

## **REFLEX PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUB**

### **ABSTRACT PHOTOGRAPHY – 09/01/2020 – ELISABETH SMITH**

#### **PRESENTATION NOTES**

##### **What is Abstract Photography?**

*Abstract means : Not representing or imitating external reality or the object of nature i.e. it is 'non-representational'.*

Abstract art is about exploring form and colour. It could also be interpreted that it is artists visual representation of how they feel.

Abstract photography, sometimes called non-objective, experimental, conceptual or concrete photography, is a means of depicting a visual image that does not have an immediate association with the object world and which has been created through the use of photographic equipment, processes or materials.

Photography by its nature is representational.

It is therefore important to understand Photography's place in the art world.

Photography has been argued not to be 'art' because;

- 1) of its mechanically produced origins,
- 2) potential for mass production,
- 3) links with commerce and
- 4) apparent lack of need for 'artistic' skill.

In the 1850s/1860s photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron and Henry Peach Robinson countered some of these challenges with their ground-breaking work, for example, the latter composed photographs from a number of separate images.

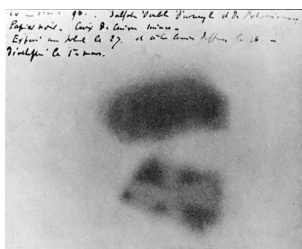
## Photography / Art History Timeline together with Examples

Note: photography dates are in blue and the examples have been incorporated within the timeline.

- 1814 - Niepce achieves first photographic image using a camera obscura.
- 1837 - Daguerre introduces a fixed image that did not fade.
- 1841 - William Henry Talbot patents the Calotype process, the first negative-positive process making possible the first multiple copies.
- 1851 - Collodion process invented which reduced exposure times to 2-3 seconds.
- 1859 - The showing of photographs was finally permitted in Paris's annual exhibition of Fine Arts.
- (1865–1885) Impressionism e.g. *Monet* , *Manet*, *Renoir*...
- (1885-1910) Post Impressionism e.g. *Van Gogh*, *Gauguin*, *Cezanne*...
- 1888 – Eastman patents Kodax roll-film.
- (1900-1935) Fauvism and Expressionism e.g. *Matisse*, *Kirchner*, *Kandinsky*...

### Henri Becquerel (b: 1852 d: 1908)

In the early 1900's Becquerel, a French scientist, visually captured radiation / radioactivity, which had an abstract quality to it. This is an image of Becquerel's photographic plate which has been fogged by exposure to radiation from a uranium salt. The shadow of a metal Maltese Cross placed between the plate and the uranium salt is clearly visible.



- 1900 – The first mass-marketed camera goes on sale
- (1905-1920) Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism and De Stijl e.g. *Picasso*, *Braque*, *Leger*...
- 1913/1914 – First 35mm camera is developed
- (1917-1950) Dada and Surrealism e.g. *Duchamp*, *Dali*, *Magritte*, *Man Ray*, *Moholy-Nagy*...

Some surrealists pointed their cameras haphazardly, recording whatever happened to be in front of the lens. Other efforts were more purposeful.

**Alvin Langdon Coburn (b: 1882 d: 1966)**

Coburn was an American-born British photographer. In his "Vortographs" of 1917, he achieved what are considered to be the first deliberate photographic abstractions, and a deliberate attempt to prove that photographers could fracture space into abstract compositions as Cubist painters and sculptors had done. He built a machine which contained mirrors which he fixed on to the front of his camera.



*vortograph of Ezra Pound, 1917*

**Man Ray (b: 1890 d: 1976)**

Man Ray was an American visual artist. Interestingly he considered himself a painter but was best known for his photography. He worked a lot with photograms, which he called 'Rayographs' in reference to himself.



*Abstract Composition, 1924*

In Man Ray's "Unconcerned Photographs" the blurred images were caused by him swinging a Polaroid camera at random around his Paris studio.

**Francis Bruguiere (b: 1879 d: 1945)**

Bruguiere was an American photographer. He consciously made non-objective photographs as early as 1912. Throughout his life, he experimented with multiple-exposure, solarization, original processes, abstracts and photograms.



*Light Abstraction, 1925*

**Jaroslav Rössler (b: 1902 d: 1990)**

Rössler was a pioneer of Czech avante-garde photographer. He used paper cut-outs and lighting to create abstract images (shown below). He also experimented with birefringent prisms and solarisation.



