

INMAN GALLERY

For Immediate Release
March 9, 2023

Inman Gallery is pleased to present

Erika Blumenfeld *Tracing Luminaries*

March 9 – April 29, 2023

Artists' reception: Friday, March 10
6–8pm

Inman Gallery is pleased to present the exhibition, **Erika Blumenfeld: *Tracing Luminaries*** on view March 9 – April 29, 2023. **Jackie Gendel: *Sidelong Glances*** will be on view in the main gallery. The exhibitions will be open for viewing beginning March 9, and the artists' reception will take place Friday, March 10, from 6–8pm.



Erika Blumenfeld, *Plate no. 16914 (Small Magellanic Cloud)*, 2022
From the portfolio *Tracing Luminaries*
A portfolio of six intaglio prints with cyanotype, chine collé, and
24k gold leaf on Hahnemühle Copperplate
Portfolio size: 17 ¼ x 15 in

Tracing Luminaries is a new print edition by Houston-based artist **Erika Blumenfeld** created in close collaboration with Island Press in St. Louis, MO. The project centers on the Women Computers who, beginning in the late 1800s, worked at the Harvard College Observatory with the institution's growing Astronomical Photographic Glass Plate Collection. These women brought their keen attention and passion for discovery to the task of examining and cataloguing hundreds of thousands of stars and deep space objects, revolutionizing astronomy and astrophysics in the process. In their careful examination of the glass plates, the women hand-inked their research directly onto the glassy surface of countless photographic plates, literally drawing connections across the night sky in lyrical gestures.

In an effort to digitize this collection of 500,000 glass plates to benefit time-duration astronomy research efforts, the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics initiated what is known as the DASCH project, which, in the process of creating clean scans of the collection, permanently removed the women's marks from the plates. While a group of the Women Computer's marked plates were set aside for posterity, and those markings were documented photographically before being wiped off, the majority of the women's original marks no longer exist. Upon learning of this history, Blumenfeld was moved to artistically intervene. Combining photography, printmaking, and

experimental conservation, Blumenfeld worked with Island Press to return the women's marks to the stars through the language of materials. Using the element of pure gold—which is forged by the stars—and direct sun-exposed cyanotype "light recordings," the *Tracing Luminaries* prints reveal the women's drawn notations as a poetic starfield amidst a deep blue expanse.

Blumenfeld writes:

"The rich historic data of the stars captured on the photographic emulsion and the collection's continued import in contemporary astronomical research are inseparable from the historical inked ephemera illustrating human exploration and knowledge seeking, our longing to learn the stars, and the people who carried that vision to us."

She continues:

"The entanglement of these star-made materials alongside interwoven ideas of latency and presence, of human and cosmic timescales, and of elemental reciprocity has coalesced as a kind of alchemy throughout the making of this work. In this way, their marks—these interstellar drawings—once again become embodied fluid topographies, embedded by the gravity force of the press as it orbited the intaglio plate and paper, finally revealing the women's marks as elevated. Then, the elemental form of pure gold coalesces with the embossed ink layer forming a material bond that renders the text as star matter—and raised, as it would be, above the print's own horizon line; their marks become, once again, star-bound."

Blumenfeld holds a BFA in Photography from Parsons School for Design and an MSc in Conservation Studies from University College London. Both a Guggenheim and Smithsonian Fellow, Blumenfeld's studios include laboratories, observatories, and extreme environments, and she has collaborated with scientists and research institutions, including NASA, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, McDonald Observatory, and the South African National Antarctic Program. Her works are in the permanent collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Lannan Foundation, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts; The Polaroid Collection; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art; University College London and the University of Texas. Her work has been featured in *National Geographic*, *Art in America*, *Nature*, *ARTnews*, *New Scientist*, and *The New York Times*, among others. In 2022, the artist was elected as Full Member of the Sigma Xi Scientific Research Society for her artistic practice's contributions to science.

For more information, email Grace Earick, grace@inmangallery.com



Blumenfeld inspects one of the engraved acrylic plates.
Photograph by Jake Eshelman