



THE  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF

KARL BLOSSFELDT



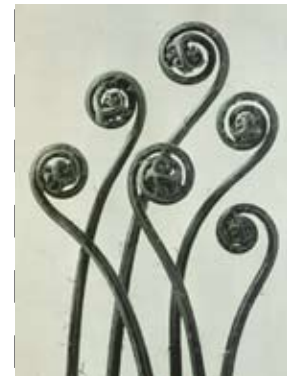
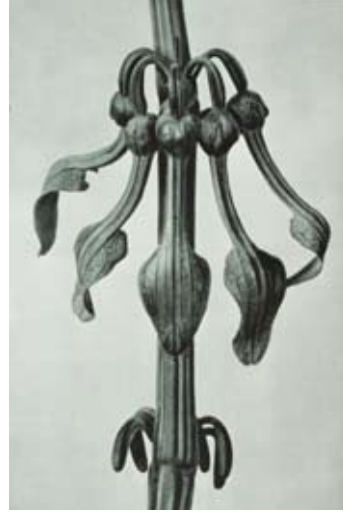
*“The plant never lapses into mere arid functionalism; it fashions and shapes according to logic and suitability, and with its primeval force compels everything to attain the highest artistic form.”*

*Karl Blossfeldt*



Karl Blossfeldt (1865-1932) was a German instructor of sculpture who used his remarkable photographs of plant studies to educate his students about design in nature. Self-taught in photography, his hobby soon grew into a life-encompassing passion. He devoted himself to the study of nature, photographing nothing but plants for thirty-five years.

Blossfeldt was a student in Berlin at a time when the Jugendstil movement was at its peak. This 'Young Style' was the German equivalent of Art Nouveau, and



used organic designs often found in nature as its inspiration. In 1891 he received a scholarship, which allowed him to travel to Italy, Greece, Egypt and North Africa. During this experience abroad he had an extraordinary opportunity to collect many rare and beautiful plant specimens. After five years he returned to Berlin, where he constructed his own large-format camera and began making images of a wide variety of plants.

This line of work was not his main profession, although his fame today rests on his photographs. Rather, plant photography was part of a teaching concept, of which he was only partly the author. He taught for over thirty years at the Kunstgewerbeschule (College of Arts and Crafts) in the Charlottenburg quarter of Berlin.



*Blossfeldt focused on flowers, stems, leaves, buds, tendrils, seeds and seedpods, meticulously arranging them to show the intricate, elegant architectural structure of their natural formations.*

His photographs were taken using either a vertical or horizontal perspective and could be magnified up to twenty-seven times their actual size, revealing extraordinary details within the natural structure of the plants. In the process he created some of the most innovative photographic work of his time, the simple yet expressive forms captured on film affirmed his boundless artistic and intellectual ability.

He photographed plants by the thousands - photographs which feature flowers, buds, branched stems, clusters or seed capsules shot directly from the side, seldom from an overhead view, and rarely from a diagonal perspective. He usually placed the subjects of his photographs against white or grey cardboard, sometimes against a black background. Hardly ever can details of the



rooms be detected. The light for his shots was obtained from northern windows, making it diffuse, but it fell from the side, creating volume. The technique and processing conditions were very simple; only the medium size of the negative format was somewhat out of the ordinary.

In 1928 Blossfeldt published his masterwork, *Urformen der Kunst* (Art Forms in Nature). This was followed up with *Wundergarten Der Natur* (Magic Garden of Nature), published the year he died, 1932. These rarely seen subtly toned black and white photogravure images are now recognized as vital contributions to the history of photography and they remain as intriguing today as they are beautiful.

