

Exhibition Reviews

These timely shows provide retrospectives of well known artists, as well as forward-thinking group shows that examine how we might live in a near-future. *Aesthetica's* coverage includes exhibitions that are still open to see this winter season.

1 Minkkinen: 50 Years of Self-Portraiture

ARNO RAFAEL MINKKINEN

This retrospective of Finnish-American photographer Arno Rafael Minkkinen (b. 1945) is a sight for sore eyes. Photographed across nearly 30 countries and 20 American states, the body of work offers a grand tour of nature in many of its manifestations – though Minkkinen has a preference for its calmer aspects. The show is reflective both literally and figuratively: stilled water abounds.

Most of Minkkinen's images are conspicuously staged in a manner that recalls Kishin Shinoyama or Edward Weston. Nude figures dovetail perfectly with their surroundings to such an extent that viewers sometimes have to look twice in order to spot them. *Väisälänsaari, Finland, 1998*, for instance, depicts birch trees fitted with human parts that seem to grow organically out of the trees. *Coralie, Fort Foucault,*

Niort, France, 2009 has a similarly surreal quality: a female figure in the foreground has a pair of hands growing tenderly onto her face. Minkkinen's surreal effects are generally achieved without digital modification, with the possible exception of pieces like *Kilberg Vardø, Norway, 1990*, which shows a man balanced on his head on the keel of a bark.

The photographs have an appeasing quality, but they also manage to exude a strong sense of humour across the uncanny placements. *King of Fosters Pond, Fosters Pond, 2013*, for example, shows Minkkinen's floating head seemingly mounted on a wooden pedestal. *Fosters Pond, 2000* depicts a Loch Ness Monster-like hand about to write on water with a pencil, a take on John Keats's tragic epitaph "here lies one whose name was writ on water."

Words
Erik Martiny
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Galerie Camera
Obscura, Paris
25 October - 28 December
galeriecameraobscura.fr

2 Lost Lands

MARQUESJKA LAVIGNE

Lost Lands is the latest series from Belgian photographer Maroesjka Lavigne (b. 1989). This series documents a vast range of evolving landforms including western America, Argentina, Chile and China. Lavigne's year-long forage into natural worlds brings a spectrum of colour and texture, through rust-coloured hills or the flutter of pink wings.

Landscapes are the focus of Lavigne's work. With a detail-driven, painterly aesthetic, she combines organic elements with a brushstroke appearance. *Death Valley, Namibia (2015)* and *Colored Hills, Xinjiang, China (2017)* capture subtle shifts in ombre palettes, whilst *Salinas Grandes, Argentina (2017)* offers tranquil illustrations of a world standing still. In these geological portraits, the environments are constantly in flux, on the verge of what they might become.

Metaphors of journey, migration and personal growth are evident in images of birds and open landforms. *Pink Feathers (2019)* and *Leaf (2017)* offer vivid depictions of life in the evolving landscapes – flourishing and verdant. Such pieces illustrate a touch of civilisation, found in even the most remote location. This notion intermingles the idea of who we are as being connected with our environments.

Naturally evolving rhythms provide the axis for Lavigne's imagery. "When you take a picture in a beautiful place, you have to realise that nature isn't the background for your photograph," says Lavigne. "Rather, you are its prop."

Lavigne's debut monograph, *Someone Somewhere Sometime* is co-published with Robert Mann Gallery, including works from four series and text by David Campany.

Words
Jennifer Sauer
—

Robert Mann Gallery,
New York
24 October - 21 December
robertmann.com

3 Live Dangerously

A GROUP SHOW

Humour, drama, ambiguity and innovation drive the disruptive visions of 12 women photographers at NWMA, Washington DC. The show is a categorical rejection of women purely being represented as erotic, fertile and ultimately powerless creatures. Many of the featured works raise more questions than provide answers, with varied shades of nuance, assessing the female gaze and the body within the landscape.

