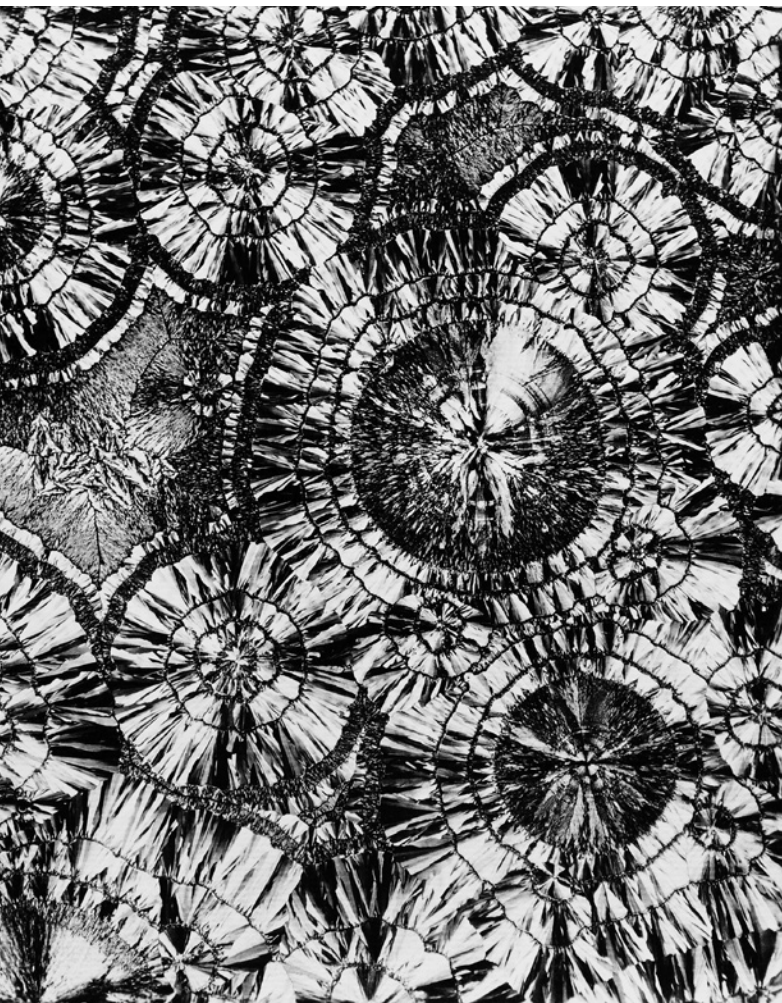


Laure Albin Guillot

(1879–1962)

The Question of Classicism

26 February – 12 May 2013





Lucienne Boyer, ca 1935
Collections Roger-Viollet / Parisienne de Photographie



Jean Cocteau, 1939
Private collection, Paris

Born in 1879, Laure Albin Guillot became a professional photographer in the early 1920s. Her style and manner embody a kind of classicism and “French style” that went against the current of modernity and the avant-gardes of the day. It was this style which made her name in a France that, after victory in the First World War, was now looking to revive the grandeur of past centuries.

Both artist and institutional figure, Laure Albin Guillot occupied an important position, and indeed was soon a dominant presence on the French photography scene of the day: a member of the Société des Artistes Décorateurs and Société Française de Photographie, she was director of the photographic archives at the Direction Générale des Beaux-Arts (forerunner of the Ministry of Culture), the first keeper of the Cinémathèque Nationale and president of the Union Féminine des Carrières Commerciales et Libérales: she stands out as one of the most active figures of the day, and one of the most keenly aware of the cultural and media issues of the times. This exhibition is based to a large extent on the contents of her studio, now in the Collections Roger-Viollet (themselves owned by the City of Paris and kept by the Parisienne de Photographie), analysis of which affords an insight into her work and her position during the interwar period.

