

FRAENKEL

49 GEARY STREET SAN FRANCISCO 94108 415 981 2661

For immediate release:



RICHARD LEAROYD

With ceramicist Frances Palmer

May 29 – August 9, 2025

Fraenkel Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new and recent photographs by Richard Learoyd. Exploring classical subjects using exacting photographic techniques, Learoyd creates hyper-detailed works with enigmatic depths. Highlights include new studies of ancient trees printed on gessoed canvas and largescale views of the Grand Canyon. The show also features new still lifes, and marks the debut of photographs Learoyd made in collaboration with renowned ceramicist Frances Palmer. For the exhibition, Palmer created vessels based on drawings made by Learoyd, who in turn photographed the ceramics in his studio, overflowing with flowers in a reconsideration of Rococo styles. A public reception with Learoyd and Palmer will take place on Saturday, May 31, from 2-4pm.

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At the center of the exhibition are three monumental landscapes set in the English countryside, each depicting a massive, bare-branched tree. On view for the first time, the works are made using a process combining multiple layers of pigment printed onto hand-gessoed canvas. In each, a section of canvas is left raw, highlighting the differences in texture between materials and complicating the relationship between surface and photographic image. In part, the images draw inspiration from the work of 19th-century artists William Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the salted paper and calotype processes, and English Romantic landscape painter John Constable, whose pencil sketches of willow trees have been a longtime interest of Learoyd's.

Learoyd takes a different approach to landscape in two color photographs made at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. "The Grand Canyon is of such a monumental scale it defies framing or pictorial selection," Learoyd has noted. Undaunted, he brought his outsized, hand-built camera obscura to the park's South rim and photographed into the last light of the day. The process yielded enormous negatives, measuring nearly 4 x 6 feet, from which he created highly detailed contact prints. The resulting photographs capture the vastness of the scene and the stark, muted colors of the landscape.

The exhibition also features work made in Learoyd's London studio. Still lifes depict red, pink, and white poppies with vibrant or fading petals, and other natural elements. Often drawing on themes from Dutch Golden Age painting, the photographs capture the subtle sheen and iridescence of feathers or flowers, a focus on optical qualities also found in memento mori paintings. Precisely transcribing the various ways that light falls onto natural materials, Learoyd's photographs emphasize the ambiguity between dead and living things and often refer back to the act of seeing. Some works include vintage glass eyeballs hidden among the stems of poppies, creating the unsettling suggestion that the viewer is in turn being watched.

For works made in collaboration with Frances Palmer, Learoyd photographed lavish arrangements of tulips and other flowers housed in the ceramic vessel Palmer created from his sketches. In Learoyd's photographs, flowers seem to erupt and tumble out of the white base. "Based on [Learoyd's] measurements, I made the pieces in both a translucent bisque porcelain and low-fire earthenware with a matte white glaze so that he could choose which texture would work best for the photograph," Palmer writes. These vessels will be on view along with the photographs and a selection of other ceramics made by Palmer for the show. "Continuing with these ideas, I have made additional pieces in both clay bodies, thinking about how my pots will have a conversation with Richard's work in the gallery."

Richard Learoyd has been featured in solo exhibitions including *The Silence of the Camera Obscura*, a 2019 show at Fundación MAPFRE in Barcelona that traveled to Fotomuseum den Haag in the Netherlands. Other exhibition highlights include a solo show at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which traveled to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, and *Dark Mirror*, which took place at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Learoyd's photographs are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; National Gallery of

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Canada, Ottawa; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, among others. A self-titled monograph was published in 2019 in connection with his Fundación MAPFRE exhibition, and *Day for Night*, a collection of portraits and still lifes, was published by Aperture in 2015.

A celebrated author, ceramist, gardener, and photographer, **Frances Palmer** trained as an art historian at Columbia University and for the past 38 years, has focused on the process of changing ideas into form in her functional work—handmade ceramics. Her work is represented in leading private craft and contemporary art collections around the world and has been exhibited and sold internationally including at Fotografiska, Neue Galerie, Object & Thing and Wave Hill. Palmer has been featured in publications such as *House & Garden*, *Neptune Papers*, *Vogue* and *The World of Interiors*. Her first book, *Life in the Studio: Inspiration and Lessons on Creativity* was published by Artisan in 2020. Her second book, *Life with Flowers: Inspiration and Lessons from the Garden*, is dedicated to the subject of flowers in her work and will be published in May 2025.

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Image: Richard Learoyd, *Untitled Flowers (Day 1)*, 2025

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