WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY?

4 MARCH – 1 JUNE 2015
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GALERIE DE PHOTOGRAPHIES, FORUM -1

CONTENTS

1. PRESS RELEASE PAGE 3
2. THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY PAGE 4
3. EXHIBITION CIRCUIT PAGE 6
4. EXHIBITED WORKS PAGE 8
5. PUBLICATION PAGE 11
6. SURROUNDING THE EXHIBITION PAGE 12
7. PMU, PARTNER OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY PAGE 13
8. PRESS VISUALS PAGE 14
9. PRACTICAL INFORMATIONS PAGE 17
PRESS RELEASE

QU’EST-CE QUE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE ?

4 MARCH TO 1 JUNE 2015

GALERIE DE PHOTOGRAPHIES, FORUM -1

What is photography? Since its invention, this question has been asked time and time again. Taking this as its underlying theme, the exhibition provides a completely new journey through the history of modern and contemporary photography with fifty-odd iconic works by some thirty artists. It is being staged in a newly-opened area in the heart of the Centre Pompidou: the Galerie de Photographies.

Drawn from the Centre Pompidou’s remarkable collection of 40,000 photographic prints, a selection of works from the Twenties to the present day now broaden the field of investigation. The exhibition shows how different artists have striven to explore the same medium, each in their own singular way. They have all felt the need to question what they were doing, and provide answers through a picture or a series of pictures. Their proposals are highly varied, and explore the technical, essentialist or metaphorical aspect. For some, photography is simply a desire to see; for others, it is defined by its substance, its principles or its practice; for still others, photography is a subtle alchemy, a poetic divergence or a remarkable resource.

The question has been explored more intensely during periods of change in photographic practices and techniques, such as industrialisation, democratisation, artistic recognition and the changeover to digital technology.

Artists exhibited:
2. THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY

SURFACE AREA
200 m²

STAGING
Five mobile hanging rails, for versatile staging appropriate to the exhibitions on show

ADMISSION
Free admission,
Forum, niveau -1

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION OF THE MUSÉE NATIONAL D’ART MODERNE
40,000 prints and over 60,000 negatives

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A PERMANENT AREA DEDICATED TO PHOTOGRAPHY?
Photography is already very present in the Centre Pompidou: between 300 and 400 photographs from the collections are regularly displayed each year in the multidisciplinary circuit of the museum’s modern and contemporary collections.
With the creation of a permanent area devoted specifically to photography, the idea is to continue exhibiting photographs within the museum alongside the other arts, thus maintaining a multidisciplinary approach, while allocating it a separate area so that the vast scope of this photographic collection can be appreciated. In addition, several large bodies of work by contemporary artists are rarely exhibited today because they require too much hanging space for the museum rooms. They will now find their natural place in the Galerie de Photographies.
3. EXHIBITION CIRCUIT

Desires
Le désir de voir/The desire to see
Paul Citroen
Une attirance pour la lumière/An attraction to light
Brassaï
Un théâtre d’ombres/A shadow theatre
André Kertész
Un regard/A look
Nathan Lerner

A substance
De la gélatine/Gelatine
James Welling
Des grains d’argent /Silver grains
Giulio Paolini
Des promesses/Promises
Man Ray
Une surface sensible/A sensitive surface
Joseph Beuys

Principles
Une insolation/Exposure to the sun
Denis Oppenheim
Une camera obscura/A camera obscura
Abelardo Morell
Une fixation/Fixing
Patrick Tosani

Praxis
Un point de vue/A viewpoint
Denis Roche
Un cadre/A frame
John Hilliard
Une profondeur/A depth
Józef Robakowski
De l’automatisme/Reflex action
Man Ray
Des surprises/Surprises
Mariusz Hermanowicz

An alchemy
Une phase obscure/A dark phase
Gaston Karquel
Une chose ou son contraire/A thing or its opposite
Timm Rautert
Une allégorie de la caverne/A cave metaphor
Michel Campeau

A divergence
Ce qui demeure/What remains
Jan Saudek
Des reflets/Reflections
Jeff Wall
Un surcroît d’aura/An excess of aura
Jochen Gerz
Une interprétation symbolique/A symbolic interpretation
Douglas Gordon

Resources
Des supports de diffusion/Media for dissemination
Jean-Louis Garnell
Une réduction du monde/A reduction of the world
Florence Paradeis
Des clefs pour comprendre/Keys to understanding
Man Ray
Une énigme insoluble/An insoluble riddle
Robert Morris

Verifications
Une manière de faire la vérité/A way of making truth
Ugo Mulas
Des réponses inombrables/Countless answers
Mishka Henner

INTRODUCTION
This exhibition is being staged in a newly-opened area in the heart of the Centre Pompidou: the Galerie de Photographies. In a journey through the 20th and 21st centuries, it brings together some fifty works by artists including Brassaï, André Kertész, Denis Oppenheim, Man Ray, Jeff Wall, Ugo Mulas and Mishka Henner, all exploring the same question: «What is photography?»

