

MOMENTUM

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When [...] the world of clear and articulate objects is abolished, our perceptual being [...] evolves a spatiality without things. This is what happens in the night. Night is not an object before me; it enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses [...]. Night has no outlines; [...] it is pure depth without foreground or background, without surfaces and without any distance separating it from me.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Phenomenology of Perception (translated by Colin Smith)



Figure # 61, from the Gravity series, 2022, 135 x 180 cm

Momentum is pleased to unveil Finnish artist Aapo Huhta's latest photographic series, Gravity (2023) at Paris Photo 2024. Gravity presents a collection of black-and-white studio portraits of human figures combined with imagery of mummified remains from late 16th-century Sicily. Part of the series was photographed in the Palermo Catacombs, a site that has captivated artists like Lord Byron, Francis Bacon, and Richard Avedon. In these gently surreal scenes, human bodies float, enveloped in grainy textures from chemical residues and light leaks. By photographing and re-photographing through transparent and reflective objects, Huhta transforms the figures into contorted human-like creatures.

In his new austere black and white work, Aapo Huhta fills his photographs with a darkness so impenetrable that it dissolves the horizon. This nocturnal void is inhabited by figures that seem to be shrouded in milky mist or to exist behind a veil of cosmic radiation. They are at once painfully corporeal and infinitely distant, as if visual echoes from another dimension. These bodies give us no information on the space they inhabit, because their existence does not adhere to familiar laws of physics.

Three-dimensionality is in peril when Huhta dismantles the figurative tradition of the photograph. Through the use of analog processes and methods, his works warp space and time in a way that borders on the grotesque. The artist distorts the contours of the human body with a great sense of urgency: these beings are above all to be described as mortals.

The series Gravity sees Huhta progress along a path of existential discovery. His artistic work has always been concerned with humankind's relation to surrounding space, and has over the years moved away from its documentary origins to an increasing degree of abstraction. The human figure is a constant subject in Huhta's photography, however, even if in a highly anonymized form. When reduced to a mere shadowy silhouette, as was the case in the artist's previous series Omatandangole, the individual body becomes a symbol for humanity and can take on a multitude of meanings. In Gravity Huhta abruptly inverts his former colour scheme, turning away from the blistering sunshine that permeates his earlier work. As day turns to night, the presence of death makes itself known.

Gravity seems to take place just outside of the event horizon of a fantastic black hole, in a limbo where both matter and concepts are altered to the point of collapse. The disintegration of the body is exposed in all its terrifying beauty as Huhta rejects the norms of depicting the human individual. But embedded within the endless night of Gravity's outer space are clues of what lies beyond the final loss of power: the end is an enduring arid landscape. This, then, is what peace looks like.

Helen Korpak
art critic

Aapo Huhta (born in 1985) is a photographic artist living in Helsinki. Huhta combines elements of documentary practice and experimental darkroom techniques with subjective, mundane observations, building a range of ambiguous and often fragmented narratives in his work. Exploring different forms of photographic narratives, methods, and possibilities plays a significant role in his work. The exploration has culminated in three photobooks, Block (Kehrer Verlag, 2015), Omatandangole (Kehrer Verlag, 2019) and Gravity (Kult Books, 2023). In 2014, Magnum Photos selected Huhta as one of the Top 30 Under 30 photographers. He received the award of the Young Nordic Photographer of the Year, by Fotografiska, in 2015 and was chosen for the Joop Swart Masterclass in 2016. He was named Young Artist of the Year 2020 in Finland.

Momentum is a contemporary fine art gallery dealing exclusively in fine art photography. Based in Miami Florida the gallery represents mid-career and emerging fine art photographers from around the globe. With a growing list of international artists representing several continents, these artists embody a vast and varied range of contemporary styles of photography, engaging the genres of cinematic narrative, landscape, documentary, and portraiture while drawing from conceptual themes and abstraction. Their respective work explores contemporary expressions of photography as an artistic technique.

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