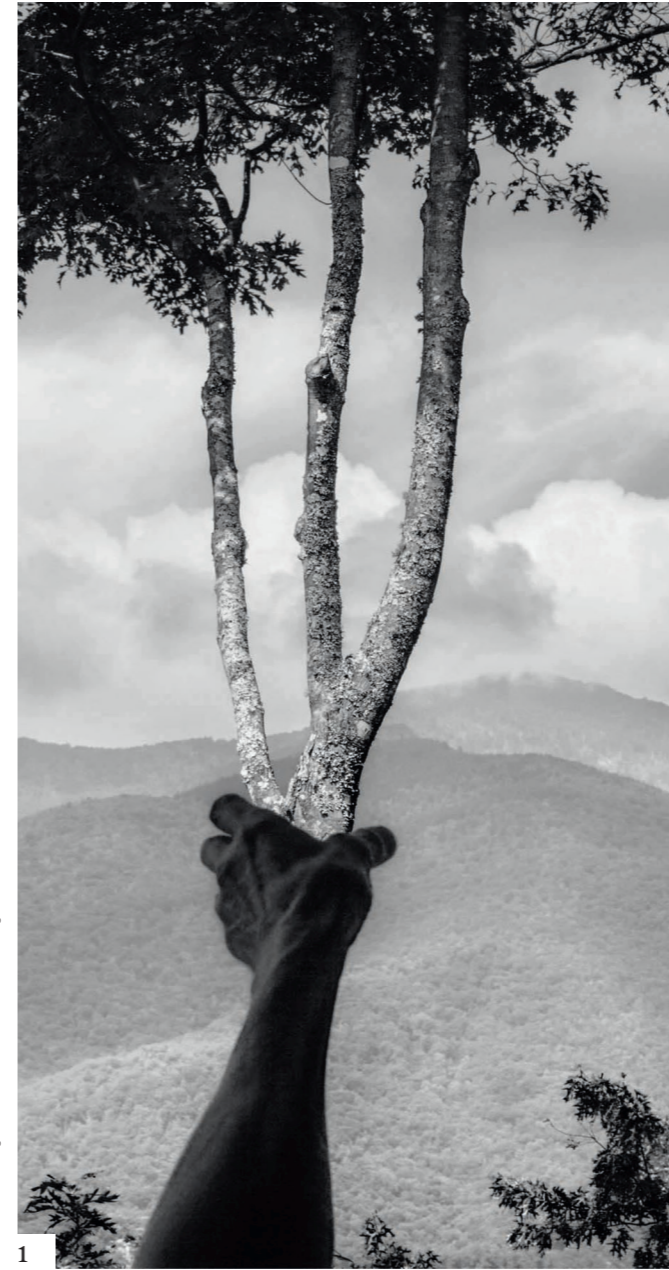
Janaina Tschäpe's (b. 1973) body lies prostrate in 100 large-scale photographs. What exactly caused her demise – drowning? Murder? A hard night of partying? It is unclear. Tschäpe has travelled around the world to produce the tongue-in-cheek theatrics of the *100 Little Deaths (1996-2002)* series, from the foot of the Moai statues on Easter Island to the shores of the Hamptons and Long Beach.

Anna Gaskell (b. 1969) is similarly ambiguous in 2003's *Untitled #104 (A Short Story of Happenstance)*, where a figure is either safely suspended from a tree or plunging downward. All we see are legs dressed in a petticoat and black shoes, tights and skirt in this mysterious image. "I want viewers to find themselves suddenly caught up in the same trap as that of the character they are watching," Gaskell says.

In Ana Mendieta's (1948-1985) *Volcán (1979)*, the artist lays down in a mound of earth, leaving the imprint to burn and smoke with gunpowder. In another dramatic example, Kirsten Justesen (b. 1943) tested the limits of her body by positioning herself atop blocks of ice whilst nude but for rubber gloves and boots in the *Ice Sculpture (2000)* series. Attend NMWA for a searing vision of the female experience.

