



**SIGMAR POLKE: PHOTOGRAPHS 1969 – 1974**  
**November 10 – December 24, 2005**

Nyehaus is pleased to present an exhibition of 30 photographs created between 1969 and 1974 by Sigmar Polke. These highly personal images come from the collection of Mariette Althaus, Polke's girlfriend during that time. The subject matter ranges from the erotic to the euphoric, laced with Polke's signature: a sardonic sensibility.

During the late '60s and early '70s, Polke shed his German Pop roots for the more formally layered style that would permit him to fuse subject and process, provocatively and inextricably, in his paintings and with palpable potency, in his photography. With one foot in the overtly figurative, the works in this exhibition offer a window into the uncompromising experimentations with flaring and layering that were about to be conceived. Bice Curiger's description of this synthesis- the eroticism captured in the picture... makes the silver of the photograph 'blush'- articulates Polke as image-maker and sorcerer.

Mariette, in sundry states of grace, is the subject of the majority of the photographs. The sexualized spirit of the '60s and '70s literally bleeds through the photographic paper, caressing the naked bodies of Mariette and friends in gardens of earthly delights. In subject and in the form-flaring effects, the veiling, and the soft sensuality of the printing, the series captures the rapture in Polke's personal life and in his subject-accentuating artistic development.

In the early '70s financial remuneration finally synchronized with critical appreciation of Polke. This confluence is captured in a photograph of Mariette, gleefully fanning herself with the cache of cash from the artist's first major sale. And so it goes with Polke, who uses his muse as a mirror to reveal beautiful imperfections and spontaneous reactions. Wry and sly, his art has continued to defy categorization.



**Once upon a Time, or Two or Three Things She Knew about Them..**

By Mariette Althaus

René Char wrote somewhere "To live is to insist on finishing on a memory." Only, how could she flaunt herself (and, above all, why show off) about such a force of evidence, because *"The Photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been."*<sup>1</sup>

At the end of an afternoon in Lucerne. He was conversing with Leonardo; he would transform into a palm-tree; he would reinvent the relationship between numbers. He would suck on the red flower of a geranium. After the shock of the geranium, she sent him a first image: beautiful Artemis.<sup>2</sup> She found herself happy then, in the role of lover-mother-wet nurse. The city of Paris made of them a new Alcyone and Ceyx.<sup>3</sup> They drifted in a joyous, paradoxically mind-blowing ecstasy. She and he belonged to McLuhan's generation of the Gutenberg Galaxy. In the absence of all norms of rest, they experienced things as important as discussing Blake's mysticism or knowing that a cubic centimeter of ordinary fog holds five million drops for a weight that amounts to not even two ounces, that a soccer match is exciting when a goal is scored and that the laugh of Don Martin goes back all the way to the high point of antiquity. And then their trips resembled them; surprising entelechy. This prince of Iconoclasm let her pass from flower to flower, the kind that grow in the center of beds and develop wings. With him, she laughed unbelievably, enormously, incredibly, fabulously. And cried as much. Before they opened the windows of Gaspelhof onto the horizon, they used to sleep under a flamingo's smile. Of course he was always the center, the omphalos, the core, but really that was bloody well all the same to her (she fibs: only sometimes). "They" was "natural." She was living beside an unbridled and insatiable visionary, made to order for her. He has genius, of course everyone has more or less his own brand of genius, but he has several. He often said and repeated that it was the process that interests him, not the end result. She took part in an indefinite number of processes in fast motion. He taught her that the soul always thinks in images.



"It seems that in Latin 'photograph' would be said 'imago lucis opera expressa'; which is to say: image revealed, 'extracted,' 'mounted,' 'expressed' (like the juice of a lemon) by the action of light. And if Photography belonged to a world with some residual sensitivity to myth, we should exult over the richness of the symbol: the loved body is immortalized by the mediation of a precious metal, silver, (monument and luxury); to which we might add the notion that this metal, like all the metals of Alchemy, is alive."<sup>4</sup> He divested her ferociously (tenderly? lovingly?) of herself. And succeeded evidently and as always in shooting for the moon by making her coincide with her image.

"In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am , the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself..."

-Translated by Sally Shafto

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 2000), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> One of the most popular Divinities among mortals, Artemis was the guardian of children and the patron of women in childbirth. She was also the ruler of the nymphs, notorious for their sexual activity, and her cult became associated with prostitution. The author cites here a love myth recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.

<sup>3</sup> Alcyone and Ceyx were a devoted couple, rarely apart, until Ceyx was called away to consult an oracle. His boat sank en route and he drowned. Alcyone's grief was so great that the gods transformed them both into kingfishers so that they would be reunited.

<sup>4</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 81.