

IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM

Turku Art Museum 7 June – 15 September 2019

Press preview: Thursday 6 June 2019 at 11 am at Turku Art Museum (Aurakatu 26, Turku). The exhibition will be presented by the artist's grand-daughter Meg Partridge and curator Mia Haltia.

Opening: Thursday 6 June at 6-8 pm.

In summer 2019 Turku Art Museum presents an exhibition of work by **Imogen Cunningham** (1883–1976). One of the iconic names of modern photography, Cunningham is best known for her black-and-white portraits as well as elegant studies of plants and nudes that celebrate the beauty of ordinary things. The first museum scale presentation in Finland, the exhibition comprises almost 80 works and covers Cunningham's entire long career. It is produced in collaboration with the Imogen Cunningham Trust on Lopez Island, Seattle, USA.

Encouraged by photography studies she had undertaken in Dresden, Germany, Cunningham opened her own studio in Seattle in 1910. She began to photograph nudes, an exceptional choice considering the moral atmosphere of the time and the still rather precarious status of photography as an art form. Cunningham turned upside down the Western tradition of nude portrayal in which the woman is the object of the male gaze. The subject of her ground-breaking nude series shot on Mount Rainier in 1915 was her husband, artist **Roi Partridge**. A female pioneer of nude photography, Cunningham continued to develop nude studies in the 1920s and 1930s. She wanted to portray the human body objectively and neutrally by studying its forms, textures and the interplay of light and shadow.

The 1920s was a particularly important period in the development of Cunningham's style: as a wife and mother of three little children, she turned her attention on the domestic sphere and began to take extremely close-up pictures of the flowers and other plants in her garden, using variations of light and shadow to transform them into geometric compositions. The soft, painterly expression of her earlier work gave way for a new, reductive style. In 1932 Cunningham and other likeminded photographers from the US West Coast founded a group called f/64, whose members included famous practitioners such as **Ansel Adams** and **Edward Weston**. The members shared an interest in natural motifs and the principle of 'straight' photography, a style that aimed for objectivity instead of subjective interpretation.

Cunningham's work includes self-portraits taken in different periods of her career. Her self-portraits taken in 1950s–1970s reflect the spirit of an age when the stylistic purity of modernism gave way to an experimental approach and photographers, in keeping with the tradition of humanist photography, turned to the streets and everyday life for their subject matter. Cunningham's own personality was also captured in photographs by many of her colleagues. The *auteur* of cool, elegant photographs was a temperamental person with a great sense of humour who remained inquisitive and experimental to the very end of her life.

The period from the 1950s to the 1970s was also a time of important exhibitions and honours for Cunningham. With a Guggenheim scholarship she was able to take a break from shooting and focus on printing her photographs. In 1975, Cunningham founded a trust bearing her name, and it has safeguarded the preservation of her work for future generations.

For further information

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