



RICHARD LEAROYD
From 5 JUNE TO 8 SEPTEMBER
SALA FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE CASA GARRIGA NOGUÉS
BARCELONA

Fundación **MAPFRE**

Press conference: 4 June 2019

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Curator: Sandra Phillips

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Press images:

<https://noticias.fundacionmapfre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/RICHARD-LEAROYD.zip>



<http://exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/richardlearoyd>



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Cover image:

Richard Learoyd

Swan, 2013

© Richard Learoyd, courtesy of the artist and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

RICHARD LEAROYD (Nelson, Lancashire, United Kingdom, 1966) is today one of the most well known contemporary photographers. Learoyd's oeuvre is rooted in the past and contains multiple references to the history of painting, as regards subject matter and technique. Both his black-and-white photographs and his works in colour are the result of a traditional process that often involves the use of a darkroom he himself has constructed.

Richard Learoyd's career is distinguished by the unique photographic works that he has been making for over a decade, generally portraits of models – clothed or nude – taken in his studio. Yet he has also explored other themes, such as dark mirrors or animal and landscape photography, all of which are treated as seriously and considerately as his portraits. Many of the animals he depicts are no longer alive and are caught up in pieces of wire or tightened by threads in order to be examined. Unlike the usual material that makes up still life compositions, these are experiments, often playful, made with both ordinary and unfamiliar objects. The mirrors are perhaps the most abstract motifs, resembling deep outer-space constellations. Learoyd has recently made large-scale black-and-white pictures and has even begun to take his huge camera outdoors to photograph landscapes and old buildings he has discovered in small Eastern European towns. In some cases he revisits the same place several times to photograph it at different seasons of the year.

This exhibition presents Richard Learoyd at the peak of his career, exemplified by a selection of fifty-one photographs in colour and black-and-white that sum up his work of a decade. The show also includes one of the landscape photographs he took in Spain (to be precise, on the island of Lanzarote), commissioned by the MAPFRE Foundation and now in our Photography Collection, along with two earlier works by the artist.

His oeuvre was displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London in 2015 and at The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2016. At present, his photographs enhance the permanent collections of important international museums including The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the V&A Museum and the Tate Gallery in London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and numerous private collections. Represented by McKee Gallery in New York up until its closure in 2016, Richard Learoyd is currently represented by Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco and Pace/MacGill Gallery in New York.

The show will open at the Fundació MAPFRE Exhibition Halls in Barcelona and Madrid, and will subsequently tour to the Fotomuseum Den Haag in The Hague.

THE EXHIBITION

The proposed itinerary of the exhibition is thematic rather than chronological, and its walls present a combination of landscapes, portraits and still lifes.

CAMERA OBSCURA PHOTOGRAPHS

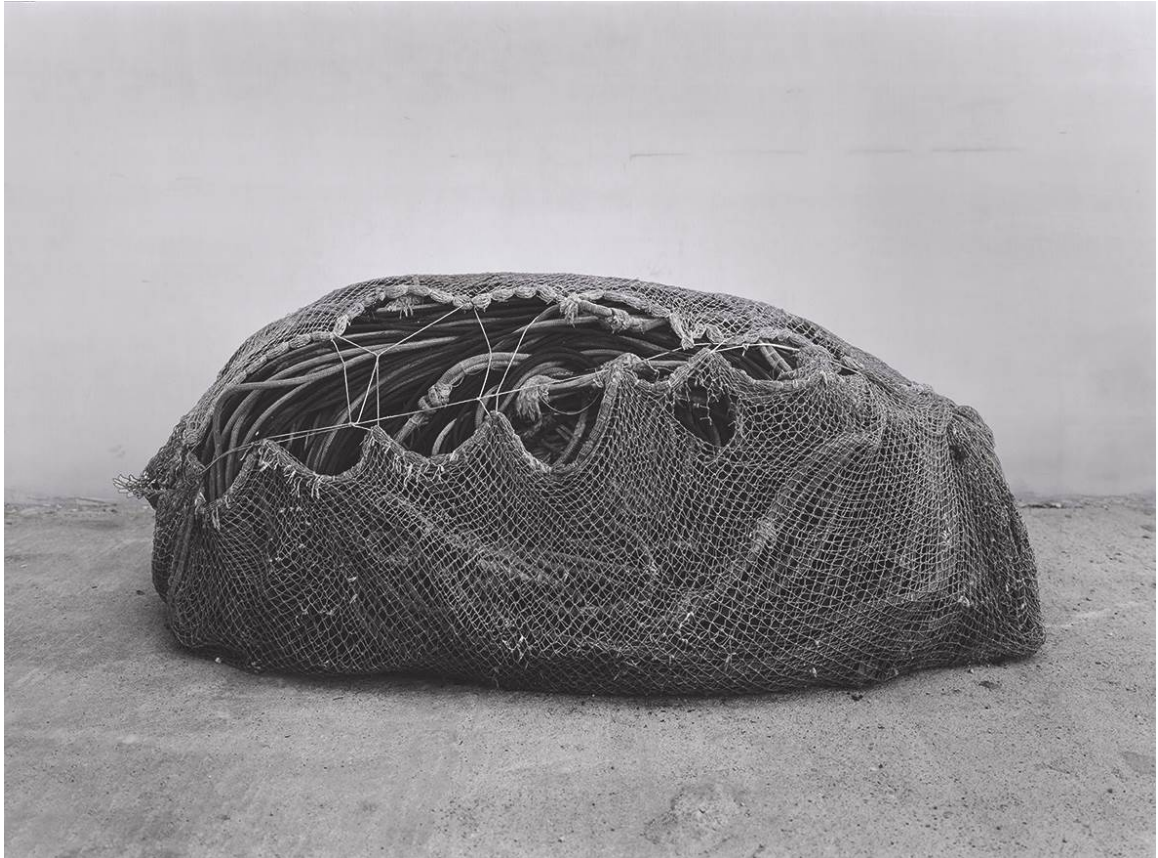
British artist Richard Learoyd has spent approximately twenty years taking photographs with his camera obscura — a huge studio camera he himself has designed based on ancient optical principles. This tool has enabled him to take photographs that have a captivating singularity in an age in which photographs are often abundant and banal. The people featured in his pictures seem to inhabit worlds of heightened psychology and are examined under an extremely crystal clear and distinctive light. Even the motifs he chooses for his still lifes – some of which are quite unusual – are characterised by an exceptionally evocative beauty and calmness.

