



**Tom Ficht** lives and works in Germany and France. He studied cybernetics, engineering, and art history in New York and Berlin. He launched his artistic career in 1992 at *Documenta IX*. In the late 1990s, Ficht embraced photography as his preferred medium. Since then, he has produced an extensive body of portrait and landscape work. Since 2012 he prints only one unique copy of every new image. His work is featured in numerous museum exhibitions and collections, including the National Galerie and Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; Royal College of Art, London; Helmhaus, Zurich; and MuCEM, Marseille.

In 2015 DOWNTOWN Paris published *Eclipse* featuring 25 unique vintage prints with an essay by Hans Irrek exploring the lightening series *Electric Cinema* and Ficht's moonlight series *Nocturnes*.



Installation view with *Eclipse* # 8090, 2013 and *The Wave* by Gustave Courbet, 1870 Musée des Beaux Arts - LAAC Dunkerque, France, 2014

*DARK MATTERs* is the artist's umbrella term for his night photography, a recent body of work that investigates notions of time and space while reminding us that 95% of the universe remains unknown Dark Matter. These works cross the line between the reality of the physical world and the invisible, magic part of our universe and push his photography to the edge of quantum physics.

**LAFFANOUR**  
 GALERIE DOWNTOWN/PARIS  
 18 Rue de Seine, 75006, Paris  
 T. +33 1 46 33 82 41  
 contact@galeriedowntown.com  
 www.galeriedowntown.com

Please contact the gallery for further information and a list of works currently available.

