

PRESS RELEASE

The V&A celebrates opening of new Photography Centre with major commission by Thomas Ruff

The V&A Photography Centre

Opening 12 October 2018

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Today, the V&A unveils a major new photography commission by internationally-acclaimed artist Thomas Ruff. Inspired by some of the earliest photographs of India and Burma (Myanmar), Ruff's series, *Tripe/Ruff*, reimagines a set of 1850s architectural and topographical images by British Army Captain and photographer Linnaeus Tripe. Encompassing over twenty prints, *Tripe/Ruff* is the latest series in Ruff's 35-year investigation into the medium of photography. The work has been commissioned to celebrate the opening of the V&A's brand-new Photography Centre on 12 October. Ten images from the series will feature in the inaugural display.



In preparation for the series, Ruff scoured the museum's collection of over 800,000 photographs. He was captivated by the haunting quality of Tripe's large-format paper negatives, revealing temples, palaces and monuments that in some cases no longer exist. Made over 160 years ago, when he was an official photographer for the East India Company, Tripe's work is widely regarded as one of the great achievements in early photography.

Ruff was drawn to the scale, beauty and aesthetics of Tripe's negatives – specifically the way in which discolouration and damage to the paper mark the passage of time. He was also fascinated by Tripe's early 'retouching' processes, in particular his painting the reverse of negatives to add different effects, such as clouds.

Tripe/Ruff blends analogue photography with digital manipulation to thrilling effect. For each 80 x 140 cm print, Ruff began by combining the distinctive colour of Tripe's negatives with that of the positive albumen print on-screen. He then enlarged the negative by over three times its original size to reveal the structure of the paper and minute detail captured by Tripe. While Ruff predominantly works with images on a computer screen as digital files, he

acknowledges that printing the image and hanging it on the wall is one of the most important steps in his creative process. It is only through this act, by looking at each image for days, weeks or months, that he can determine whether a work is finished

Thomas Ruff, said: *“Working with the V&A’s historic photography collection adds a new dimension to my work. It’s the first time I’ve ever worked with paper negatives. I was fascinated and astonished by the beauty of Tripe’s negatives and how he created them. In the age of digital photographs, I find it really interesting to revisit these images. Throughout my career I have produced a lot of negatives, but I’ve never really looked at them, except as the master for printing. Yet, Tripe’s negatives have a pictorial quality that is really incredible. ‘Tripe/Ruff’ is about the history, the different processes, techniques and technology of photography, and how rich the photographic world really is. The series is about curiosity, discovering something new and beautiful, and wanting to share it with the world.”*

Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs at the V&A, said: *“Thomas Ruff is one of the world’s most prolific fine artists using photography today. His work continually challenges the processes, techniques and concepts of the medium, frequently editing and manipulating a wide range of photographic images made by others to reimagine their possibilities. By digitally reinterpreting photographs made over 160 years ago in places such as Mysore, Rangoon (Yangon) and Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli), Ruff gives Tripe’s evocative images a new context. He emphasises their hidden details, resurrecting them with spectacular new life. It is a kind of collaboration between artists that bridges the centuries, collapsing the distance in time between them. In combining both historic and contemporary image-making, ‘Tripe/Ruff’ makes a powerful statement about photography today and our ambitions for the V&A Photography Centre as a new space to celebrate the medium.”*

Opening on 12 October, the first phase of the V&A Photography Centre is designed by David Kohn Architects. The centre more than doubles the space devoted to photography at the V&A with a rotating display to tell the history of the medium from the daguerreotype to the digital. The V&A Photography Centre includes a screening room, an interactive camera handling table, a wall for digital installations, stereograph viewing stations and spaces for newly commissioned works and acquisitions. It is part of the V&A’s FuturePlan development programme to revitalise the museum’s public spaces through contemporary design and the restoration of original features.

Tripe/Ruff goes on display from Friday 12 October, accompanied by a new publication by Martin Barnes and Thomas Ruff. A series of limited edition prints will be available from the V&A Shop.

The V&A Photography Centre is supported by The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation, Modern Media, Shao Zhong Art Foundation and many other generous donors.

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Notes to Editors

About the V&A photography collection

The V&A holds the National Collection of the Art of Photography. The museum has collected photographs since its foundation in 1852 and continues to collect today. The Royal

Photographic Society (RPS) collection was transferred to the V&A by the Science Museum Group in 2017 and was acquired with the generous assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Art Fund. The amalgamation of these world-class collections is the catalyst for the museum's new Photography Centre, which opens on 12 October 2018. The V&A's collection encompasses the work of leading historic and contemporary photographers as well as publications, cameras and related equipment. When not on display, photographs from the collection can be viewed in the Prints & Drawings Study Room.
vam.ac.uk/collections/photographs

About V&A FuturePlan

FuturePlan is an ambitious programme of development which is transforming the V&A. The best contemporary designers are creating exciting new galleries and visitor facilities, while revealing and restoring the beauty of the original building. In the past 15 years, over 85% of the museum's public spaces have been transformed, improving access and allowing the collections to be more elegantly and intelligently displayed. By introducing bold new architectural interventions, FuturePlan aims to delight and to inspire visitors, and to continue the museum's tradition of championing new talent.
vam.ac.uk/info/futureplan

Image credits

- Thomas Ruff (born 1958), *Tripe_12 (Seeringham. Munduppum inside gateway)*, 2018, C-type print © Courtesy of Thomas Ruff and David Zwirner Gallery
- Thomas Ruff (born 1958), *Tripe_13 (Madura. The Tunkum from east)*, 2018, C-type print © Courtesy of Thomas Ruff and David Zwirner Gallery
- Thomas Ruff (born 1958), *Tripe_05 (Rangoon. Signal Pagoda)*, 2018, C-type print © Courtesy of Thomas Ruff and David Zwirner Gallery

For further PRESS information about the V&A's photography collection and the new Photography Centre, please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 3949 4509 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

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