After years of experimentation, the photographers presented here felt the need to question what they were doing, and proposed a form of synthesis of their art. Sometimes they tried an approach through words. For example, Mulas, the focus of the last section in the exhibition, wrote: «My aim was to understand the meaning of the operations I endlessly performed, sometimes up to a hundred times a day, for years on end, without ever questioning them for themselves, divorced from their utilitarian function.» Sometimes the works bear witness to this questioning on their own. In every case, the proposals are highly varied and subtly different, exploring technical, essentialist or metaphorical aspects.

Each of the exhibition’s eight sections, and each work within these sections, provides a different response to the initial question. For some, photography is simply a desire to see; for others, it is defined by its substance, its principles or its praxis; for still others, photography is a subtle alchemy, a poetic divergence or a remarkable resource.
PHOTOGRAPHS THAT SPEAK OF THEMSELVES

Since the birth of photography in 1839, the question of knowing what photography is has been endlessly explored by photographers, artists, historians and theorists, who have attempted to define its qualities and singularities, particularly with regard to the other arts. From the 19th to the 21st centuries, the intrinsic nature of the medium has nonetheless been explored more intensely in certain periods, corresponding each time to moments of profound change in photographic practices: industrialisation, democratisation, artistic recognition, developments in working methods and, more recently, the changeover to digital technology. Because thinking on the ontology of photography – its essence – seems to be historically linked with the development of its uses, it is precisely in terms of practice, not theory, that the matter demands further investigation today.

The thirty-odd artists exhibited here have responded to this fundamental question not with theories or manifestos, but through one or more photographs. In these works, they seek to show what photography consists of, and to understand the skill they practise. Some analyse photography’s tools and materials, showing the dark room, the lenses, the lighting, the gelatine and the sensitive paper that define the specific nature of the medium for them (Abelardo Morell, Józef Robakowski, Brassaï, James Welling, Giulio Paolini). For others, the new practices introduced by this equipment are what make photography different from the other arts: the sharpness of the photographer’s eye is then revealed in innovative viewpoints, subversive framing or random shots (Nathan Lerner, Denis Roche, John Hilliard, Man Ray).

Photography is also defined through its relationship with reality. While lauded for its documentary accuracy and prized for the critical distance it involves, it is also the means for a poetic interpretation of our relationship with the world (Jan Saudek, Jeff Wall, Robert Morris). Today, the medium of photography is considered above all in terms of its relational status: artists emphasise the viewer’s impact in the construction of the image and its meanings, together with its social and political components (Man Ray, Douglas Gordon, Jeff Wall).

The wide conceptual and formal range of these proposals shows that the issue is obviously not to provide a single answer to the original question, but to define a field of investigation. And so, despite a title seemingly in line with the usual definitive definitions of photography, the exhibition proposes exactly the opposite. In short, it is distinctly anti-ontological.
4. WORKS EXHIBITED

Joseph Beuys
Sans titre [Untitled], 1963
Negative on soft film, painted in gouache, glued onto paper, 29.9 × 23.9 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Brassaï
Papillon à la lampe [Moth and lamp], c. 1934
Silver gelatin print, 22.3 × 16.8 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by Mrs Gilberte Brassaï in 2002

Brassaï
Papillon à la bougie [Moth and candle], c. 1934
Silver gelatin print, 23 × 17.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by Mrs Gilberte Brassaï in 2002

Michel Campeau
Sans titre no. 3281 [Untitled no. 3281], «La Chambre noire» series, 2005 - 2010
Inkjet digital print, 106 × 82.9 cm
Centre National des Arts Plastiques/Fonds National d’Art Contemporain

Michel Campeau
Sans titre no. 0310 [Untitled no. 0310], «La Chambre noire» series, 2005 - 2010
Inkjet digital print, 106 × 82.9 cm
Centre National des Arts Plastiques/Fonds National d’Art Contemporain

