

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Thomas Ruff's "MA.R.S./nudes" Comes To Gagosian Gallery

Whether they are forbidden or inaccessible, there is something inherently tempting about the unseen image.

Thomas Ruff's new exhibition combines hypnotic images of Mars' surface with the perhaps equally hypnotic images of women from pornography websites. The concurrent exhibitions, titled "MA.R.S./nudes" juxtaposes the surfaces of the red planet with those of eroticized flesh, emphasizing the mystery of both.

German-born photographer Ruff re-appropriated images from his previous collection, "nudes", in which bodies were digitally processed and obscured. The collection came with an excerpt from Michel Houellebecq's dystopian novel, "The Possibility Of An Island." The French enfant terrible writes, "There will be giant video screens, mirrors, rooms where couples dance and make love side by side, absorbed, narcissistic, completely unobtainable." These racy images are combined with "MA.R.S." in which Ruff takes typical black-and-white NASA prints of the Red Planet and saturates them with unnatural colors.

Ruff's hazy photographs remind you of your first brush with porn, that unforgettable flash of flesh that embodied everything you hadn't yet seen and weren't supposed to imagine. Eventually milky curves and craters align the nudes and the planetary visions. Distorted pornography turns sexual cliches into alien sightings. The collection presents hazy visions of fantasy, whether sexual or sci-fi.

Just as porn is the artificial quick-fix for how we think sex should look, so the visions of outer space begin to look like a science diorama. Yet Ruff's dreamy distortion frees the photos from their categories of scientific and sexual, releasing them into the infinite realm of abstract image. As Geoff Dyer wrote in "The Guardian": "The challenge of these photographs is that we don't know quite what we are looking at — or for." Space and sex converge as enchanting images we imagine but don't often see in the gallery.

"MA.R.S./nudes" is showing at Gagosian Gallery's two locations in London until April 14.