an imitation of anything else. Minimalist artists make no attempt to represent the outside world, their experiences or emotions. They want the viewer to respond only to what is in front of them. This concept can be problematic for photography, a medium that is by nature representational. Many of the photographers shown here engage with the aesthetic simplicity of minimalist art, presenting carefully selected volumes, shapes and lines.

They focus our looking on the forms within the image so that the source or subject matter becomes irrelevant. Other images engage with serial art and conceptual practices, which often involve following strict sets of rules

to determine their outcome and composition. In adhering to processes, artists can create art without personal expression. By photographing and rephotographing their subjects, they are also able to experiment with different permutations. These works create order through repetition and highlight the form and structure of the world around us.

## **Clockwise from wall text**

Barbara Kasten born 1936

### **Photogram Painting Untitled 78/2 1978**

4 photograms, gelatin silver print and oil on mural paper on canvas

Courtesy the artist, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, and Bortolami, New York.

X70145

Barbara Kasten born 1936

**Photogenic Painting, Untitled 74/5**

**Photogenic Painting, Untitled 74/13**

**Photogenic Painting, Untitled 74/3**

**Photogenic Painting, Untitled 75/19**

**Photogenic Painting, Untitled 75/32**

1974–5

5 photographs, cyanotype print on paper

These images by American artist Barbara Kasten are cyanotypes, a photographic printing process that produces blueprints. Their title is the name photographic pioneer Henry William Fox Talbot gave to his first photograms. Kasten's works are produced by laying sheets of paper on the studio floor. She treats the paper with photosensitive chemicals before placing textiles and sculptural works on top. She folds and moves her materials to emphasise their three-dimensional qualities. This movement creates painterly effects on the surface of the paper. Kasten calls her process 'painting in motion'.

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham.

X70149, X70147, X70148, X70146, X68503

Jay DeFeo 1929–1989

**Untitled** 1973

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Untitled (White Spica)** 1973

3 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

The Jay DeFeo Foundation

X70137, X70136, X69448, X70135

John Divola born 1949

**74V13**

**75V11**

**74V14**

**74V1**

**74V47**

**74V11**

**From the series *Vandalism* 1974**

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

From 1974-5 American photographer John Divola travelled across Los Angeles in search of rundown properties to photograph. Using spray paint, string and cardboard, the artist created abstract installations which he then documented. He titled the project **Vandalism**. It blurred the line between fiction and reality. Divola's carefully staged interventions merged sculpture, installation and performance while his images drew on the aesthetics of forensic photography. The series questions the photograph's role as evidence.

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X68614, X68613, X70152, X57949, X57951, X68612



Inge Dick born 1941

**Black 14.6.96 14/2**

**Black 4.6.96 14/14**

**Black 14.6.96 14/42**

**Black 14.6.96 14/47**

**Black 14.6.96 19/25**

**Black 14.6.96 19/37**

1996

6 photographs, Polaroid print

Loaned from Photo Edition Berlin. X68603

James Welling born 1951

**60600**

**ZEPES**

**Untitled**

**Untitled**

**Untitled**

From the series **Degrades** 1986

5 photographs, C-print on paper

These images are from American artist James Welling's **Degrades** series. The photographs are camera-less exposures created by placing photographic paper beneath an enlarger. Welling manipulated his light source using colour filters and by slowly moving a piece of cardboard to generate shadows. Welling's images 'degrade' the pure colour that would be produced without his intervention. Their subtle variations of brightness and tone draw parallels with colour-field paintings from the 1950s.

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham

X57939, X57945, X57941, X57942, X57944

John Hilliard born 1945

**Seven Representations of White 1972**

7 photographs, C-prints on paper mounted on board

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2016

P81609

John Hilliard born 1945

**White Expanse 1974**

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper and transfer script

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2016

T14512

Jared Bark born 1944

**Untitled, PB #1005 1974**

8 photographs, gelatin silver photobooth print  
on paper

**Untitled, PB #1115 c.1975**

14 photographs, gelatin silver photobooth print  
on paper

**Untitled, PB #1004 1973**

10 photographs, gelatin silver photobooth print  
on paper

Courtesy the Artist and Yancey Richardson, New York.  
X69472

Collection of Kaitlyn and Mike Krieger. X69476

Courtesy the Artist and Yancey Richardson, New York.  
X71665

Mel Bochner born 1940

**Photograph-Blocks (Four by Four)**

printed 2009

5 photographs, gelatin silver prints mounted on aluminium

Courtesy the artist and Peter Freeman, Inc. New York

X69450

Edward Ruscha born 1937

From the series **Parking Lots** 1967–2013

25 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

© Ed Ruscha, courtes of the artist and Gagosian

X68674, X70292-312, X70314-6

Carl Andre born 1935

**Steel Zing Plain 1969**

Steel and zinc

Tate. Presented by Janet Wolfson de Botton 1996

T07148

Lewis Baltz 1945–2014

**San Jose 1972**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Houston A, Houston B 1972**

2 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

**Newport Beach 1970**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

**Laguna Niguel 1973**

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57919

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2012. P80062

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham. X57917, X57916

Lewis Baltz claimed that, 'photography is the only deductive art, every other art that I can think of begins with the topic tabula rasa, or blank sheet of A4 paper... photography begins with a world that's perhaps over full and needs to sort out from that world what is meaningful'.