The photographs he takes with this tool are basically as large as the camera itself. Both the acts of taking the photographs and of beholding them require careful, attentive ways of looking, a contemplative attitude rather than the immediacy with which we usually photograph the world. Learoyd has designed this huge yet flexible camera with the intention of it being movable, despite some limitations. After composing the image, he positions a sheet of photographic paper of the same size as the camera at the back of the machine to create a unique print. In spite of its complexity, thanks to this technology he is able to create highly distinctive works characterised by extraordinary qualities of light and colour. In these photographs nothing is left to chance.

More recently, the photographer has expanded his technological horizon and has designed a camera that he can use outdoors to take a limited number of not unique prints. Once again, these are unlike any other photographs we've seen before and explore a wide variety of themes. Let loose in the outside world, Learoyd has photographed well known places, such as Yosemite Valley in California, and other less familiar territories in Eastern Europe. These new pictures seem to examine the situation of the modern world, breathtakingly beautiful and at once potentially destructive. They represent a liberation from the previous limitations imposed by their self-defined process and are only the beginning of a new vision of a wider world.

NEW PICTURES

Before experimenting with the magical colour pictures for which he is so well known today, Learoyd was a landscape photographer who took classical black-and-white photographs. He has recently managed to modify his huge camera obscura and move it outdoors, thanks to which he is now able to produce pictures that embrace the emotion of discovery.



The Sins of the Father

Contact print on gelatin silver paper, edition of 5

© Richard Learoyd. Courtesy of the artist and of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

While he was working to refine this process, his pictures were gradually increasing in complexity. His first experimental works in black and white resembled his colour photographs, as exemplified by his portraits of Agnes nude and the parliament of magpies trapped by threads. These pictures were taken in his studio. When he moved outdoors, he discovered a discreet and mysterious bag of fishing nets on a beach in Portugal (*The Sins of the Father*), and envisaged a family portrait in front of a manor house (*The Von der Becke Family*), the composition of which is more ambitious. Lately, Learoyd has gone one step further, portraying a deserted lunar landscape on the island of Lanzarote and even the hybrid architectural forms found in Eastern Europe (*Gdansk, Poland*). He also collects cars that have been burnt in the States, which he stores in a warehouse in Texas before photographing their skeletons, which he sees as metaphors of the disturbing present, specimens of some sort of holocaust.

PORTRAITS AND FIGURES



After Ingres, 2011

Unique photograph on Ilfochrome paper

Pier 24 Photography, San Francisco

© Richard Learoyd. Courtesy of the artist and of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Although the people we see in Learoyd's studio pictures seem quite contemporary, as if they had just sat down and were waiting for him to finish adjusting his strange, bulky camera, the figures also possess a timeless quality that evokes the art of the past. Since ancient times, portraits and figure paintings have featured prominently in visual expression. In museums all over the world we come across pictures of people, either clothed or naked, sitting patiently while an artist depicts the elaborate embroidery on a dress or the precise complexion of a beautiful young girl. Besides focusing on the old masters of the Renaissance, Learoyd has studied nineteenth-century painters like Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, a particularly elegant portraitist. Ingres was also a master of the nude, and some of his paintings are echoed in the photographer's images of figures. Similarly, in spite of the fact that his pictures strike up a dialogue with the paintings by British Pre-Raphaelite artists, Learoyd is particularly drawn to Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.

Yet as relevant as these artistic forerunners is the distinctive personality of the artist, whose particular form of perception transforms his chosen motifs. Learoyd's figure studies and portraits are uniquely aligned with the present: the impression of distance, internalised emotions and the strange beauty of his bodies betray an unsettling present.

