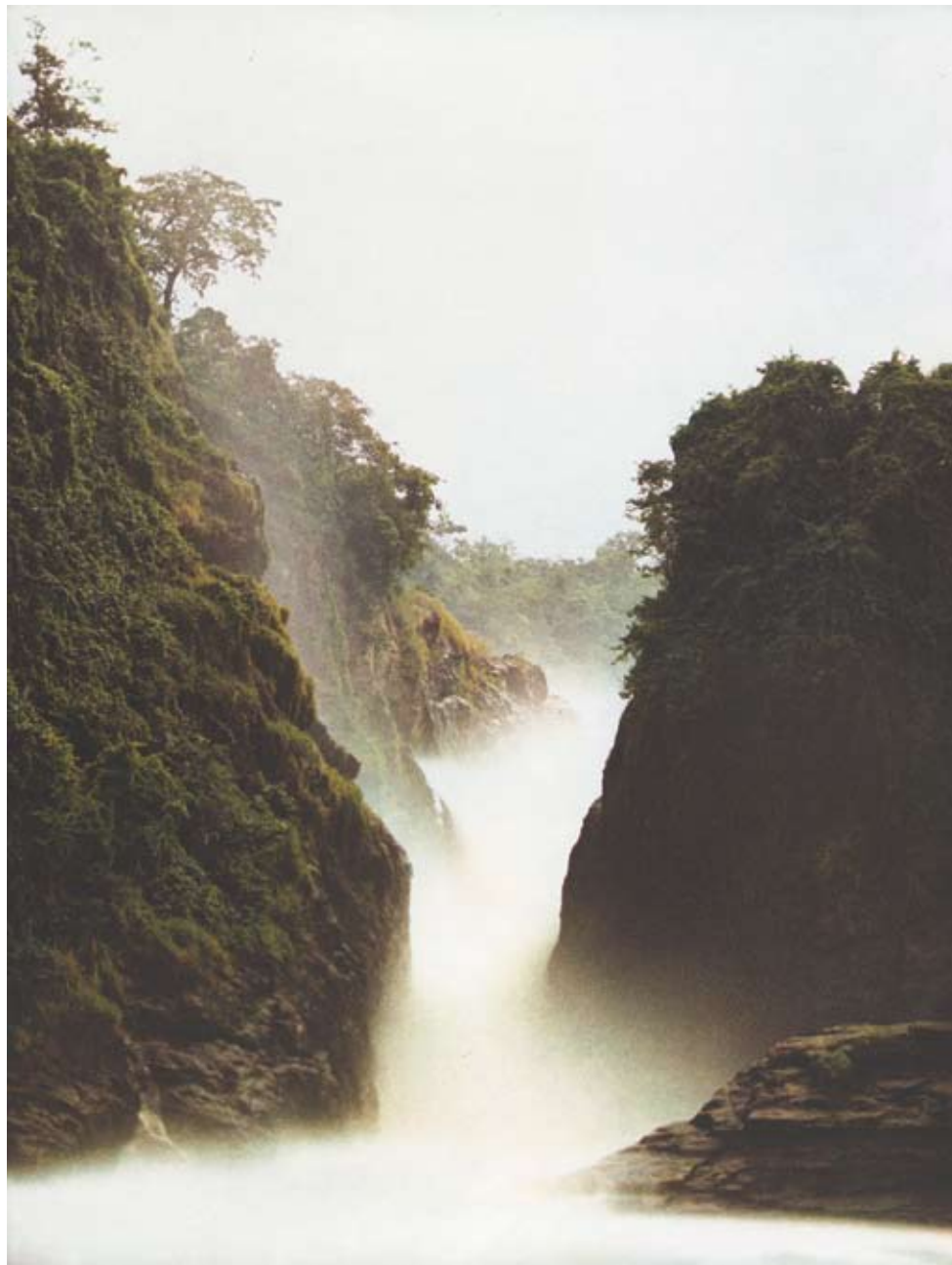


Overview

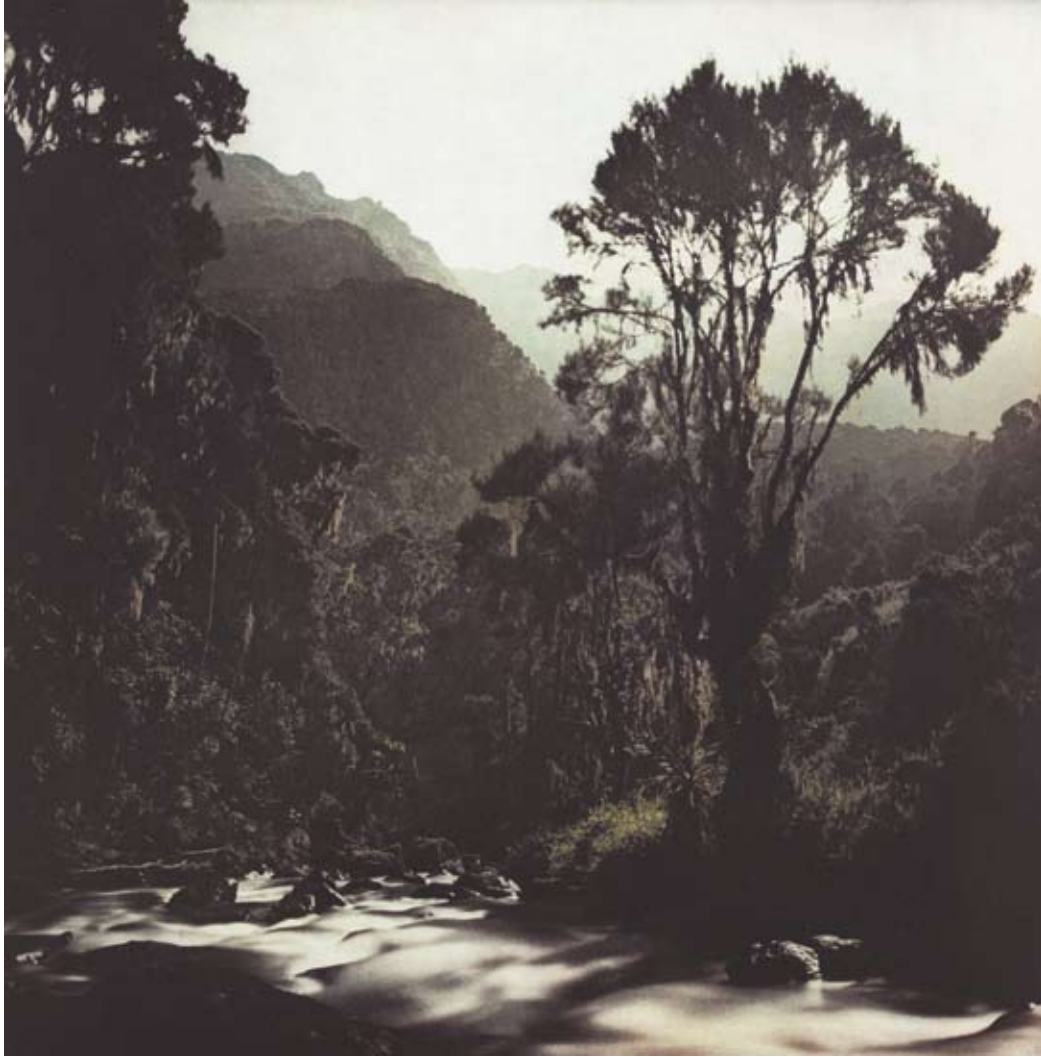


Fullmoon@Murchison Falls: Mountains of the Moon, 2010. Color photogravure. 24½ x 18½-inch image on 34 x 27-inch sheet. Edition 10. Photogravures printed by Asa Muir-Harmony.