Words
Olivia Hampton
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National Museum of
Women in the Arts,
Washington DC
19 September - 20 January
nmwa.org



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3a

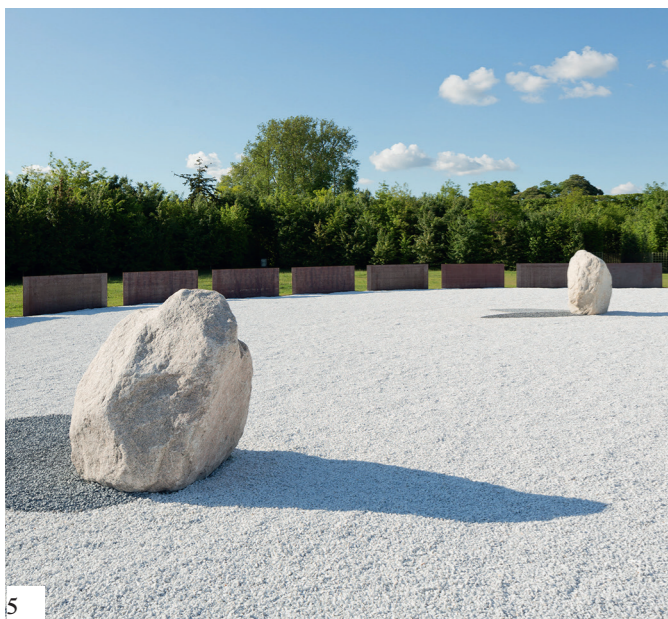


3b

1. *Halfway Up Me*, Mitchell, Burnsville, North Carolina, 2013. © Arno Rafael Minkkinen. 2. *Colored Hills*, Xinjiang, China, 2017. 3a. *Graciela Iturbide, Mujer Ángel, Desierto de Sonora (Angel Woman, Sonoran Desert)*, 1979, (printed 2014). Gelatin silver print, 50.8cm x 40.64cm. National Museum of Women in the Arts. Gift of Cindy Jones. © Graciela Iturbide. Image courtesy of Throckmorton Fine Art, New York. 3b. Rania Matar, *Rayven, Miami Beach, Florida*, from the series *She*, 2019. Archival pigment print, 112cm x 94cm. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Klein Gallery. © Rania Matar.



4a



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6



4b

4a. Shahidul Alam (b. 1955, Dhaka, Bangladesh), *Protestors in Motijheel Break Section 44 on Dhaka Siege Day*, 1987. Courtesy of Shahidul Alam / Drik / Majority World. 4b. Shahidul Alam (b. 1955, Dhaka, Bangladesh), *Protestors in Motijheel Break Section 44 on Dhaka Siege Day*, 1987. Courtesy of Shahidul Alam / Drik / Majority World. 5. Lee Ufan, *Relatum - The Shadow of the Stars*, 2014. Installation view, Château de Versailles, © ADAGP. 6. Cannupa Hanska Luger, *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances*, 2018. Image: Chip Thomas for *Return of the Warrior Twins* mural, 2018 - Ginger Dummi.

4 Truth to Power

SHAHIDUL ALAM

A year after his release from a Dhaka jail, Bangladeshi photographer, writer and activist Shahidul Alam features at Rubin Museum, New York. Redefining, reframing and representing the “third world” of South Asia as a “majority world,” Alam’s works are concerned with empowerment and authentic truth. Alam was also named *Time’s* Person of the Year in 2018, as an advocate in defending social and religious injustice and suppression. His call for positive change sends an emotional, efficacious charge.

Over 40 images encapsulate the solidarity and strife faced by Bangladesh and South Asia. Scenes from daily life – both domestic and of discord – demonstrate how photography can communicate the human condition on a higher level – looking at the concept of dignity. *Protestors in Motijheel Break Section 44 on Dhaka Siege Day* (1987), for example, shows a surprisingly quiet city centre, except

for a few protestors. The composition takes inspiration from Henri Cartier-Bresson, whilst the content exemplifies a commitment to the possibility of democracy.

Wedding Guests and Abahani Wedding (1988), in contrast, discloses scenes from a prominent middle-class wedding which emphasises the lack of attention to mass floodings which are occurring in the region (as pictured in *Woman Cooking on Rooftop* and *Woman Wading in Flood*, 1988.)

