

intimacy, as everything is brought too close for comfort. Body parts are also made unrecognisable through movement and changes of scale in **Mona Hatoum's** *Testimony* (1995–2002) and **Wim Delvoye's** *Sybille II* (1999), but it is the body parts themselves that are moving, rather than the camera. In all three films, the defamiliarising effects of the close-up allude to the uncanny experience of seeing but initially not recognising body parts that appear to take on a life of their own, performing like independent organisms, only eventually recognised as object, repugnant.

Like the involuntary sculptures of Dalí and Brassai, the works of **Mel Bochner**, **John Hilliard** and **Mike Kelley** investigate the effects of scale on everyday objects. In *Transparent and Opaque* (1968/1998), Bochner employed photographers from the world of advertising to capture transparent and opaque household substances such as toothpaste and shaving cream. Bochner was interested in the effects of changing conditions such as lighting and distance, and the experience of looking again at

the overlooked. In *The Most Plausible Theory* (No. 3) (1976), **John Hilliard** also exploits the conditions of photography, most notably with changing focal points that create the repeated demand for greater attention at different registers, as if we are seeing the world again in each image.

It is perhaps **Mike Kelley's** series of photographs of dustballs, *Untitled (Dust)* (1994), that most dramatically bring little things up close and make them strange. Dust is human matter, the form to which we all return, but more importantly it is ubiquitous and unappreciated. Through his use of the close-up, Kelley has produced the progeny of *Dust Breeding*, a family of 'involuntary sculptures'. The close-up challenges the primacy of the human eye as interpreter, transforming the world through the lens, and making us look again and look for longer.

A comprehensive catalogue containing new essays from the curators accompanies the exhibition. Available from the Bookshop, priced £15.95

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Close-Up

**Proximity and defamiliarisation
in art, film and photography**

Exhibition **24 October 2008 – 11 January 2009**

Laure Albin-Guillot
Aenne Biermann
Karl Blossfeldt
Mel Bochner
Jacques-André Boiffard
Stan Brakhage
Brassai
Luis Buñuel
Kate Craig
Salvador Dalí
Wim Delvoye
Mona Hatoum
John Hilliard
Mike Kelley
Eli Lotar
Dora Maar
Man Ray
Jean Painlevé
Giuseppe Penone
Albert Renger-Patzsch
Carolee Schneemann
Simon Starling

This exhibition traces historically significant moments for the close-up over the past 150 years, exploring its persistence as a practice for avant-garde artists. The range of material in *Close-Up* encompasses historic and contemporary forms of lens-based media, including lantern slides and modern slides, original and reproduced images in books and periodicals, vintage and contemporary photographic prints, and experimental film and photographic processes. Curators Dawn Ades and Simon Baker isolate periods of interest in the close-up, focusing on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century microphotography and film; avant-garde work from the 1920s and 1930s; conceptual art, and contemporary photography and film. The subjects of the work broadly fall into two groups: in the first, the subjects are taken from the natural world, while the focus in the second is on the human body and its effects.

At the entrance to the exhibition, an image of tiny organisms is projected as it was originally intended, a magnified view of one of **Ellen Willmott's** lantern slides in the display cabinet nearby. The display cabinets introduce us to nineteenth-century microphotography, which enlarged very small things and allowed scientists to see them with greater

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clarity. Where microscopes made it possible for the individual to glimpse 'wonders', images of things otherwise invisible to the naked eye, micro-photography made it possible for greater numbers of people to scrutinise and circulate these images, as **W.H. Olley** proposed in his book, *The Wonders of the Microscope* (1861). Microphotography allowed scientific photographers to reproduce an image of any microscopic subject, from single-celled organisms to the eye of a fly. In this room, photographs are presented on cabinet cards used for research purposes, pasted into books, and as other complex forms of prints. By the early twentieth century, film projection also magnified objects for scientific study. In *Crabes et Crevettes* (1929), the pioneering filmmakers **Jean Painlevé** and **Eli Lotar** filmed sea creatures close-up under water.