The studio

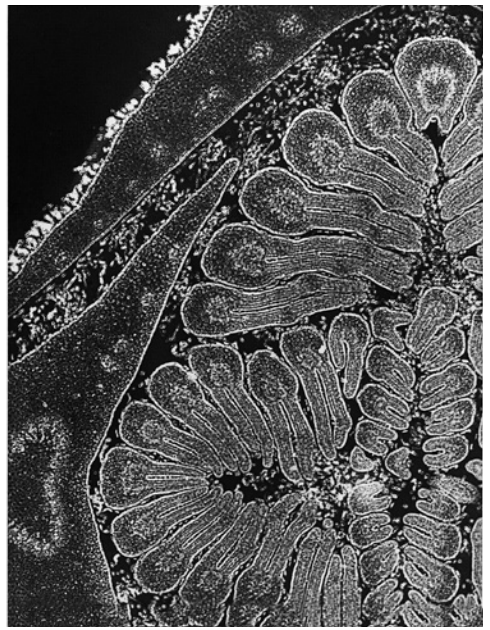
Laure Albin Guillot started her career in the first half of the 1920s with portraits and fashion photographs. Her code: elegance. Her approach was fairly systematic and she used a set range of devices: bare backgrounds, close-ups, a relatively shallow field, simple lighting. The desired effect of interiority and intimacy is heightened by “inspired” poses designed to express the model’s character in a painterly manner. Albin Guillot accepted the comparison with the pictorialists, and her early work is close to theirs in form and technique, thanks to her use of soft-focus lenses (Opale and Eidoscope). Her posing sessions were short (never more than twenty minutes). The lamps were positioned in such a way that no detail was lost in shadow (a weaker light used in opposition to the main one). She improved on nature. Contours were softened. The diffuse light was flattering. In her photos of nudes, she put mastery before inspiration in her search for poetic purity. She made no secret of her interest in the statuesque. Her figures are constructed by light and tend towards the ideal. The subject is reduced to a plastic form, to set of lines. The face is relegated to the corners, almost effaced.

A decorative art

After victory, in 1918, Paris regained its artistic role. The style français triumphed at the Exposition



Nude study, 1939
Bibliothèque Nationale de France



Micrography, ash tree bud (section), ca 1931
Collection Société Française de Photographie

Internationale des Arts Industriels et Modernes. Close to other artists and craftsmen, Albin Guillot exhibited a remarkable series of portraits of decorators. She made her own kakemonos using stylised photographs and, inspired by *Japonism*, framed some of her photographs in lacquered wood to make them into fireguards or screens.

The photographer thought of herself as a simple artisan, and began to frequent decorators, ceramists, glassmakers, lacquer makers and bronze and copper workers as well as sculptors, painters and architects. Clearly, her work shared with many of them an elitist tendency in its taste and ambitions, its remarkable technique and a style, that while unapologetically classical in its references, was also honed, elegant and extremely subtle, helping to move gently towards modernity.

In 1931 her *Micrographie décorative* won her immediate, international acclaim. The book was a visual curiosity, playing on the ambiguity surrounding the origin of the photographed subject and the nature of the reproduced image. The twenty plates reproducing diatoms, minerals and other plants seen under the microscope were accomplished aesthetic propositions, the masterly culmination of a shared line of research that she had pursued with her late husband, himself a collector of microscopic preparations. The publication

enjoyed considerable media coverage and the press praised it enthusiastically for its fusion of science and art. Abstraction was not the point of her microscopic investigations, which set out simply to offer a range of ornamental possibilities. The micrographs took the form of wallpaper, silks, bindings, and diverse objects. In the debate between those who upheld and those who dismissed photography as an artistic medium, Laure Albin Guillot's answer was to put it forward as a decorative art.

Commercial photograph

In 1933 Laure Albin Guillot published *Photographie publicitaire*, a book on photography in advertising, one of the very few theoretical works written by a French photographer in the interwar period. At the time she was also a fashionable portraitist and an institutional figure, as director of both the photographic archives of the national Beaux-Arts authority and the Cinémathèque Nationale. Albin Guillot was fully aware of the media and commercial issues taking shape around cinema, radio and the illustrated press. Proceeding from her own experience, she tried to define the role that photography could play in the newly emerging world of advertising.