DARREN ALMOND
by Kathan Brown

The only light in Darren Almond's *Fullmoon* photographs is the light of the moon. "You go off into nature and sit down and look into one spot for an hour and you never know what you're getting. It's just a bloody nice thing to do," he says. It's also time-consum-

ing and complicated. To take the color pictures that you see here, this artist, who comes from a small town in England, has made a trip to Africa and hiked for twelve days through jungle and knee-deep mud to a source of the world's most historic river, the Nile.



Fullmoon@Bujuku: Mountains of the Moon, 2010. Color photogravure. 20 x 20 inch-image on 29¼ x 28½-inch sheet. Edition 10.

“Once the earth was flat, but now we say it’s round. Once we thought we could sail west to the Indies; now we know that a New World is there. Once we were the center of a vast but known universe; now we’re just a speck in a vast and chaotic jumble.” –John D’Agata, quoted by David Shields in his recent book, Reality Hunger.

Late one night during the time Darren Almond was working at Crown Point Press, I read that passage, and it remains attached in my mind to Almond’s work, and to its maker, who seems to be without preconceptions—especially preconceptions of a “vast but known universe.” Almond was born in 1971 and is not quite forty, so he is on the “chaotic jumble” side of a demarking line between generations. Theoretically, however, he takes a long view, looking backward and forward through history and (in an irregular way) marking the passage of time. Practically he moves step by step, with full engagement at each step. It always matters to him where he is.

He told me that when he was a small boy his grandfather

took him to a swap-meet and he came home with an out-of-focus (long-exposure) photograph of a waterfall. Years later, standing in front of Yosemite Falls, he recognized the subject of his boyhood treasure. “I realized that the seeds for this work started growing a long time ago. It’s kind of nice to be working here in California now on some of my own landscapes.”

He was pleased, also, to be working with photogravure, a photographic process invented by Henry Fox Talbot, one of the inventors of photography itself. “I started my *Fullmoon* series twelve years ago at Lacock Abby in Wiltshire, where Fox Talbot made the first paper negative in 1841,” Almond said. Not long after that, Talbot created an early form of photogravure so his photographs could be permanent and printed repeatedly. The process we use today is called Talbot-Klic; it was improved by a Frenchman named Klic just before the end of the 19th century. It involves fixing an image into light-sensitive gelatin and biting it with acid into rosin-dusted copper plates—four are needed for each color image.



Fullmoon@Rwenzori: Mountains of the Moon, 2010. Color photogravure. 20 x 20-inch image on 29¼ x 28½-inch sheet. Edition 10.

Except for using a computer to make color separations, we work in Talbot's footsteps, and Almond, who has photographed a landscape painted by Constable and a mighty tree in Jackson Pollock's back yard, embraced the historic concept.

Beyond concept, Almond engaged himself with the practical aspects of photogravure, even attentively learning to hand wipe a plate, and the process has rewarded him. "There's a different energy breathing through the images than you can get in ordinary photographic printing," he said. "These have a different depth to them. They feel more sculptural, more like objects."

I could envision Almond hiking in Uganda in the Mountains of the Moon (a "seriously difficult landscape to get through" he called it) thinking about the explorers of the past, feeling a kinship with them in being, like him, "drawn to the Nile and its effect on geography and history." Murchison Falls, he told me, was where the 19th century explorers stopped. "It's a kind of gateway now. Beyond, at lakes Bujuku and Kitandara, high in the Rwenzori

range, it feels prehistoric because everything is out of scale. Lobelias can be six meters tall. This is one of the wettest places in the world."

The images are exotic, yet somehow familiar. "Certain photographs or paintings hold a certain amount of familiarity," Almond observed in an interview in *Flash Art*. "This mountain range, that river, is it one you've seen before? Or is it an unspecific memory you hold?"