STILL LIFES [ARRESTED LIVES]

Learoyd has shown a specific interest in the still life, although his compositions in this genre are substantially different to many of the classical examples we find throughout the history of art. The seventeenth-century still-life paintings made in the Netherlands often represented sumptuous objects and included symbols of the passage of time such as extravagant bunches of flowers in which insects lurk. The works by renowned eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Siméon Chardin highlighted the simple pleasures of a humble life: freshly picked cherries on a dish, a loaf of bread depicted exquisitely and precisely. Later painters, from Impressionism onwards, would also arrange objects in their studios in order to examine them; Paul Cézanne and his modern followers enjoyed setting out apples on a table. Traditionally, still lifes have made few emotional demands on their beholders.

Learoyd has rethought the still life, placing special emphasis on the meaning of the term. These are photographs of lives that have been arrested. Some bear a likeness to images we are already familiar with: a branch with wild apples, for instance, appears to be unusually casual and laden with fruit as if it had just been pulled off a tree in a garden in order to be photographed in an interior. Others are at once beautiful and disturbing: the head of a horse with its lustrous white mane and dark sparkling eye, lifeless, that mark a clear contrast with the deep red blood on its neck. Learoyd has also positioned magpies and swans as hanging decorations, staging them imaginatively even though they are dead. Some of his most original pictures present hybrid forms that the artist himself has sculpted with creatures that were once alive: *Fish Heart I*, for instance, consists of two organisms that have been sewn and suspended in mid-air.



Fish Heart I, 2009

Unique photograph on Ilfochrome paper

Collection of Samuel Merrin

© Richard Learoyd. Courtesy of the artist and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The catalogue that accompanies the exhibition includes essays by Philip Gfelter, writer and photography critic of *The New York Times*, and Sandra S. Phillips, Curator Emeritus of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and curator of the show.

The book is published in Catalan and Spanish by the MAPFRE Foundation. The English version is a co-edition by the MAPFRE Foundation and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND CATALOGUES

2007 *Twenty Two Photographs*, Union Gallery, London (18 November 2007- 2 March 2008). Catalogue includes essays by Christopher Bucklow and Martin Barnes: *Richard Learoyd. Twenty Two Photographs 2005-07* (self-published by the artist), 2008.

2009 *Unique Photographs*, McKee Gallery, New York (24 September - 31 October 2009). Catalogue includes an interview by Christopher Bucklow entitled 'Richard Learoyd. Unique Photographs, 2007-09'.

2011 *Presences*, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (5 May -25 June 2011). Catalogue. *Portraits and Figures*, McKee Gallery, New York (28 September - 29 October 2011). Catalogue includes an essay by Mark Alice Durant.

2013 *Still/Life*, McKee Gallery, New York (9 May - 30 June 2013). Catalogue includes an essay by Charles Moffet.

The Outside World, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (12 September - 26 October 2013).

2015 *Dark Mirror*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (24 October 2015 - 14 February 2016).

2016 *Day for Night*, Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York (1 - 30 April 2016). Catalogue includes essays Martin Barnes, Nancy Gryspeerdt and Richard Learoyd: *Richard Learoyd: Day for Night*, Aperture Foundation and Pier 24 Photography, New York and San Francisco, 2015.

In the Studio, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (30 August - 27 November 2016), and The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (10 February - 11 June 2017).

2017 *Richard Learoyd*, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (5 January - 4 March 2017).

2018 *Work from Two Rooms*, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (25 October - 22 December 2018).

2019 *Richard Learoyd*, Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York (3 April - 11 May 2019).

Richard Learoyd, Fundació MAPFRE, Casa Garriga Nogués, Barcelona (5 June - 8 September 2019), Fotomuseum Den Haag, The Hague (5 October 2019 - 5 January

2020), and Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid (19 February - 24 May 2020). Catalogue includes essays by Sandra S. Phillips and Philip Gelter: Fundación MAPFRE (Catalan and Spanish), and Fundación MAPFRE in collaboration with Fraenkel Gallery (English), Madrid, 2019.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (SELECTION)

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid

Centre Pompidou, Paris

Middlebury College Museum of Art, Middlebury, Vermont

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario

Pier 24 Photography, San Francisco, California

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California

Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh, Scotland

Tate Gallery, London

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California

The JP Morgan Chase Art Collection, New York

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ADDRESS

Fundación MAPFRE

Casa Garriga Nogués

C/ Diputació, 250

infoexposbcn@fundacionmapfre.org

ADMISSION FEES

General admission: € 3 per person

Free admission: Mondays except Bank Holidays from 2.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

OPENING HOURS

Mondays from 2.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Sundays and Bank Holidays from 11.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.

GUIDED TOURS

Mondays to Thursdays: 5.30 p.m. (Catalan) and 6.30 p.m. (Spanish)

Price per tour: € 5

AUDIO GUIDES

Audio guides: Catalan / Spanish / English

Price per guide: € 3.50