

MICHAEL BENSON

ATMOSPHERES

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9 NOVEMBER - 3 DECEMBER 2016

PRIVATE VIEW TUESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 6-8PM

We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvellous; but we do not notice it. —Charles Baudelaire

Flowers Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new and recent photographs by Michael Benson. This is his first solo exhibition with the Gallery.

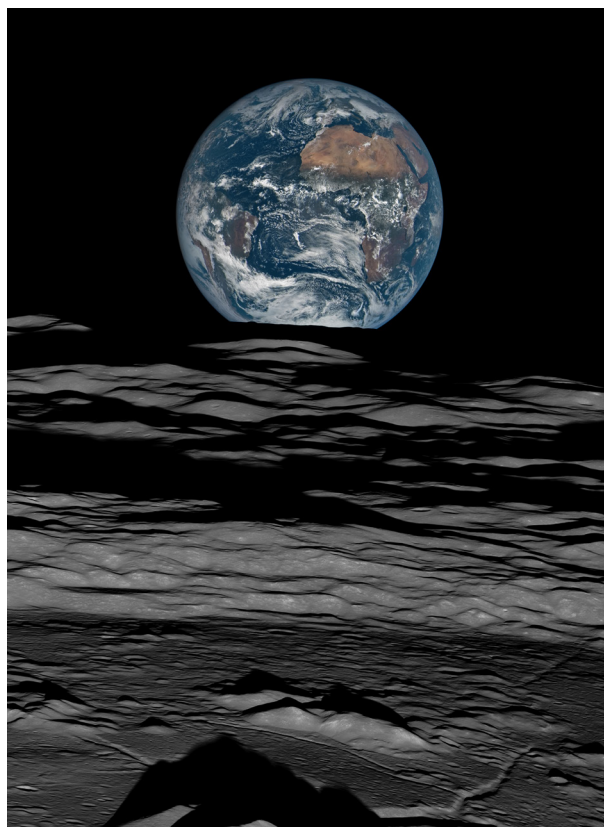
For more than a decade, Benson has used raw image data from robotic interplanetary missions to create large-format landscape photographs of the planets, their moons and the Sun. This body of work, constructed from fragments captured by machines hundreds of millions of miles from Earth, explores the visual legacy of over five decades of robotic space exploration, marking a significant new chapter in the history of visual representation. Benson's appropriation and re-positioning of materials originally acquired for scientific research, seeks to radically reframe the limits of visual and conceptual horizons; looking, as he describes, *"through the eyes of our post-human avatars."*

The images in *Atmospheres* reveal uncanny similarities between atmospheric effects on Earth and our most similar planetary neighbour, Mars. The term 'atmosphere', (from the Ancient Greek, meaning vapour in the shape of a sphere), is used to describe the envelope of gases surrounding a planet, and also invites a subjective view of the extraterrestrial landscape, informed by our sensory responses to atmospheric phenomena on Earth.

Benson's images highlight the contrasts between worlds with and without atmospheres (the Earth and its airless satellite, the Moon); and the visible traces of atmosphere and climate conditions on Earth and Mars, from the aeolian sand dunes on the surface of Mars, swept into their characteristic waveforms by Martian winds; to the clouds of desert sand on Earth, carried across the Western Sahara. In the near-full view of *Earth, with Hurricane and Sahara Dust*, ice can be seen retreating from Canada's Hudson Bay; while *Frosted Mars Dunes in Winter*, created from imagery captured by a Reconnaissance Orbiter, shows a frigid patina of seasonal carbon dioxide covering its southern hemisphere. In *Rover Tracks in Gale Crater*, the hazy sky and graduating horizon are caused by the scattering effects of light and suspended particles of dust, demonstrating the ways in which atmosphere determines how depth of field is perceived. Similarly, *Sunset on Mars*, which depicts an inverse colour graduation to sunsets typically seen on Earth, from a central blue glow radiating outwards into copper hues, suggests how the interaction of light and atmosphere shapes our impressions of beauty within the landscape, both on our own planet and in other worlds.

ABOUT MICHAEL BENSON

Michael Benson's work focuses on the intersection of art and science. An artist, writer and filmmaker, in the last decade Benson has staged a series of increasingly large-scale shows of planetary landscape photography in the US and internationally. His recent museum show in the Jerwood Gallery of London's Natural History Museum *Otherworlds: Visions of Our Solar System*, which featured new music composed by Brian Eno, subsequently travelled to the Vienna Natural History Museum, and will appear in the Queensland Museum in Brisbane from March next year. His largest show to date was a 7-room, 150-print



Earth Over the Lunar Horizon, Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, 12 October, 2015, 2016, Mosaic Composite Photograph, Digital C-print.

retrospective staged from 2010-2011 at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. titled *Beyond*. He is also an award-winning filmmaker, with work that straddles the line between fiction and documentary film practice. In *Predictions of Fire* and other films, staged studio scenes and animated sequences alternate with straight documentary material. In 2008-10, Benson worked with director Terrence Malick to help produce space and cosmology sequences for Malick's award-winning film *Tree of Life*, which drew in part from Benson's book and exhibition projects; his work can also be seen in Malick's 2016 film *Voyage of Time: Life's Journey*. Benson's next image-based project, *Nanocosmos*, will use a scanning electron microscope at CUNY's Advanced Science Research Center in Harlem, NYC, to focus on natural design at sub-millimeter scales. He is a Fellow of the New York Institute of the Humanities, an Advocate for Curiosity at the Weizmann Institute and a Visiting Scholar at the MIT Media Lab.

NOTES TO EDITORS

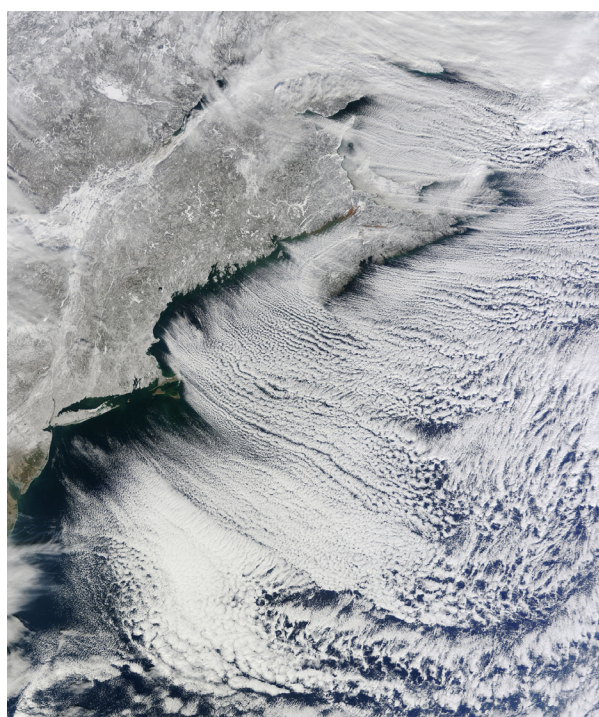
Opening Hours: Monday - Saturday 10am - 6pm or by appointment

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For further information and more images, please contact Hannah@flowersgallery.com / 020 7920 7777



Rover Tracks in Gale Crater, Curiosity Rover, February 9, 2014, 2015, Mosaic Composite Photograph. Digital C-print.



North Atlantic Clouds, Terra, January 24, 2011. 2016. Digital C-print.



Sunset on Mars, Spirit Rover, May 19, 2005, 2012, Composite Photograph. Digital C-print.



Frosted Mars Dunes in Winter, Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, November 26, 2006, 2011, Digital C-Print