

# Karl Blossfeldt

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**Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932)** is now recognised as one of the key figures in the development of twentieth century photography.

As a self-taught photographer, Blossfeldt used this newly emerging medium in support of his argument that all forms created by man had their origins in nature. Building a series of cameras with interchangeable lenses, he was able to examine his botanical specimens in unprecedented, microscopic detail revealing their tactile nature, intricate forms and uncanny characteristics.

Blossfeldt produced the majority of his photographs during his tutorship in Berlin, where he worked in relative obscurity until he was invited to exhibit at Karl Nierendorf's gallery in 1926. With the encouragement of this gallerist, Blossfeldt brought together a number of his images of plants in one volume, a selection of which are shown here. The response to the first edition by such figures as critic Walter Benjamin repositioned Blossfeldt at the heart of debates around modern art and photography.

This exhibition looks at the circulation and use of these images through such activities as book production, teaching and exhibition making. It also considers the reaction to the publication in 1928 of Blossfeldt's *Urformen der Kunst (Artforms in Nature)*.

Shown alongside his book works are five, rarely-seen 'working collages', which are believed to have assisted Blossfeldt in the editing and organisation of material for his publications. While they follow a format that we are now familiar with through conceptual art practice's analysis through a grid structure, they demonstrate how Blossfeldt at an early stage categorised his subject matter and drew comparisons between diverse natural forms.

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#### Find out more:

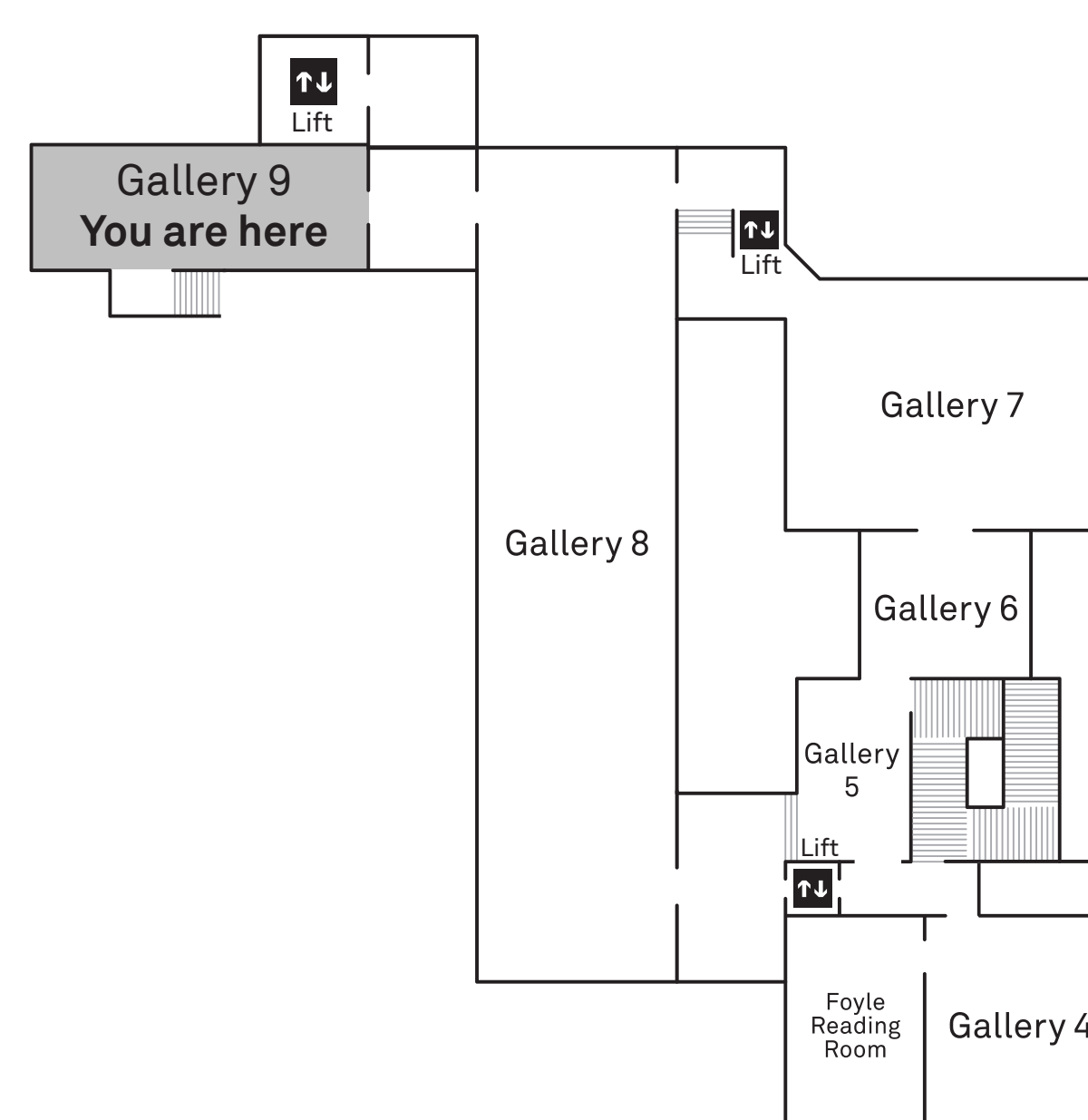
Karl Blossfeldt is organised by the Whitechapel Gallery with thanks to Karl Blossfeldt Archive at Stiftung Ann and Jürgen Wilde; Pinakothek der Moderne; Berlin University of the Arts; Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur; Chelsea College of Art and Design Library; Simon Baker; Inès de Bordas; Michael Hoppen; Jack Kirkland; Rajka Knipper and Goethe Institut, London.

The exhibition has been generously supported by David Knaus.

A series of limited edition prints by contemporary artists will be made in response to this exhibition. Please ask at the information desk for further details.

A programme of events will take place to accompany the exhibition. Please see the season guide for details.

**MARTINSPEED**





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Karl Blossfeldt trained as a sculptor and taught at what is now Berlin University of the Arts from the late nineteenth century until his death in 1932.

Throughout his career, Blossfeldt amassed a vast body of botanical photographs that are now acknowledged for the critical role that they played in new approaches to observation and scale, heralding the transition from Art Nouveau's preoccupation with form to Modernism's analytical methods.

Gallery 8 shows over 80 images that were used by Blossfeldt in his teaching practice. These photographs acted as a tool to assist students in his plant modelling class and simultaneously formed part of the research and development of Blossfeldt's argument for the primacy of natural form over man-made constructions. The subsequent publication of a selection of these images in 1928 caught the attention of artists including Bauhaus tutor László Moholy-Nagy, who applied Blossfeldt's close scrutiny of flora to the emerging tendency of New Objectivity photography, which opposed expressionistic form in favour of a direct approach to recording subject matter.

The final selection of works in this gallery focuses on Blossfeldt's exhibition-making with a series of seldom shown, larger-scale prints that are understood to have been produced for Blossfeldt's first display at Karl Nierendorf's gallery in 1926. These are shown with a number of journals and magazines such as *Atlantis*, *Documents* and *UHU* that demonstrate the way in which Blossfeldt's practice was recontextualised within the discourses of Surrealism in the period immediately after his death in 1932.

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