

BRUNO V. ROELS: Delicate Matter by Willemijn van der Zwaan in GUP, p. 122-129 on July 13th 2018

Article

Delicate Matter

by Willemijn van der Zwaan

To own a photograph is to be in a constant state of worry about its preservation. Sunlight will make it fade, silverfish will nibble at its edges, and moisture is its arch enemy. In a way, a photograph is always a delicate object. Not the image or what is depicted, but the photographic print itself. No matter if it's an analogue or digital creation, anything printed on paper is at the mercy of the elements.

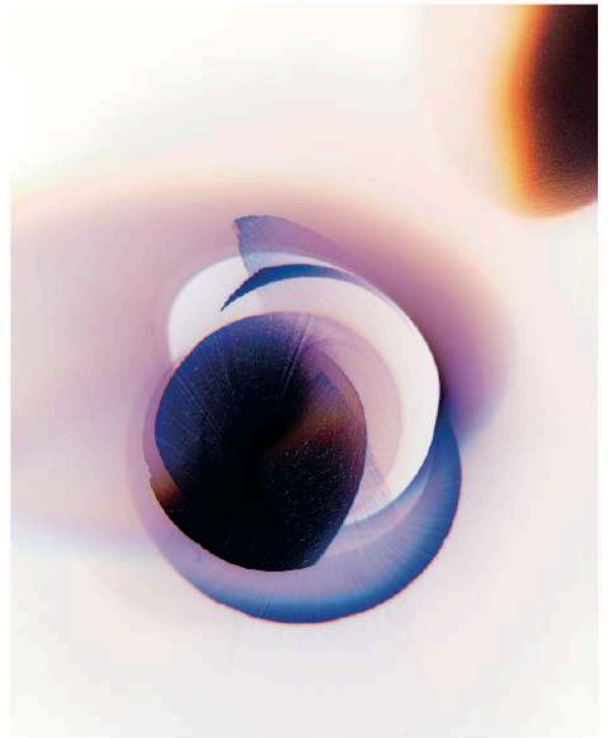
The whole act of turning a negative (or a jpeg) into a physical object is arguably the most bewitching thing about photography. How utterly mind-blowing it is, that something captured through a lens can be turned into a beautiful physical image! Luckily, plenty of contemporary artists are seemingly aware of potential methods to elevate a photograph into a unique object, and to play with the materiality and tangibility of the medium in myriad ways.

Collage seems to be making a revival, but the incorporation of various other techniques, such as embroidery or painting, has also become increasingly popular. What all these different approaches have in common is that artists apply them in order, it seems, to undercut one of the essential characteristics of the medium: its reproducibility. By adding a handmade element to a print – a swipe of paint or even the cut of a knife – photographers manage to create something that is truly unique.

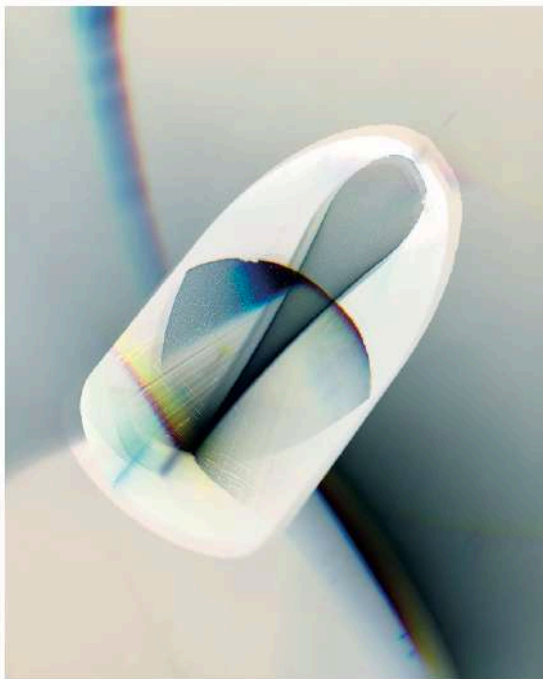
The fact that you can endlessly print an image has always set photography apart from painting and sculpture, with the consequence that many have considered it a lesser form of art. This notion was not really helped by the so-called 'limited' editions that flooded the art market when the appreciation for collecting photography started to grow in the 1980s and '90s.



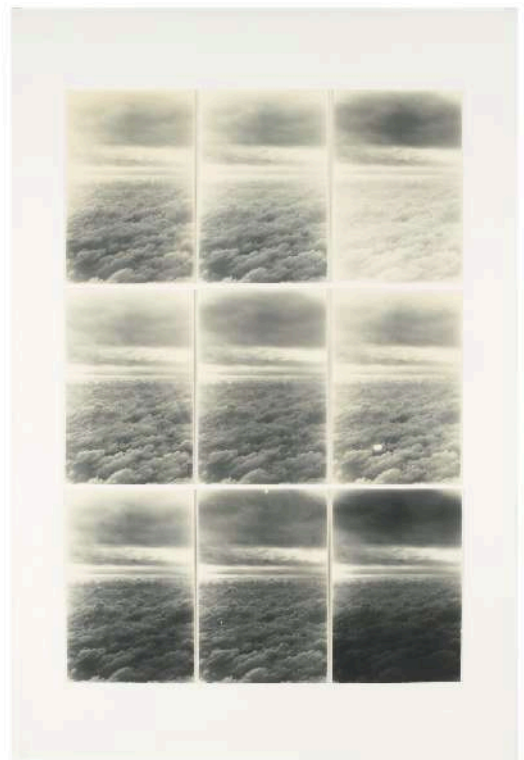
© Sjoerd Kribbe: Exploded View #92, 2017



