

## Press Release

### Thomas Ruff

*d.o.pe.*

November 26, 2022–January 31, 2023

Sprüth Magers, Berlin

**Sprüth Magers**

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to announce Thomas Ruff's *d.o.pe.*, a solo exhibition at the Berlin gallery. The featured, eponymous series of new works is the first to find Ruff using large wall tapestries as a textile carrier for his images. Featuring fractal patterns the tapestries reflect Ruff's long-standing interest in the beauty and visualization of complex mathematical phenomena. The title of the series refers to Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, a 1954 essay describing the British philosopher's experiments with mind-altering drugs and the consciousness-expanding potential of artificial sensory impressions. The psychedelic imagery in *d.o.pe.* continues Ruff's ongoing exploration of human perception, specifically as it relates to both real and constructed reality.

Ruff's multi-faceted practice mines the ever-changing possibilities of photography, investigating visual and cultural phenomena to address the ways in which technology influences our seeing. It manifests across a wide range of subjects and methods ranging from classical portrait photography to algorithmically generated digital images.

In the early 2000s, Ruff first turned his attention to the visualized geometric structures, for which the mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot coined the word 'fractal' in 1975. Fractal patterns exhibit a high degree of self-similarity, which is to say that magnifying any part of the original shape shows the same shape repeated over and over again. Self-similar structures can be created mathematically but also occur in nature. They can be generated as a two- or three dimensional digital image in virtual space and at the same time appear in simplified form as a natural construct – in the crystalline structure of a snowflake, for example. Ruff's initial attempts at fractal imagery were unsuccessful, as the computer programs available at the time lacked the necessary precision. He returned to the idea of fractals in 2022, after coming across software that could be used to create and manipulate psychedelic imitations of nature with the degree of complexity he was looking for. The correlation between fractals as both natural and artificial structures chimes with Ruff's ongoing investigation of human perception. What happens when the line between real and constructed reality blurs, when the two are no longer entirely distinguishable?

In his experiments for *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley engaged with his everyday surroundings and their aesthetic beauty. His journey of the senses resulted, among other things, in a number of newly articulated insights into art, music, and nature. Formal, visual aspects of *d.o.pe.* echo the kind of 1960s and 70s psychedelic art and imagery that Ruff encountered on posters and record covers in his youth. Abounding with floral-decorative ornament, mandalas, and kaleidoscope patterns, they illustrated the hallucinations that often accompany the experimental use of mindexpanding hallucinogens including LSD and mescaline. These images – visual phenomena that exist outside the realm of rational imagination but are nevertheless perceived as real – resonate with Ruff as they point to an expanded concept of perception. Adding to this visual language are the material properties of the velvety, shiny velour tapestries themselves: Velour was popular in interior décor and saw a particular heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. The industrially manufactured textile has a soft, organic feel that underscores Ruff's interest in artificially constructed naturalness. The choice of printed tapestries gives the psychedelic patterns in *d.o.pe.* an object-like character and contribute to a sense of spatial depth. With his new series, Ruff takes up a historical image-making technique and reinterprets traditional tapestry by choosing industrially produced velour carpets.

**Sprüth Magers**

Ruff's *d.o.pe.* evokes the highly detailed Renaissance style of painters like Hieronymus Bosch and Matthias Grünewald – artists whose subject matter and color palette took few cues from the real world. Their work, with its surreal architectural structures and richness of figures, reminds Ruff of the limitlessness of artistic imagination. Ruff's image-laden tapestries ask the human mind to look beyond the usual limits of perception. In the words of William Blake, as quoted in Aldous Huxley's titular essay, "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite."

Thomas Ruff (\*1958, Zell am Harmersbach) lives and works in Dusseldorf. Selected solo exhibitions include the K20, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (2020–21), the National Portrait Gallery; Whitechapel Gallery, London (2017), the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2016), S.M.A.K., Ghent, which travelled to the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (both 2014) and the Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012). In 2017 Thomas Ruff's exhibition *New Works* was exhibited at the Gallery Sprüth Magers, Berlin. Recently his work was on view at group shows at the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (2021), Kunsthaus Zürich (2020), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019), the Tate Modern, London (2018) and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2018). In 2021, Thomas Ruff presented his first major solo exhibition in South East Asia at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung.

For further information and press inquiries, please contact Felix Lorenz-Wohnhas (felix@spruethmagers.com).