**TOM FECHT**

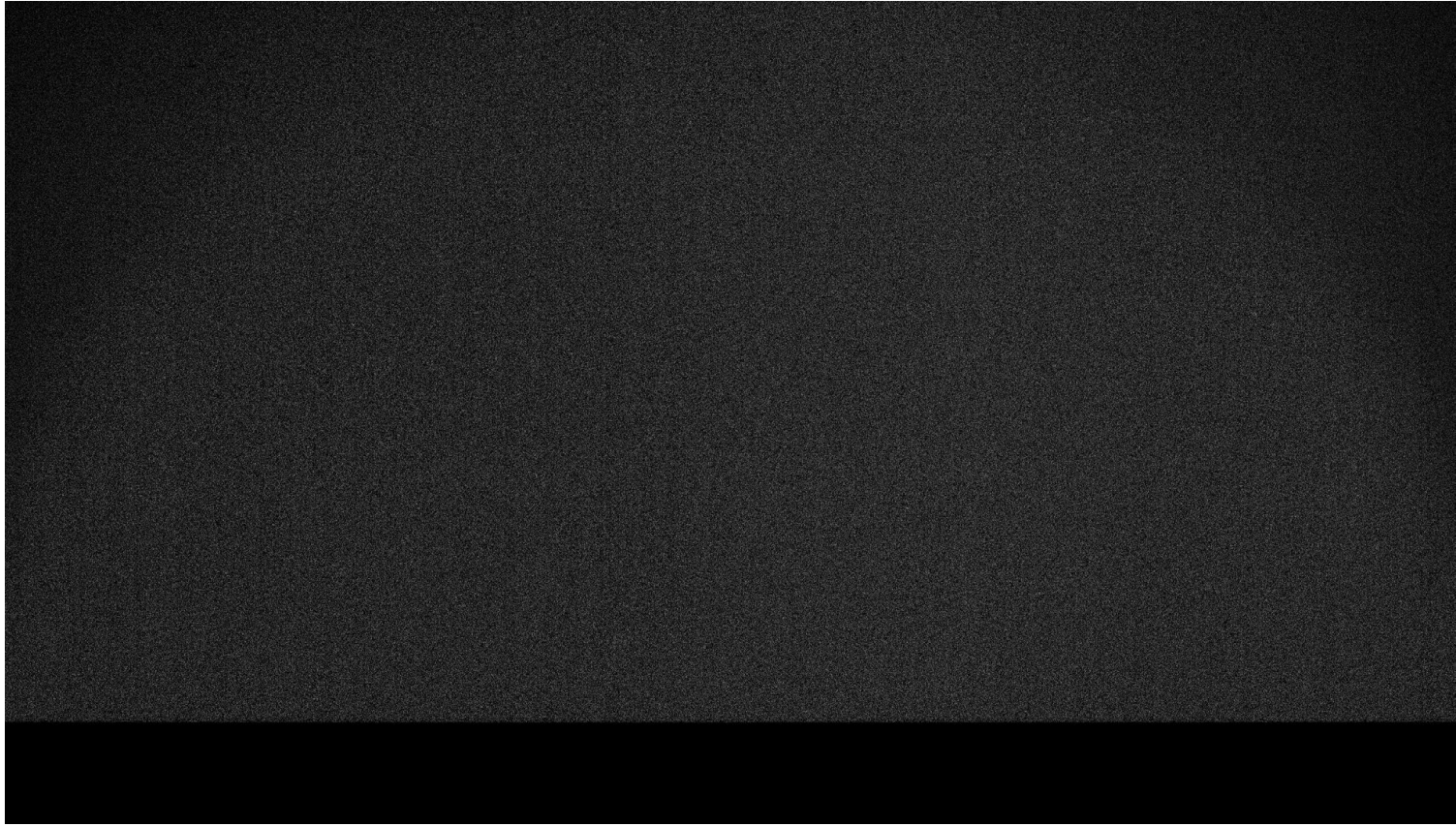
**DARK MATTERs**

**LAFFANOUR**  
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**ECLIPSE**  
**NOCTURNES**  
**INCERTITUDES**

**TEFAF 2016**

Booth #605



**Tom Ficht** *Incertitude* # 64001, 2016  
Unique gelatin silver Baryta print 125 x 210 cm. UltraSec



**Tom Ficht** *Eclipse* # 8077, 2014  
Unique C-print 180 x 295 cm, UltraSec

*“All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in the rain”*  
Rutger Hauer in the final sequence of *Blade Runner*



Hans Irrek: DARK MATTERS

Challenging the Invisible in Photography

Tom Fecht is an artist whose photographic language has been shaped by his fascination with the infinite sea. His seascapes carry us beyond established landscape traditions through a magic gateway of photographic abstraction into black matter. *DARK MATTERS* is the artist's umbrella term for his night photography, a recent body of work that investigates notions of time and space while reminding us that 95% of the universe remains unknown Dark Matter.

In the opening series, entitled *Electric Cinema*, the viewer encounters rigorous, minimalist images of rarely visible natural phenomena. In the series *Eclipse*, Fecht explores the heightened effect of low residual daylight scattered over the open sea. The viewer is immersed in details captured at a thousand fractions of a second during extreme meteorological conditions that are inaccessible to the naked eye. In the moonlight series *Nocturnes*, the sea is transformed into a vast crystalline sphere thanks to the camera's technical memory. In his most recent series, entitled *Incertitudes*, Fecht pushes his photography to the edge of quantum physics. These works cross the line between the reality of the physical world and the invisible, magic part of our universe.

At first glance, some *Eclipses* resemble colossal ultrasound images, others evoke cooling lava streams glowing from within. On closer inspection, these color prints reveal an extraordinary impression of space oscillating between warm and cool. The viewer's gaze is conducted through blackened shades of blue across an image whose sheer



Tom Fecht *Eclipse* # 8078, 2014  
Unique C-print 180 x 295 cm. UltraSec

prehistoric fossil lights in the upper half and a clearly discernable pitch-black marine horizon below. It took Fecht (a former engineer) years to perfect the photographic process requiring advanced chemo-optical and thermic engineering. When our gaze moves toward the edge of the quantum world, uncertainty becomes certain. Upon closer inspection of the oscillating details in the dark photographic matter, the viewer faces a countless number of crystals shaping an infinite sphere. This encounter unsettles the imagination and triggers a fragile experience between infinity and uncertainty.

Fecht's approach evokes the ancient notion of the sea as an empty territory. This paradigm spans from Genesis to *Finis Terrae* and culminates in the scientific theories of infinity. The work also evokes Gaston Bachelard's seminal philosophical meditation *Poetics of Space*. Bachelard analyzed the meeting of the elements of water and air as a way of tapping into a primal experience for the viewer. For Bachelard "space stores condensed time in its thousands of honeycombs." In this context it is worth examining the Zen-like Seascapes of Hiroshi Sugimoto. The fine line of his horizons divides water from air, cleaving the images into yin and yang-like parts. By contrast, Fecht's photographs seem to reflect a history in constant upheaval "whose embers have not yet cooled". Both artists favor sea and sky as imaginary foils that facilitate a multitude of visionary projections. While Sugimoto's Seascapes refer to water and air as the beginnings of life, Fecht's *Incertitudes* refer to prehistoric landscapes through marine firmaments. Sugimoto feeds our imagination with his conceptual vision of prehistoric light while Fecht actually captures it. For him the tides vouchsafe the ever-changing face of his main subject: gravity.