© Sjoerd Kribbe: Exploded View #10, 2017



© Sjoerd Kribbe: Exploded View #4, 2017



© Bruce V. Bork: Would you Still Love Me if I Had Done Something Terrible, 2016

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Belgian artist **Bruno V. Roels** (b. 1976) is someone who felt frustrated by the phenomenon of editions and went looking for ways to undermine it. He does this by presenting all the prints he makes at once, instead of selecting just the best one. He uses these prints to create singular compositions, consisting sometimes of dozens, even hundreds, of varying copies of the same negative, in an endlessly captivating rhythm of images. In his deeply philosophical and poetic exploration of photography, Roels has thus placed the act of printing on the same level of importance as capturing the image itself. Heavy experimentation in the darkroom is his key to freedom from the limits imposed by the rules of photography. He doesn't aspire to make the perfect print; for him, each print of an image holds value.

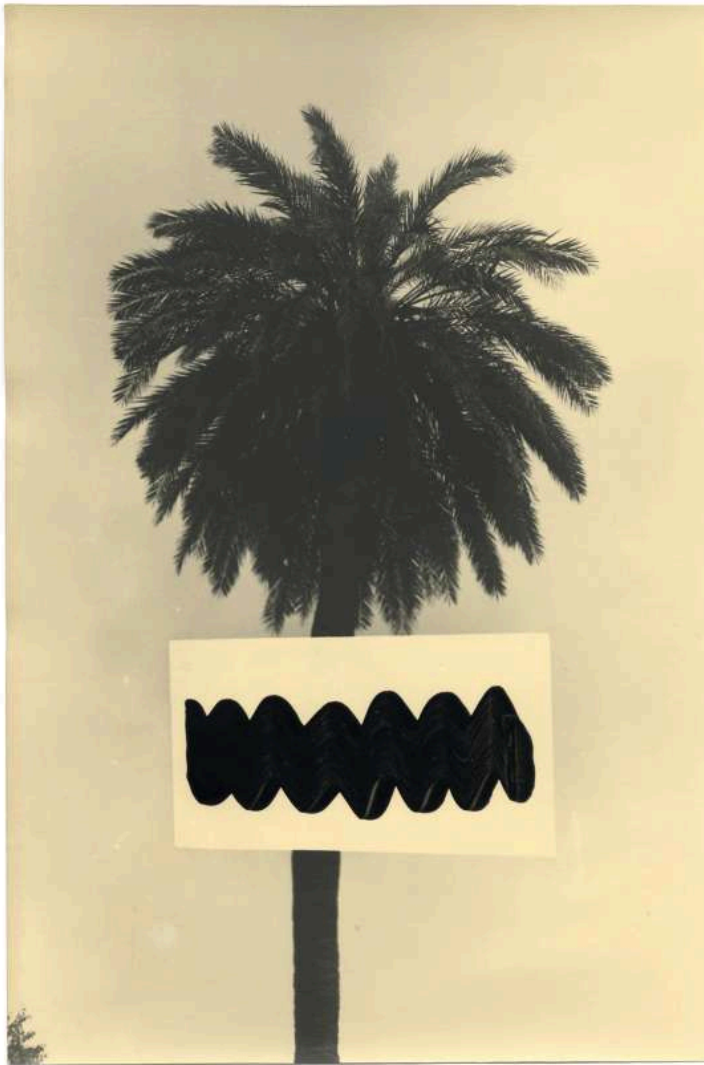
Besides reproducibility, another key element to this trend of artists who are fascinated with the materiality of photography is the urge to free photography from its flatness. By adding something to the image physically or by creating a three-dimensional work, they are emphasising the idea that a photo doesn't necessarily have to be a picture in a frame.

For his latest project, *Exploded Views*, **Sjoerd Knibbeler** (b. 1981, The Netherlands) decided to return to the very origin of the medium by creating his own version of the camera obscura, the prototype of the photo camera. Like Roels, he aims to be liberated from photographic conventions and to refamiliarise himself (and his audience) with the medium by going back to its source.

In Knibbeler's camera, a beam of sunlight is sent through a number of handmade prisms. The white light is dispersed in a spectrum of colours through these prisms, which he set up in different compositions to ultimately record them as photograms. He frames these photograms in perspex cubes, turning them into highly ephemeral objects. In that sense, not unlike Roels, Knibbeler successfully arrives at something that is essentially photographic: producing a delicate entity, strengthened by highlighting its characteristics.

brunoroels.com

sjoerdknibbeler.com



© Bruno V. Roels, Fake Billboards #3, 2018



© Bruno V. Roels, Fake Billboards #2, 2018