

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



RIVER #15, 2021, hand toned gelatin silver print, 96.5 x 66 cm / 38.3 x 26 in., Ed. 1/3.
Signed in pencil on the print border under the mat and on the back of the removable mount.

THOMAS BRUMMETT

This Shimmering World

From November 6 to December 30, 2021

Opening on Saturday November 6th from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., in the presence of the artist.

“If there is a rule that defines what a photograph is today it is simply that there are no rules. The question today is just what constitutes a photograph [...]? If every mark in a photograph is made by hand with a camera, lens and light sensitive materials processed in the darkroom, yet it seems more a drawing than anything else, then what kind of photograph is it? Abstraction, Photographic Document or Dream? On a good day, my images are all three.”

Thomas Brummett, 2017.

Galerie Karsten Greve is delighted to present *This Shimmering World*, the new solo exhibition by the American photographer Thomas Brummett, who will unveil his series *RIVER* and *HALOS*. Like the rest of his *œuvre*, they are part of his vast project *Rethinking the Natural*, which he defines himself as “the project of a lifetime”. Immanence and meditative observations shape the genesis of his approach, which celebrates nature in all its forms and tackles the themes of the infinite and the divine.

In the “Allegory of the Cave”, Plato developed the theory of visual perception by mentioning a metaphysics of light. Uncovering these secrets is an obsession that has haunted many artists for centuries and Thomas Brummett is no exception: “*A lot of my work is about process transcendence, observation, alchemy [...]*”.

In his new series, light thus reigns supreme. Whether in the play of reflections of the ripple blurring the edges of reality or the radiance of a sunbeam in the lens, the photographer handles the infinite subtleties of natural phenomena with poetry. His penchant for Buddhism and Taoist philosophy taught him to pay full attention to the world around him. Like a gaze diving into the essence of beauty, he bows down in rapt contemplation to the imperfect perfection of nature. For Brummett,

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this attention is not restricted to the motif of fleeting details such as reflections on the water or the movements of rustling leaves that fleetingly part for light. He sees his work as a continuation of the history of natural sciences, which fascinated the world during the 19th century, and insists on the fact all images are actually meditations resulting from a long observation, making it possible to see and feel the world in its entirety.

As he worked on his new series *RIVER* and *HALOS*, Thomas Brummett returned to the codes of documentary photography, which aims to capture a situation or environment while maintaining an observational neutrality. The artist thus lends himself to a kind of meditation, similarly to Buddhist meditation, for example, which calls for a detached contemplation of the world and oneself. He is both committed to revealing nature and curious about photographic technique and science. Brummett masters the medium of photography to explore all the possibilities offered by working with light. The final image is thus a visualization of this process, sublimated by chromogenic printing, which makes some of the photos look like photographic drawings.

The images in the *RIVER* series are based on almost abstract organic motifs. Parts of the forest are reflected in the aqueous undulations of *River #14* and *River #15*, but also in more abstract shots such as *River Diptych #3*. That forest is not, however, made up of living, lush vegetation. On the contrary, after attentive observation, the viewer can see trees bereft of their leaves with burnt trunks and emaciated silhouettes like skeletons. Thomas Brummett sees these reflections of light on the water as a portal to a parallel universe. He wrote “*These pictures are of reflections. Portals into a reversed other world; a kind of fractured looking glass*”. “*You can experience these works as an environmental message, a kind of photographic drawing, or just meditations on a meandering river. Many symbols revealed themselves on the River: bird and winged reflections comfort us but a few also hint at our burned forests and poisoned water. The camera for me is my way to explore all this and more*”. Some works also pay tribute to the great masters of art, celebrating the waves of Katsushika Hokusai or the landscapes of Sesshū Tōyō. *River #12 (For Soulages)* displays the same light effects as Pierre Soulages’ *Outrenoirs*. Dedicating works to the great masters who came before him is a way for the photographer to converse with history. He sees perpetuating the timeless dialogue between artists as a rite of passage.

The *HALOS* series, on the other hand, raises the question and the meaning of the phenomenon of light, especially the spectrum we are not able to experience. The evanescent halos are physical manifestations of the immaterial, perceptible to the eye only for an instant. In some of Brummett’s photos, light appears secretly through the dense leaves as a celestial shape, as in *Halos #13 (Ascension)* and *Halos #12 (For the Fallen)*. Inversely, in *Halos #9*, the luminous radiance erases the landscape in an intense flash, leaving only optical effects and the colorful glows of the sunbeams.

His photos seem to hold a great deal of mystery, allowing the viewer to dream and reflect on the essence of a work that transcends the traditional photographic observation of nature to create dreamlike images of an exceptional aesthetic quality, guiding the viewer to a state of full consciousness.

Thomas Brummett was born in Colorado, United States, in 1955. After studying ceramics and photography at Colorado State University (Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1979) and Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan (Master of Fine Arts, 1982), he settled in Philadelphia. He became a freelance photographer in 1983 and taught at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia from 1985 to 1990.

Raised in an episcopal Christian family, he discovered Buddhism and Taoism during his travels in Asia as an adult. He was drawn to the serene immanence and environmental aspect of the Eastern theologies, which inspired him to develop his major project *Rethinking the Natural*, which overarches all his series. The contemplation of nature is at the heart of the *Nature morte* (1993-97), *Desert* (1997-99), *Nocturne* (2000-04) and *Animalis* (2005-07) series, while the projects *Diatoms* (2004), *Light Projections* (2013-18) and *The Infinities* (2013-19) tackle the infinite through a very scientific approach. The series *The Murmur of a thousand suns*, *Halos* and *River* (2020-21) further that research and explore the phenomenon of light in its most diverse forms.

Thomas Brummett’s works feature in many public collections including those of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the United States and the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His work has earned him many prizes, notably the International Photography Award in 2004, 2009 and 2012 and the Sony World Photography Award in 2014. Thomas Brummett lives and works in Philadelphia (US).