Advertisement study, undated

Collection Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Ville de Chalon-sur-Saône

From the late 1920s onwards she took large numbers of commercial photographs, putting in place a repertoire of simple, effective and easily intelligible visual schemas. The great bulk of her advertising work concerns luxury products (watches, jewellery and fashion). She also made numerous illustrations for the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries, which at the time were the newest and most dynamic sectors of industry.

Printed output

Albin Guillot's work was abundantly published. She worked for the press and for publishers, producing portraits of writers for the frontispieces of novels or photographs for collective volumes. Between 1934 and 1951 she illustrated eleven books, including a novel, a school textbook, a guide to the Louvre and a book of prayers. Working with Paul Valéry, Henry de Montherlant, Marcelle Maurette and Maurice Garçon, among others, she also produced superb "artist's books" combining literature and photography. These works were sold by subscription, in what was a real strategic effort to promote her work. Their finish, luxuriousness and rarity made them real collector's items at a time when there was no such thing as a photography market. As she wrote at the end of her

life, "I won acceptance for photography in the field of bibliophile editions."

The exhibitions and artist's books were intimately linked. The latter's publication was heralded by presentations at a salon or gallery of series of prestigious prints (usually pigment prints from the Fresson studios). Thus the large-format prints showing the roads or landscapes exhibited in this section (kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale or Société Française de Photographie) were designed for albums that in the end were never published.

Delphine Desveaux and Michaël Houlette,
curators of the exhibition

outline biography

1879 14 February: birth in Paris of Laure Meifredy. She studies at the Lycée Molière, Rue du Ranelagh, in the 16th arrondissement of Paris, where she will live all her life.

1897 Marries Albin Guillot.

1922 "Madame Albin-Guillot" publishes her first fashion photographs in . Her portrait studio is at 88 Rue du Ranelagh, her home.

1924 Exhibits at the 19th Salon International de Photographie and the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs. She will take part in these two salons every year up to the 1950s.

1925 Presents works at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. Her prints are signed "Laure Albin Guillot," which becomes her artistic name. Her renown is growing.

1928 In Paris the Salon de l'Escalier, the "First Independent Photography Salon," brings together work by Atget, D'Orá, Kertész, Krull, Man Ray, Laure Albin Guillot, Nadar and Outerbridge.

1929 Death of Albin Guillot.

Laure Albin Guillot moves in at 43 Boulevard de Beauséjour. She receives and photographs figures from the worlds of the fine arts, music and literature such as Paul Valéry, Colette, Anna de Noailles, Jean Cocteau, etc.

1930 During the 1930s she travels to North Africa, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Norway and the United States. Her photographs are abundantly reproduced in the press and there are several books. Every year she has solo and group shows in salons and galleries in Paris, around France, and abroad.

1931 Publishes *Micrographie décorative*, a lavish volume featuring microphotographs of microscopic preparations viewed for their ornamental qualities. She is president of the Union Féminine des Carrières Commerciales et Libérales, an association set up to promote and champion the interests of women professionals.

1932 Laure Albin Guillot is made head of the archives department at the Beaux-Arts administration (the future Ministry of Culture).

1933 She becomes director of the Cinémathèque Nationale (which precedes the Cinémathèque Française) and conceives an ambitious project for a museum of the "mechanical arts" uniting cinema, photography and phonographic music. This museum never becomes a reality. She publishes a book defining the role of photography in modern advertising.

1936 She illustrates by Paul Valéry, the first in a series of artist's books combining photography and literature.

1937 Laure Albin Guillot is on the photography and cinema installation committee for the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques.

Organises and takes part in "Femmes artistes d'Europe", an exhibition at the Jeu de Paume.

1939 She photographs work done to protect the monuments of Paris and the evacuation of the collections from the Louvre.

1940-1944 During the Occupation she publishes a number of artist's books: *La Cantate du Narcisse* by Paul Valéry (1941), *Petits Métiers de Paris* (1942), *Arbres* with Paul Valéry (1943), *Ciels* with Marcelle Maurette (1944).

