


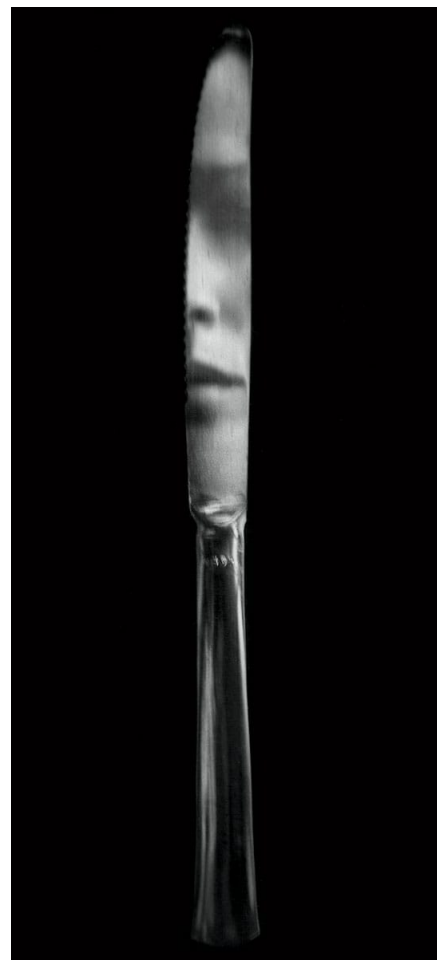
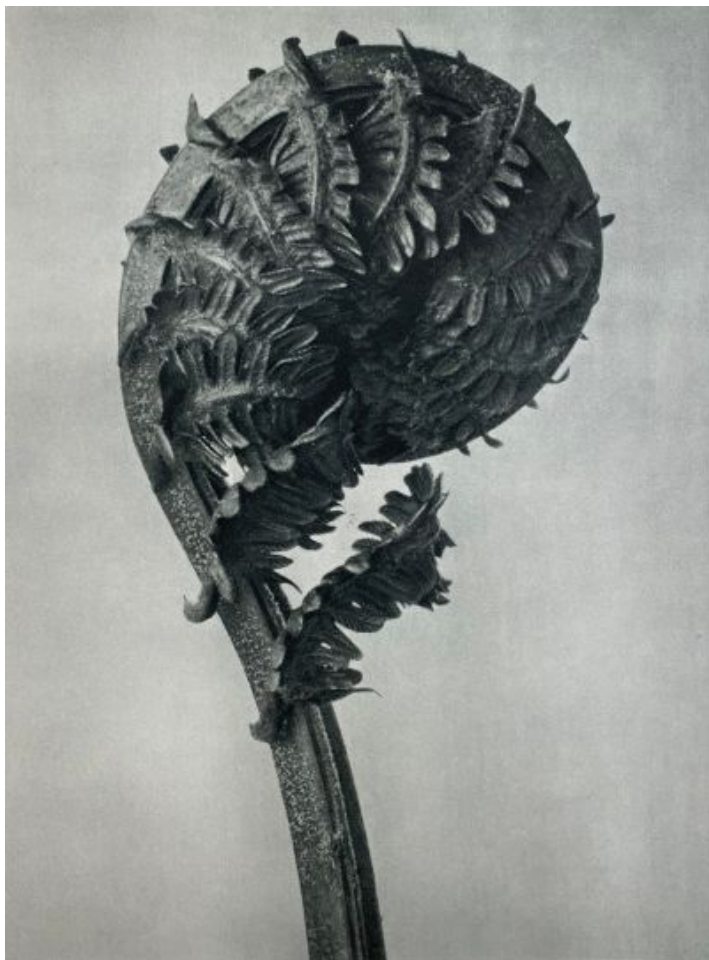
L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

Collezione Ettore Molinario : Dialogues #44 : Karl Blossfeldt / Alain Fleischer

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Ettore Molinario

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The 44th dialogue of the **Collezione Ettore Molinario** unfolds within a vital game of coincidences, one I believe in and often trust when encountering the authors I love most. Its epicentre? Rome. And one day, in Rome, two extraordinary men and one extraordinary woman arrived.

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Albert Einstein once said that coincidence « is God's way of remaining anonymous ». Now, I don't know whether God – a most discreet one, if anything – is truly behind that mysterious, unconscious, inexplicable force that draws certain lives to certain places where life flows more intensely. Still I can't help but be struck by the discovery that Karl Blossfeldt and Alain Fleischer began imagining and creating the images in this visual dialogue in the same city: Rome. Karl Blossfeldt arrived in Rome in 1890 at the age of twenty-five, supported by a scholarship. He was then a sculpture student at the Universität der Künste, the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts. A hundred years later, in 1985, Alain Fleischer also came to the Eternal City, now in his forties and the recipient of a photography fellowship from Villa Medici, the seat of the French Academy. Back in 1884, Blossfeldt had met his mentor, Moritz Meurer – a painter born in the very year photography was invented, 1839. Meurer was one of the first to study the morphology and structural principles of plants, turning their ornamental richness into both an artistic method and a teaching philosophy. In 1981, in Saint-Étienne, during a major retrospective of his work, Fleischer met Danielle Schirman – who from that moment on would become his wonderful life companion. A filmmaker herself, she too went on to receive the Villa Medici fellowship in 1987. Two artists, two deep connections, one city. Immersed in Rome's creative energy –regenerative in its endless variety of forms and the flowing of centuries – both Blossfeldt and Fleischer saw their destinies shift.

Under Meurer's guidance, Karl Blossfeldt had taken his very first photographs of flowers in Rome, highlighting their forms and that unique inner blend of function and raw, powerful beauty. It was this early work that would later lead to his artistic research, eventually collected in the 1928 volume *Urformen der Kunst (Art Forms in Nature)*, one of the most influential books of the twentieth century – so much so that even Walter Benjamin engaged with its ideas. Alain Fleischer – semiotician, anthropologist, writer in the language of the Marquis de Sade, photographer and filmmaker – took things further. He transformed the reflective surfaces of objects – like a knife, for instance, where Danielle's face appears mirrored – into generators of new images.

Is it perhaps the love of nature, and love itself – for images, for the act of creation – that turns every artist into a demiurge, and binds such unique destinies together? I like to think so. And I like to believe that Rome has something to do with it. Too much intensity, too much time, too many images covering every surface and giving birth to new ones – not to be affected by it seems impossible. And I'm reminded of yet another coincidence. In 1898, a few years after returning from Rome, Blossfeldt became a teacher at the very school where he had once been a student.

In 1997, Alain Fleischer founded, and has since directed, *Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains*, where one of the youngest artists in my collection, Agata Wieczorek, trained. Rome, eternal teacher of life? Perhaps. But one thing is certain: Alain and Danielle never truly left Rome or its countryside. In their home, they grow beautiful plants and keep shaping their love in ever new forms.

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