Paul Citroen
Im Theater [At the theatre], c. 1930, print of 1980
Silver gelatin print, 23.8 × 17.7 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Jean-Louis Garnell
Triptyque #1 [Triptych no. 1], 1992
Chromogenic prints, 22.4 × 27.7 cm each
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by La Caisse des Dépôts in 2006

Jochen Gerz
Jochen Gerz’s exhibition alongside his photographic reproduction [Documentation of the performance], 1972
In the collection: filmed version of the same performance made in 1973 in Paris
Black and white Betacam with sound, length: 16’52”
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Douglas Gordon
Head Picture [Tête image], 2001
Chromogenic print, 184 × 124 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by La Caisse des Dépôts in 2006

Mariusz Hermanowicz
Le Vieil Appareil photo [The old camera], 1981
Seven silver gelatin prints and manuscript text, 28.8 × 21.9 cm each
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

John Hilliard
Plundered/Dug/Dry/Prepared [Pillé/Fouillé/Asséché/Préparé], 1975
Set of four photographs, silver gelatin prints, 52 × 52 cm each
Centre National des Arts Plastiques/Fonds National d’Art Contemporain

André Kertész
Autoportrait [Self-portrait], 1927
Silver gelatin print, 21 × 19 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by the artist in 1978

Man Ray
Boîte de négatifs [Box of negatives], 1957
Box of negatives, signed and painted by Man Ray, 9.9 × 13.3 × 8 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Acceptance in lieu, 1994

Man Ray
Boîte d’allumettes [Box of matches], c. 1960
Silver gelatin print glued to a matchbox, metal keys, 8 × 6 × 3.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Acceptance in lieu, 1994
Abelardo Morell
*Camera Obscura. Image of Boston*
[Camera obscura. Image de Boston], 1998
Silver gelatin print, 101.6 × 121.7 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by Ixis Corporate & Investment Bank in 2006

Robert Morris
*Photo Cabinet* [Cabinet photographique], 1963/1975
Wooden box, grey acrylic paint on wood and two silver gelatin prints, 38 × 27 × 4 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Ugo Mulas
*Le Verifiche* [Verifications], 1968-1972
Series of silver gelatin prints glued to aluminium
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 1, Ommagio a Niépce*
[Verification 1, Homage to Niépce], 1968 - 1970
60.5 × 51 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 2, L’operazione fotografica. Autoritratto per Lee Friedlander*
[Verification 2, The photographic operation. Self-portrait for Lee Friedlander], 1970
50.5 × 40.5 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 3, Il tempo fotografico. A Jannis Kounellis*
[Verification 3, The time of photography. To Jannis Kounellis], 1970
24 × 30.8 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 4, L’uso della fotografia. Ai fratelli Alinari*
[Verification 4, The use of photography. To the Alinari brothers], 1972
19.2 × 25.8 cm

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 5, L’ingrandimento. Il cielo per Nini*
[Verification 5, Enlargement. The sky, for Nini], 1972
50.5 × 120.8 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 6, L’ingrandimento. Dalla mia finestra ricordando la finestra di Gras*
[Verification 6, Enlargement. From my window, in memory of «The window at Le Gras»], 1972
50 × 121.5 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 7, Il laboratorio. Una mano sviluppa, l’altra fissa. A Sir John Frederick William Herschel*
[Verification 7, The laboratory. One hand develops, the other fixes. To Sir John Frederick William Herschel], 1972
42 × 51.4 cm

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 8, Gli obiettivi. A Davide Mosconi, fotografo*
[Verification 8, The lenses. To Davide Mosconi, photographer], 1972
31 × 45 cm

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 9, Il sole, il diaframma, il tempo di prova*
[Verification 9, The sun, the lens stop, the exposure time.], 1972
31.2 × 40 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 12, La didascalia. A Man Ray*
[Verification 12, The caption. To Man Ray], 1972
40.5 × 50.5 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 13, Autoritratto con Nini*
[Verification 13, Self-portrait with Nini], 1972
39.8 × 49.7 cm
Donated by Valentina and Carmela Mulas in 2010

Ugo Mulas
*Verifica 13, Fine delle verifiche. Per Marcel Duchamp*
[Verification 13, End of Verifications. For Marcel Duchamp], 1971
60 × 50 cm

Giulio Paolini
*Sette fotogrammi della luce*
[Seven photograms of light], 1969
Seven silver gelatin prints on canvas, 20 × 25 cm each
Centre National des Arts Plastiques/Fonds National d’Art Contemporain
Florence Paradeis
Les Images [The images], 1995
Chromogenic print, 91.2 × 114 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by La Caisse des Dépôts in 2006