Fecht's work blends a contemporary perspective with a historical awareness of the techniques and visual language of photography's pioneers. *Eclipse* and *Nocturnes* both pay homage to Gustave Le Gray's and Eadweard Muybridge's innovative techniques. The influence of Le Gray's combination printing and Muybridge's high-speed photography are both palpable. Yet Fecht also consciously toys with the concepts of romanticism. Contrary to the tradition of German Romanticism, e.g. the seascapes of C. D. Friedrich, *DARK MATTERS* includes no traces of human existence or *gestalt* against



Gustave Le Gray *The Great Wave, Sète*, 1857  
Albumen silver print, 34.4 x 41.1 cm



Hiroshi Sugimoto *Sea of Japan - Rebun Island*, 1996  
Gelatin silver print, 50.8 x 61 cm

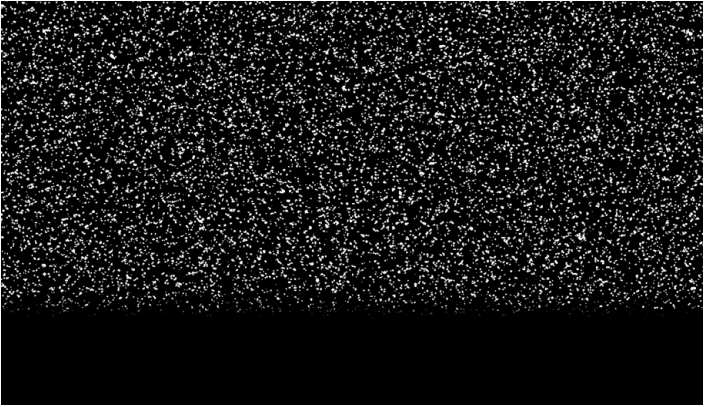


Tom Fecht *Nocturne* # 6354, 2016  
Unique C-print 105 x 145 cm. UltraSec

size (180 x 295 cm) generates a profound sense of silence that resonates through the images in which a sea of reflected sunlight courses. From this magic obscurity a universal light is emitted, the landscape is bathed in burning blackness by an invisibly blackened sun. The cosmic darkness of the bent horizon gives no orientation to this immense marine no man's land.

In *Nocturnes* the curvature of the horizon conveys a vastness that comes from viewing the earth as a whole - a globe. The viewer momentarily perceives the earth in space, recalling another world and the iconic images of mid-20th-century space missions. The traditional earth-bound viewpoint of the camera has been shifted into orbit. Photographed during full moon, the surface of the sea transforms into a bright sphere of reflecting crystals converting salt water into frozen air. The deep black horizon above transcends the orbit's border with the universe and the blue planet seems to be no longer protected by its atmosphere.

With *Incertitudes*, Fecht pays homage to Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty. These unique large format gelatin silver prints (125 x 210 cm) challenge the imagination. In the microscopic silver halide crystals, embedded in the photographic emulsion of sheet film, the artist captures the light of long extinguished stars that still radiate from distant galaxies. This faint white noise of the universe leaves visible traces in the light-sensitive colloid on the film base (whose expiration date has long past). Because the sea absorbs astronomical light waves, the images display a sparkling silver firmament of



Tom Fecht *Uncertainty* # 4001, 2016 (Detail)  
Unique gelatin silver Baryta print 125 x 210 cm. UltraSec



Anselm Kiefer *Falling Stars*, 1995  
Oil on canvas, 230 x 170 cm

which to measure infinite nature. The artist simply wanted "to be naked again under new stars". Considering the artist's post-war German background, it is not surprising that his *Incertitudes* evoke the *Sternenfall* (Falling Stars) series of paintings by his compatriot and near contemporary Anselm Kiefer. After the demise of fascist rule both artists forged a path toward a new beginning on their own terms, with or without illusions. As Kiefer stated in his recent *Cosmogonies* "I live completely in and through illusion, because I cannot see any sense in in the world." To survive he creates meaning where the lines of history, geology and astronomy meet: "the light waves, the infrared waves, the gamma waves and kinds of others, 99.99% invisible. And I pretend that the artist can make them visible, at least somewhat."

Thus the dark matters in *Eclipse*, *Nocturnes* and *Incertitudes* and render Fecht's repertoire part of an independent emotional and philosophical discourse. The photographs generate a feeling of Euclidean antiseptis that purifies the image's content and frees it from visual habits. Despite their abstractness there is a clear emotional charge. The formula for this sobering effect comes from the various components of the composition: a horizon of light, waves, time and gravity. It is as if the sum of the elementary forces and physical effects were able to reveal the diversity of the factors from which these surprising images arise. They confront us with the contemplative experience of witnessing subtle seismographic movements otherwise invisible to the naked eye, thus extending the millisecond towards eternity. These images, like their subject, are in constant motion, nurtured by intuition, craftsmanship, and technical expertise. They are testament to and a mirror of the fundamental powers of nature, masked by civilized refinements. The depth of time condenses in this dark photographic matter.

*Hans Irrek* is a German essayist and curator. His publications on photography and art and design classics include essays on Andreas Gursky, Axel Hütte, Isamu Noguchi, and Oscar Niemeyer. He is a member of the advisory board of the Photo Book Museum, Germany. The text is based on a recent conversation with the artist and Irrek's essay *Burning Blackness in: Tom Fecht - Eclipse*, published by DOWNTOWN Paris in 2015.