For scientists, microphotography and film expanded visual knowledge about the natural world. By the 1920s and 1930s, microphotography had also become an art form in itself. Photographers such as Laure Albin-Guillot and Albert Renger-Patzsch produced images that not only allowed a greater understanding of the form and structure of subjects, but were also used to think about relationships between natural forms and design. The naturalist and photographer **Karl Blossfeldt** used his own photographs of enlarged plant fragments to teach principles of form to art and design students, and the publication of his book *Art Forms in Nature* (1928) brought his work to a wider audience. Blossfeldt's work was embraced by both German and French avant-garde artists through their exhibition at the Bauhaus and reproduction in

French publications such as **Amédée Ozenfant's** *The Foundations of Modern Art* (1931) and Georges Bataille's essay *The Language of Flowers*. Blossfeldt's extreme close-ups of animals and parts of insects, such as *Libelle* (Mayfly: c.1886), resonate with **Stan Brakhage's** *Mothlight* (1963), in which he applied moth wings, sections of petals and grasses directly onto the filmstrip. Brakhage had hoped that his experimental film would capture the view 'as a moth might see from birth to death if black were white'.

In the adjoining gallery, the work explores two directions the close-up takes during the 1920s and 1930s: expanding vision and seeing more closely on the one hand, and misrecognition of the subject and defamiliarisation on the other. In his book *Painting Photography Film* (1925), **László Moholy-Nagy** proposed that the medium of photography could offer a revolutionary vision, applying the term 'New Objectivity' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) to this new vision, which embraced the close-up as 'intensified seeing'. Photographers such as **Renger-Patzsch** and **Aenne Biermann** produced photographs which possess great clarity of focus and precise composition. Biermann's close-ups of people and objects, usually overlooked, propose relationships between unrelated things.

The close-up could bring the viewer closer to an objective reality or further away from what was recognisable, heightening reality or rendering the familiar strange. In **Brassaï** and **Salvador Dalí's** series of photographs entitled 'involuntary sculptures', little bits of detritus become plausible sculptural forms. In the photographs and films of **Jacques-André**

Boiffard, Brassai, Luis Buñuel and **Dalí**, confusion of scale contributes to the defamiliarising effects of the close-up. Publications such as *Documents* and *Minotaure* produced close-ups of small subjects juxtaposed with distance shots of larger subjects to suggest surprising affinities. Likewise, in **Buñuel** and **Dalí's** *Un chien andalou* (1929), the close-up, along with rapid shifts of scale, changing focal points and metaphorical montages, contributed to an irrational narrative built on resemblances and distinctions.

Throughout the 1920s, experimental photography and film was used to make everyday objects appear strange. Photograms were produced by placing objects directly onto light-sensitive paper and then exposing them to light. Although the process dates back to the origins of photography in the nineteenth century, Man Ray's interest in exploiting this process led him to produce a series of works which he called rayographs. **Man Ray** translated this photographic process to film in *Le retour à la raison* (1923), in which he sprinkled salt and pepper, pins and tin tacks directly onto short strips of film and then exposed them to light, to produce a film of negative forms, white on black. When projected, magnification and movement further defamiliarise these objects.

Man Ray's *Dust Breeding* (1920) is another example of the effects of defamiliarisation. When this photograph of a layer of dust on Duchamp's sculpture *The Large Glass* was published, Man Ray provided a caption alongside, referring to it as a 'view from an aeroplane'.

Simon Starling brings the effects of heightened reality and defamiliarisation

together in his work *Inventar-Nr. 8573 (Man Ray)* (2006), a work which takes Man Ray's photograph *Geological Fold* (1930) as its starting point. Slide by slide, the work gradually takes us closer and more deeply into the surface of the photograph to a point where the surface itself dematerialises into floating silver molecules.

Upstairs, everyday objects and human bodies remain consistent subjects for the close-up in post war conceptual and contemporary art. Here, the close-up plays a critical role in mapping the human body and in other conceptual projects. At the top of the stairs, **Biermann's** *Nose and Mouth* (c.1929) introduces a recognisable fragment of a human face. Images of fragments of the human form constitute **Giuseppe Penone's** *To Display One's Own Skin* (1970) and **Carolee Schneemann's** *Portrait Partials* (1970/2004), but both works operate differently. Each of Penone's 104 photographs are part of a larger conceptual project, an encyclopaedic study of all the surfaces of his own body, measured and presented like an archive, whereas Schneemann's compilation of bodily orifices proposes formal associations between subjects, games of resemblance and misrecognition, as in **Biermann's** juxtaposed images such as *Agate Face* with a human face in the book *60 Fotos*.

Movement is incorporated in the process of mapping **Kate Craig's** body in *Delicate Issue* (1979), in which she directs her husband to film the surfaces of her body at extremely close range. The effects of proximity, movement and projection on a grand scale, together with the sound of breathing and the repeated question 'How close do you want to be?' distort and disturb constructs of bodily