1942 Does much publishing and commercial work under the Occupation, especially in fashion.

1945-1956 Laure Albin Guillot continues to produce a large number of portraits in her studio on Boulevard de Beauséjour.

1956 She ends her career and retires to the Maison Nationale des Artistes in Nogent-sur-Marne.

1962 22 February: Laure Albin Guillot dies in Saint Antoine Hospital, Paris.

related events

I Young Visitor's Tuesday Tours

guided tour of the exhibition with curator Delphine Desveaux

Tuesday 26 March, 6pm

I Children First!

visit and workshop "Déplacements et transformations"
[Movements and Transformations]

Saturday 30 March and 27 April, 3.30pm

I cinema: "Filming under the Occupation (1940-44)"
a programme by Marina Vinyes Albes

19-31 March

complete listings on www.jeudepaume.org

I publication: *Laure Albin Guillot, l'enjeu classique*, foreword by Marta Gili, texts by Delphine Desveaux, Catherine Gonnard, Michaël Houlette and Patrick-Gilles Persin (in French and English). Copublished by Jeu de Paume/Éditions de La Martinière, 192 pages, 19,5 x 24 cm, 35 €

Jeu de Paume – Concorde

exhibitions

26 February – 12 May 2013

■ **Laure Albin Guillot (1879–1962),**

the Question of Classicism

■ **Adrian Paci. Lives in Transit**

■ **Satellite Programme 6, A Spoken Word**

Exhibition. Suite for Exhibition(s) and Publication(s),
First Movement

23 October 2012 – March 2014

■ **Espace virtuel, Print Error: Publishing**
in the Digital Age

forthcoming exhibitions

28 May – 1 September 2013

■ **Lorna Simpson**

■ **Ahlam Shibli**

■ **Satellite Programme 6, Suite for Exhibition(s)**
and Publication(s), Third Movement

practical information

1, Place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris

access via the Tuileries Gardens, Rue de Rivoli entrance

www.jeudepaume.org

<http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org>

information +33 (0)1 47 03 12 50

Tuesday (last opening) 11am–9pm

Wednesday to Sunday 11am–7pm

closed Monday and 1 May

■ **exhibitions:** admission: €8.50; concessions: €5.50
free admission to the exhibitions of the Satellite Programme

Young Visitor's Tuesday: free admission for students
and visitors under 26 every last Tuesday of the month
from 5pm to 9pm

■ **guided tours and workshops:** free admission
on presentation of the exhibition ticket of the day

Tours for individual visitors with guides
from the Jeu de Paume

Wednesday and Saturday at 12.30pm

Family Tours

Saturday at 3.30pm (except last Saturday of the month)
by reservation on +33 (0)1 47 03 12 41 / rendezvousenfamille@jeudepaume.org

Children First!

visit and workshop for 7 to 11 year olds

every last Saturday of the month at 3.30pm

by reservation on +33 (0)1 47 03 04 95 / lesenfantsdabord@jeudepaume.org

Young Visitors' Tuesday Tours

every last Tuesday of the month at 6pm

Jeu de Paume – extramural

exhibition

24 November 2012 – 26 May 2013

■ **Lartigue, Wide-Eyed Wonder (1894–1986)**

Château de Tours

25 Avenue André-Malraux, 37000 Tours

information +33 (0)2 47 70 88 46

Tuesday to Friday 2pm–6pm

Saturday and Sunday 2.15pm–6pm

closed Monday

admission: €3; concessions: €1.50

guided tours: Saturday at 3pm

forthcoming exhibitions

21 March – 19 May 2013

■ **Satellite Programme 6, An Exhibition Without Texts.**
Suite for Exhibition(s) and Publication(s), Second
Movement

Maison d'Art Bernard Anthonioz

16, Rue Charles-VII, 94130 Nogent-sur-Marne

www.maba.fnagp.fr

information 01 48 71 90 07

daily 12 h–18 h

closed Tuesday and public holidays

free admission

22 June – 3 November 2013

■ **Bruno Réquillart**

Château de Tours

free admission

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ABN AMRO

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