*Akt, 1926*

### **Jaromir Funke (b: 1896 d: 1945)**

Funke was a Czech photographer and leading figure in Czech photography in the 1920s/1930s. A typical feature of his work is the “dynamic diagonal”.

The image below, *Abstract Photo*, was created using an assortment of materials from Funke’s darkroom, such as glass negatives and mat board. He arranged them to create a puzzling space of shade and shape.

He was recognized for his play of “photographic games” with mirrors, lights, and insignificant objects, such as plates, bottles, or glasses, to create unique works. His still life's created abstract forms and played with shadows looking similar to photograms. He also slightly blurred his images to detach from the experience of ordinary reality.



*Abstract Photo, 1928-29*

- [1948 – Land launches and markets the Polaroid camera.](#)
- (1940's-1950's) Abstract Expressionism and (1960's) Pop Art e.g. *Gorky, Pollock, Rothko, Warhol...*
- (1970- ) Postmodernism and Deconstructivism e.g. *Gerhard Richter (visual artist), Cindy Sherman (Photographer), Zaha Hadid (architect)...*
- [1978 – Konica introduces the first point and shoot autofocus camera.](#)
- [1999 – The first mobile phone with built-in camera is introduced.](#)

**Naoya Hatakeyama (b: 1958 - )**

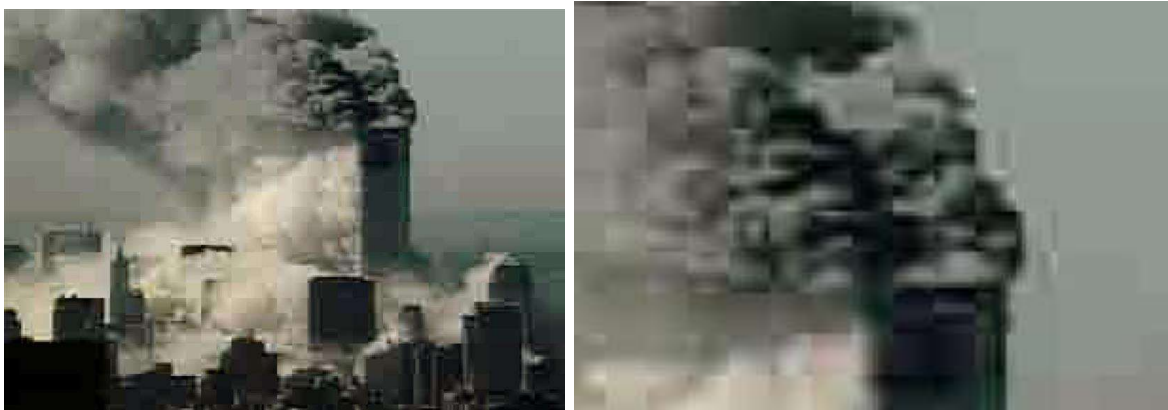
Hatakeyama is a Japanese photographer. His abstract images are created by blowing things up! (Ori Gersht stylee)



*A BIRD/Blast #130, 2006*

**Thomas Ruff (b: 1958 - )**

Ruff is a German photographer. He explores the possibilities of manipulating web images into unrecognizable forms. The pixel has replaced the grain of photographic film. Ruff has done a great deal to introduce into photographic art what we might call an 'art of the pixel', allowing us to contemplate at an aesthetic and philosophical level the basic condition of the electronic image.



*American Suburb X, taken from his book Thomas Ruff: jpegs, 2009*  
*[Right hand side is a close up of part of the image to show the pixels]*

## **Wolfgang Tillmans (b: 1968 - )**

Tillmans is a German photographer. He uses the development process itself in his work. In his Silver series he uses the reaction of photographic paper to light in order to create abstract photographs. The 'silver' refers to the dirt traces which remain on the paper if the machine in which developing occurs has not been cleaned properly.



The above was followed by a discussion on how abstract images might be created. The ideas suggested were: scale (zoom in), use lighting to show textures and form, use motion and blur, look for texture, pattern, reflections, lines and colour.

Pinterest and Google search for abstract photography brings up a wealth of images for inspiration in creating our own images.

Referenced photographer : Freeman Patterson

<http://www.freemanpatterson.com/>

### **Sources:**

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