

ubu

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THE PHOTOGRAM: 1918–1948

January 23 – March 6, 1999

Ubu Gallery is pleased to present *The Photogram: 1918–1948*, a survey of the historical development of a unique and beautiful photographic process – an abstract marriage of light and chemistry made without the objectifying presence of the camera. The exhibition will open on January 23, 1999 and run through March 6, 1999.

At its simplest, a photogram is essentially a one-of-a-kind negative image created by placing objects on a sheet of photographic paper that is exposed to light and then developed and processed in the manner of a normal photographic print. Although variants of this type of process date back to the origins of photography, the creative potential of the photogram went unrealized until unlocked by Christian Schad, a member of the original Zurich Dada group, in 1918. At the heart of the Dadaist aesthetic was the concept of creating a new art from the detritus of a “morally corrupt,” bourgeois society. Like the materials found in Kurt Schwitters’s collages, Schad appropriated as his subject matter an eclectic array of found objects – discarded tickets, fabric, newsprint, string, etc. Tristan Tzara dubbed Schad’s series of small format photograms “Schadographs,” playing upon the name of their creator and the shadow aspect of the process.

In the early 1920s, Man Ray, Lázló Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitzky – working independently – pushed the medium past Schad’s collage-like photograms. Their most significant innovation was the introduction of a sense of depth or interior space obtained by varying the dimensionality, volume and translucence of the objects and the form and manner of the lighting sources. This approach fully exploited the fluidity of the process, imbuing the resultant photogram with an enigmatic presence at once familiar and comforting as well as foreign and disturbing. Full of startling juxtapositions, they provide a visual jolt by transforming the mundane into the mysterious.

While the aforementioned artists were the pioneers of the medium, almost immediately a host of other practitioners sharing similar concerns – masters and students, “plastic artists” and photographers, some formerly not visual artists at all – continued to explore the possibilities of the photogram. All were fascinated by its “non-objective” and “automatic” qualities – the process could be influenced at every step, but the results were largely unpredictable. This reflected the prevailing avant-garde sensibility of the period wherein artists sought to divorce themselves from “imperfect” human perception expressiveness of the materials. The exhibition at Ubu Gallery will include works by more than 25 of such artists who pushed the creative boundaries of the photogram during the 1918 – 1948 period.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Press prints are available upon request.