Each image is uniquely powerful in its depiction of human struggles against the climate crisis and political strife. *Airport Goodbye* (1996), in particular, gives an intimate glimpse into the reality and of migrant life. Alam champions hope and evokes a voice for free speech, whilst breaking free from the western stereotypes of Bangladeshi history. This exhibition is a testament to new, unheard voices and perspectives at a time when we need them most.

Words
Ashton Chandler Guyatt

Rubin Museum, New York
8 November - 4 May

rubinmuseum.org

5 Open Dimension

LEE UFAN

Do objects have souls? If you embrace the integrity of materials, then yes. At least, so says Lee Ufan (b. 1936). His largest outdoor sculpture project in the USA consists of mostly unaltered boulders and stainless-steel plates arranged carefully to create a “space where you can feel mystery, relatedness” between humans and the natural world. This is also the first site-specific commission by a single artist to fill the Hirshhorn’s, Washington DC, 4.3-acre outdoor plaza, with 10 new works from the ongoing *Relatum* series.

“Modernism is connected to colonialism and imperialism,” Ufan explains about the inspiration behind the installations. The sculptures create “cracks” in the museum’s perfect, motionless concrete ring building, designed by Gordon Bunshaft. The wind constantly animates *Relatum-Box Garden*, spreading ripples across a water pool site, surrounded by four stainless steel sheets, whilst reflecting the sky and

clouds above. In the *Relatum-Dialogue*, a boulder appears to strike up a conversation with another, which turns away, uninterested. They are placed on white gravel, similar to that found in a Zen garden. Morning shadows are painted on the ground, so that there are two shadows (the “real” and the created one) except for a brief moment each day.

The contrasting juxtapositions are especially evocative because no material is treated as superior to another, whether natural or manmade. Ufan elicits sensations and responses in viewers, rather than offering straight representation. He doubles as an art critic and philosopher, and has lived and worked in Japan for more than 60 years. There, he became a leading figure of the Mono-ha (“school of things”) movement formed in response to the country’s fast-paced industrialisation. This presentation at Hirshhorn urges the viewer to sit, contemplate and revel in everyday objects.

Words
Olivia Hampton

Hirshhorn Museum
and Sculpture Garden,
Washington
27 September -
13 September 2020

hirshhorn.si.edu

6 Utopian Imagination

A GROUP SHOW

Idyllic worlds are the subject of the science fiction-themed exhibition, *Utopian Imagination*. The third instalment by the Ford Foundation Gallery, a collection of 13 artists respond to the challenges of contemporary life. Curated by Jaishri Abichandani, the works leverage objects, bodies, vessels and fragments, to project a future that is inclusive and free. The show transports viewers through pieces such as Mariko Mori’s digital dreamscape *Miko No Inori* and Saks Afridi’s ethereal acrylic sculpture *The Prayer Catcher*. The narratives become portals to imagined realms, filled with hope.

The included pieces often reflect and refract each other, echoing ideas and physical likenesses. These underpinning similarities anchor pieces from very different times and contexts. Lola Flash’s high-contrast photograph *Syzygy* depicts a handcuffed spaceman lost at sea, and Farxiyo Jaamac’s collage photograph *Android Girl* depicts a child abandoned

in outer space. Both works reimagine the self and the other, whilst recreating the physical body in a liberated space.

The show is also in conversation with history. Indigenous elements are evoked by Cannupa Hanska Luger’s performative work, *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances*, in which an individual looks out on a mountain sunset. This also occurs in Beatriz Cortez’s fortune-telling *Boxes of Wonder*. These multidisciplinary works embody a spiritual feeling, whilst becoming a contemporary version of their own mythologies – stories that are retold.

Aspects of the past, memory, heritage, imagination and culture collide within *Utopian Imagination*. Each practitioner contributes their own background and unique world view, offering a distinct vantage point to the world of tomorrow. As Curator Abichandani notes: “The artworks connect to both references in history and dreams of the future.”

Words
Jennifer Sauer

Ford Foundation
Gallery, New York
17 September - 7 December

fordfoundation.org