The American photographer believed it is the job of artists to extract and record what is significant in the landscape. Through photography Baltz identified and isolated compositions found in the world around us. His careful framing and cropping produced images that reveal geometric forms and lines form our everyday environment. Baltz presents stuccoed walls, boarded windows and building bricks as minimalist sculptures. In the 1970s his photographs were shown alongside sculptures by minimalist artist Carl Andre, whose work is also shown here.

## **Clockwise from top left**

Ellsworth Kelly 1923–2015

**Doorway Shadow, Spencertown 1977**

**Highway Marker, Hudson 1972**

**Sidewalk, Los Angeles 1978**

**Wall, Majorca 1967**

**Movie Screen, Waterbury 1982**

**Sidewalk, New York City 1970**

6 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

American artist Ellsworth Kelly is known for his paintings characterised by large areas of a single colour with sharp clear edges. Kelly's minimalist paintings transform compositions observed in the world around us. He applied this same approach to photography, surveying the landscape for volumes and shapes created by light and shadow. Kelly found compositions in the light cast from doorways and streetlamps, or the contrast produced by different materials. Kelly stated, 'I'm not interested in the texture of the rock, or that it is a rock, but in the mass of it, and its shadow'

Estate of Ellsworth Kelly, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery  
X70200 X70199, X70201, X70197, X70202, X70198.



ROOM 12

## CONTEMPORARY ABSTRACTION

How can you be a pioneer in your own time if you're copying the successes of the past? How can you make an impact with images, when everyone sees so many? I want my images to have a contemporary context. I want them to be images for today. — Maya Rochat

The works in the final room of the exhibition range from minimal compositions that demonstrate control and order, to wild abstractions that embrace chance and accident. These abstract works encourage us to engage with the artwork as a whole, including the process of its production.

All of the artists shown here have made work following the launch of the first portable digital camera in 1975. The introduction of digital technology had a profound impact on photography's place in the art world. Where a commitment to the purity of the process was once the key to creating art, contemporary artists have dispensed with boundaries between mediums. Digital technology offers artists a new set of tools to work with, from computer programming to innovative printing techniques.

These artists expand the possibilities of photography. They embrace ways of working that were once seen as contradictions. They use darkroom processes alongside

digital technology, question the notion of the original and copy, and follow controlled processes while accepting the accidents that come with experimentation.

For many of the artists in this room, the process of production is a performative act that becomes part of their artwork. They adopt all modes of image making at their disposal, creating work that can no longer be reduced to the title of photographic abstraction. Instead their work reveals photography's new place in the world.

**Clockwise from wall text**

**Clockwise from top left**

Paul Graham born 1956

**Ilford FP4, Untitled early work, 1976**

**Fuji Fujicolor HR100, Troubled Land, 1984**

**Fuji Fujicolor Realia Gen 2, 100asa, American Night, 2001**

**Konica Konica Color SR-G, 3200ASA, End of An Age, 1997**

2011

4 photographs, inkjet print on paper

In 2009, while scanning photographs for a retrospective of his documentary work, Graham noticed the different structures of photographic film. The British photographer took these scans and created extreme close ups of the different brands of film used in each body of work. The magnified images reveal the grain and structure of film. These light sensitive crystals and chemical couplers form film emulsion. They are the basic building blocks of every photographic image.

Jack Kirkland Collection, Nottingham.

X57964, X57962, X57957, X57960

Alison Rossiter born 1953

**Gevaert Gevaluxe Velours, exact expiration date unknown,  
ca. 1930s, processed 2017 2017**

4 photographs, gelatin silver print on paper

These camera-less photographs were created by developing expired photographic paper. The atmospheric conditions and physical damage these papers have endured over time can cause changes to their light-sensitive properties. Working in the darkroom under a safelight, American artist Alison Rossiter removes the paper from its protective packaging and places it in liquid developer. This process reveals marks that have been left on the surface of the paper by fingerprints, light leaks, pollutants and mould. Rossiter calls these images 'found photograms'. The works shown here were produced using Gevaert Gevaluxe Papier Velours, a paper manufactured in Belgium in the 1930s. It is considered one of the most beautiful papers in the history of gelatin silver printing.

Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

X68604

## **Middle Wall (Front)**

Stan Douglas born 1960

**JNNJ 2016**

**QAAQ 2016**

Lacquered UV ink on 2 gessoed panels

In 2013, Canadian photographer Stan Douglas created a series of photographs of distorted vertical bands of colour produced when his camera prematurely saved images. In 2016 he took this idea of digital abstraction further by employing a software developer to reverse engineer JPEG files. The file code – the building blocks of the image file – became Douglas's raw material, and he used a mixing deck to create bands of colour and kaleidoscopic shapes. In the process of turning the infinite possibilities of digital information into a photograph hanging on a wall, the artist's role takes on a particular significance.

Courtesy the artist, David Zwirner, London/New York and  
Victoria Miro, London/Venice. X70971  
Private collection. X68607

Luisa Lambri born 1969

**Untitled (Bicho Invertebrado, #11)**

**Untitled (Bicho Invertebrado, #12) 2013**

2 photographs, inkjet print on paper

Italian photographer Luisa Lambri is best known for her photographs of modernist architecture. She commented, 'when I look at buildings what I am really trying to find is a personal relationship with them, something that goes beyond the image we know of them. I look for the most intimate and vulnerable places in the building'.

These photographs are from her series on modernist sculpture. In these images she documents Lygia Clark's titles her geometric aluminium sculptures **Creature**, or 'bicho' in Portuguese. Lambri focuses on the hinges of the sculptures, which were designed to be moved and manipulated by the viewer. She documents the play of light on these highly reflective surfaces, creating new lines, angles and shapes.

Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London  
X70150, X70635

Sigmar Polke 1941–2010

**Untitled (Uranium Green) 1992**

10 photographs, C-print on paper

These photographs by German artist Sigmar Polke were created by placing chunks of uranium on photosensitive plates for weeks at a time. This process left traces of radiation on the surface of the photosensitive material, making the usually invisible radiation visible. The radiation is recorded as glowing orbs of luminescent colour. By allowing his materials to determine his process Polke challenges the authorial power of the artist.

The Estate of Sigmar Polke / VG Bild-Kunst Bonn 2017

X68595



## **Middle Wall (Back)**

Daisuke Yokota born 1983

### **Inversion 2015**

Photographs, gelatin silver print

Japanese photographer Daisuke Yokota compares his working methods to those of an electronic musician. He mimics sound layers with 'visual noise and interference', blurring all traces of the original image. He investigates the chemical reactions in traditional darkroom techniques as well as the manipulation of digital data. Yokota claims, 'There are no stories in my work. There is only what the viewers find within it for themselves. I am more interested in exploring time and multiple possibilities that exist in reality.'

Daisuke Yokota, courtesy of the artist and Jean-Kenta

Gauthier gallery

X68610

## **Clockwise from middle wall**

Antony Cairns born 1980

### **E.I. CTY1 2018**

45 e-ink screens in acrylic frames

These photographs by British artist Antony Cairns were taken at night in some of the busiest cities in the world. His subjects include London, New York and Tokyo. These environments are made strange by the absence of the usual crowds of people and Cairns's complex developing process. The artist uploads his images onto e-readers. He uses a current in the devices to stimulate electronic ink which creates the image. He fixes the ink permanently by removing the screens from their casing, disconnecting them from any interface and creating glitchy digital images.

Courtesy of the artist Antony Cairns and Roman Road  
X68609

Maya Rochat born 1985

**A Rock is a River 2018**

Mesh banner, inkjet print on paper, woven cotton  
and other materials

Maya Rochat's layered, multi-dimensional installations feature photographs, painted surfaces and projections. The Swiss artist's photographs are fragmented pictures of digital textures, geological forms and organic matter. Rochat explains her approach: 'Each person has an experience that's unique – just by being there, you are activating the show... the people, are changing – each moment is there just for you, and then it's gone. You can't really document it. It's also a way of sharing what happens when you make an image – you have these apparitions that appear in the moment. If it's too fixed, I feel a little bored. It's not the end result, it's the process.'

Courtesy Lily Robert

X72272, X68611, X71664

Thomas Ruff born 1958

**r.phg.07** 2013

**phg.10** 2012

2 photographs, C-print on paper

In 2011, German photographer Thomas Ruff began experimenting with a new way of creating photograms. Ruff collaborated with a 3-D imaging expert to design a virtual darkroom that allowed him to choose and manipulate the size, material, colour, and transparency of the digital objects his photograms would record. The result was a digital darkroom environment which offered endless possibilities and control.

Challenging the limitations of the medium further, Ruff set out to 'break the world record of the size for the photogram! The early photograms, from the 1920s and '30s, are quite small, more postcard size. I work with the large format; I like the physical presence.'

© Thomas Ruff. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London  
X68605, X70641

[Check artwork order](#)

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## **SHAPE OF LIGHT:**

### **100 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND ABSTRACT ART**

**2 MAY – 14 OCTOBER 2018**

Curated by Simon Baker, Senior Curator, International Art (Photography), Tate Modern and Emmanuelle de l'Écotais, Curator of Photography, Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris with Shoair Mavlian, Director of Photoworks (formerly Assistant Curator, Tate Modern) and Sarah Allen, Assistant Curator, Tate Modern

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