Timm Rautert
Sonne und Mond von einem negative
[Sun and Moon, from a single negative], diptych, «Bildanalytische Photographie» series, 1972
Two silver gelatin prints glued onto card, 24 × 18 cm each
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Józef Robakowski
Strefa optyczna [Optical zone], 1975
Silver gelatin print glued onto card, 49.1 × 38.8 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by the artist in 2015

Denis Roche
5 avril 1981, Gizeh, Égypte
[5 April 1981, Giza, Egypt], 1981
Silver gelatin print, 30 × 40 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by La Caisse des Dépôts in 2006

Jan Saudek
The Story of Flowers II
[L’histoire des fleurs II], polyptych, 1981
Sequence of six silver gelatin prints, painted, 25.5 × 20.3 cm each
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Donated by the artist in 1988

Patrick Tosani
Le Marcheur; triptyque
[The Walker; triptych], 1982-1983
Three chromogenic prints, 119 × 169 cm each
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

Jeff Wall
Picture for Women [Image pour les femmes], 1979
Two transparent Cibachrome prints and light box/ transparent dye destruction prints, Cibachrome, 161.5 × 223.5 × 28.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne

James Welling
Gelatin Photograph 40
[Photographie à la gélatine 40], 1984
Inkjet digital print, 76.2 × 101, 6 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
Loaned by the Centre Pompidou Foundation, 2013

Patrick Tosani
Le Marcheur; triptyque
[The Walker; triptych], 1982-1983
Three chromogenic prints, 119 × 169 cm each
Centre Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne
"What is photography?"
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Co-publishing: Éditions Centre Pompidou / Éditions Xavier Barral
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80 pages
Language: French
Price: 39 euros
6. PMU, PARTNER OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY

PMU, a popular brand, has decided in 2009 to support young contemporary photography by participating in the creation of the BAL (a space dedicated to photography created by Diane Dufour and Raymond Depardon).

The Carte Blanche PMU is born of this partnership, successfully attributed to Malik Nejmi, Mohamed Bourouissa, Olivier Cablat, Kourtney Roy and finally to the duo Léa Habourdin and Thibault Brunet.

The laureate artists of Carte blanche PMU deliver a point of view on the business space and the world in which it evolves that is new and often unexpected.

Today, PMU becomes the partner of the Galerie de photographies of the Centre Pompidou, giving a new dimension to its patronage, allowing an opening towards a larger audience.

PMU is very proud to accompany the Centre Pompidou in the presentation of its exceptional collection of photographies and is pleased that the opening exhibition is devoted to the great surrealist photographer, Jacques-André Boiffard.
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Jeff Wall
Picture for women, 1979
© Jeff Wall
Credit photo : Jeff Wall

Man Ray
Boîte d’allumettes fermée, vers 1960
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Autoritratto per Lee Friedlander
[Vérification 2, L’opération photographique. Autoportrait pour Lee Friedlander], 1970
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Denis Roche
5 avril 1981, Gizeh, Égypte, 1981
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Verifica 13, Autoritratto con Nini
[Vérification 13, Autoportrait avec Nini], 1972
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Verifica 2, Autoritratto per Lee Friedlander
[Vérification 2, Autoportrait pour Lee Friedlander], 1970
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Ugo Mulas
Verifica 7, Il laboratorio. Una mano sviluppa, l’altra fissa.
A Sir John Frederick William Herschel.
[Vérification 7, Le laboratoire. Une main développe, l’autre fixe. À sir John Frederick William Herschel], 1972
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Denis Roche
5 avril 1981, Gizeh, Égypte, 1981
© Denis Roche
Credit photo : Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Bertrand Prévost / Dist.RMN-G
Paul Citroen
*Im Theater [Au théâtre]*, vers 1930

© ADAGP, Paris, 2015 : Paul Citroen
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Georges Meguerditchian / Dist.RMN-GP

Florence Paradeis
*Les Images*, 1995

© Florence Paradeis & In Situ – Fabienne Leclerc, Paris
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## INFORMATIONS

**Centre Pompidou**  
*75191 Paris cedex 04*  
*00 33 (0)1 44 78 12 33*  
Underground  
Hôtel de Ville, Rambuteau  

**Opening times**  
Exhibition open from 11.00am to 9.00 pm everyday except Tuesdays and 1 May.  

**Prices**  
Free Admission  

www.centrepompidou.fr

## AT THE SAME TIME AT THE CENTRE

**UNE HISTOIRE. ART, ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN DE 1980 À AUJOURD’HUI**  
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