

FOCUS: Adam Fuss

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

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I cannot remember the last time I heard people gasp in genuine excitement while looking at art. I don't even remember the last time it happened to me until I visited the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth recently and encountered a small exhibition of photographs by Adam Fuss. The show, part of the museum's FOCUS series, hangs downstairs in three small galleries adjacent to areas that house the Modern's permanent collection and major shows. What I found was a set of works that systematically astounds, captivates, excites and tantalizes the senses through technical prowess and presentation.

Like any photograph, Fuss' pictures record a particular moment in time. Further they portray the energy of that moment and its connection to a more abstract spiritual plane. Fuss' images float independently, without reference to place. Their self-contained, ethereal nature suggests the power to move between the two sides of the looking glass, thus bridging the gap between the work and viewer.

Untitled, a collection of giant pigment prints, confronts the viewer head on with larger-than-life images of the insect world. This series of butterfly cocoons records the pregnant moment before a new, metamorphosed life form emerges. Opaque forms atop black backgrounds create stark contrast, which illuminates the energy pulsating inside each organic encasement. Here, Fuss examines nature, while his staging alludes to an otherworldly dimension. Scale and presentation evoke multiple planes and the continual passage among them—are these organisms a part of our space or are we a part of theirs?

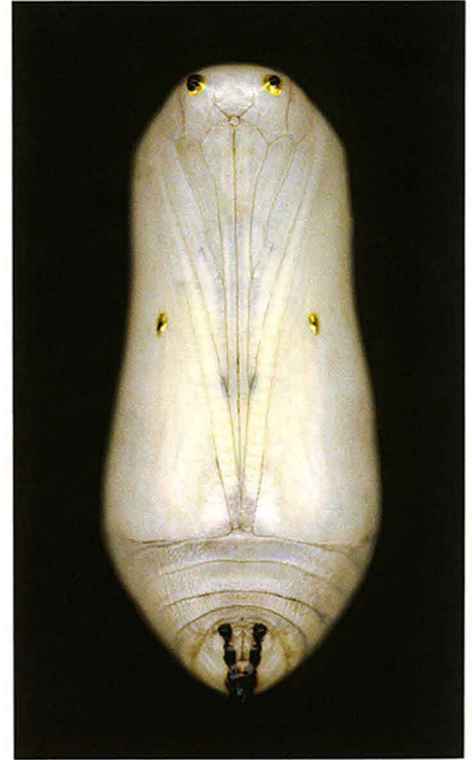
Another selection of works, Fuss' *Ark* series, includes five silver gelatin photograms. The artist routinely employs this technique, first instituted in the nineteenth century by William Henry Fox Talbot. The process does not involve a camera, but instead uses light to imprint an image on chemically treated surfaces. Each *Ark* photograph displays the point at which a droplet of water hit a pool of liquid below. Fuss has frozen this action at its apex, capturing concentric circles and ripples at the very moment of impact. The water's energy fluxes from static to kinetic as we are reminded that one droplet of water has the power to create a flood.



Adam Fuss, *Ark*, 2005
Unique silver gelatin photogram
24 x 20 inches
Courtesy the artist and Charlotte Lund Gallery,
Stockholm, Sweden

The most thought-provoking series in the show is untitled and includes a set of five silver gelatin prints that at first glance appear to be nothing more than entirely black photographs encased in glass. These five dark rectangles float on the pristine white wall of the gallery, lit only by dim spotlights. Naturally, viewers feel compelled to approach to look for something more than a blank surface. Upon initial inspection, only the viewer's reflection appears in the glass.

Fuss' initiative does not end there. After a moment of gazing at one's own reflection, a very faint image materializes: the dim apparition of a child. Ghostlike figures emerge out of the darkness, forming a link between the outside world and the illusory, sacred dimension behind the glass. Is this a postmodern scenario whereby the onlooker is literally incorporated into the work, or—as the show's curator explains, an homage to Louis J. M. Daguerre's *memento mori* series of the nineteenth century? The artist's ties to historical processes and philosophies remain present in these works, alongside postmodern concepts and presentation.



Adam Fuss, *Untitled*, 2003
Pigment print
72 x 44 inches
Courtesy the artist and Cheim & Read, New York

I found these "dark" pictures the most effective images in the show, in part because of their ability to visibly excite viewers. While some merely glanced at the photographs, most spent at least a few moments with them. This suite entices audiences because it revolves around the unexpected. We are taken off guard—surprised by the outcome. This leads the viewer on a journey of discovery, allowing him/her to play an active role in looking at and experiencing art; in turn, the work gains accessibility. We travel from our space into that of the artist—what some might argue is a spiritual transcendence. At the very least, this forms a dialogue between spectator and artist and, in doing so, unites two realms that ordinarily exist on separate planes.