Adrian Searle, writing in *The Guardian* about a 2008 *Fullmoon* series put it this way: "It isn't cinema's day-for-night so much as night-for-day. The effect is quite unlike human night vision, and closer to the way the world appears in old tinted postcards, in dreams and in memories of childhood. The world is slowed down, but this only serves to quicken the senses. Everything is impending."

The dictionary meaning of "impending" is "something that is about to occur," and it seems to be a phrase that underlies all Almond's work. He wonders what would occur if he went



Fullmoon@Kitandara: Mountains of the Moon, 2010. Color photogravure. 20 x 20-inch image on 29¼ x 28½-inch sheet. Edition 10.

somewhere or did something or built something. Then he does it thoroughly, no matter how long it takes, and the sensibility of something impending becomes embodied in it. His *Fullmoon* photographs are well known, but he is not considered a photographer in the world of contemporary art. His main working processes, according to John Slyce in *Flash Art*, are “sculpture, video, and real time.” Almond concurs and adds that he is “moving one constantly into the other.”

He moved real time literally into sculpture for his first show in New York, at the Matthew Marks Gallery in the fall of 2000. He built a digital clock into a large shipping container and traveled with it on a freighter from London. “Prepare to be stopped in your tracks by the lumbering semaphore of *Meantime*, which marks off the seconds, minutes and hours with loud, oddly soothing whirring and rhythmic ka-chunks,” Roberta Smith wrote in the *New York Times*. Almond exhibited the clock not with photographs or video of its ocean passage but with drawings of the voyage’s night

skies, “meticulously handmade, the color of each speck matched to the light tone of a particular star.” The review concludes with a description of the third piece in the show: a video of a monorail in Germany that, Smith says, “seems to glide effortlessly among different worlds, time periods and film styles, particularly between a dark, slightly foreboding past and a sun-dappled space-age future.”

I don’t see a “space-age future” as a theme prevalent in Almond’s video work, but he often invokes “a foreboding past.” It empties into the present, which rushes along as if it were a mighty river. Almond has videotaped his mother and his father, and, in another work, his grandmother. He has used the tourist bus stop for the former concentration camp of Auschwitz both in video and as an installation work, and has explored a prison, the high-speed train that threatens monastic life in Tibet, and sulfur mining in Indonesia, among other complex subjects. The work is inquiring, revealing, and visually arresting but not manipulative in the manner of conventional filmmaking.



Civil Dawn, 2010. A portfolio of five photogravures printed on gampi paper chine collé. 10 x 10-inch images on 23 x 15-inch sheets. Edition 20.



Civil Dawn, Darren Almond's second photogravure project created in the two weeks he spent this year at Crown Point Press, is a portfolio of five black and white works printed on Japanese gampi paper chine collé. The thin, smooth, very white paper against a slightly warmer support sheet makes the images seem moist: "they have a damp feel to them, not dry, which is special," Almond says.

Civil dawn is the fleeting space of time just before dawn when there is light but the sun has not yet appeared. On Mount Hiei, Japan, where Almond took the photographs, it is a moment when monks, standing in the mist rising from the mountain, offer a blessing over the city of Kyoto that stretches below them. The monks practice a form of meditation that involves running. Civil dawn is for them a moment of rest and rehydration, a time to put

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out the lanterns that they have carried through the night.

The rushing river of the present is distant to the monks of Mount Hiei, who practice an ascetic life that has continued in that spot for four centuries. Novices train for eventual participation in a marathon called Kaihyogo in which they run with little sleep or sustenance for 700 days. Almond has worked with the monks of Mount Hiei for the past three years, meditating with them, running with them, often with a camera on his shoulder, and has created a six-screen video work, titled "Sometimes Still," from his experiences. It is being premiered this May at the Matthew Marks Gallery in New York, along with large-scale photographs of images from the Mountains of the Moon.

The photogravures I have discussed and illustrated in this newsletter are an aspect of this most recent body of Darren Almond's work.



Darren Almond in the Crown Point studio with printer Asa Muir-Harmony, 2010.

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Darren Almond: Photogravures

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