



Mastering the art of looking in a visual culture so rapidly in transition has become somewhat of a sacred task, one that Dutch artist Misha de Ridder has spent his career pursuing. Drawn to the landscape at an early stage in his career, de Ridder moved from photographing the signs and signifiers of the cityscape to exploring his own relationship to nature's enigmatic depths. "I had the feeling that in the cityscape, everything is made - architecture, signs, all manmade. The meaning that arises from these objects is more or less set. So, as a photographer, you combine all these meanings and a new meaning arises. But I really wanted to work from something that had no meaning. Something before meaning."

Using a large-format field camera, he began to travel through the backdrop of the mediated landscape on the search for the unknown. From innovative and experimental photobooks to meditative video works and vast prints, de Ridder's work process is characterised by a gravity that demands we look again at what we thought we knew. Instilled with a sensitivity and respect for the monumentality of the natural world, the high detail and precision of his work invites the viewer to look anew at the world around them, and past the clichés that have come to dictate our perception of nature. "This overrepresentation of nature in media is putting up a wall in-between us and a real experience of place. I want to connect in my own way; I don't want to do it through someone else's eyes. More and more people live in cities. You see a mediated image, or a park, then maybe you're on holiday; you're in a car, you see all these mountains but you just drive passed them. You're still not looking. Even your cultural baggage keeps you from looking. Everything is already thought of."

On the pursuit of a deep-rooted experience that embraces the spiritual dimensions of our environment, de Ridder's ventures into the natural world do not shy away from the extreme nor does he attempt to conquer it. It is not with the grandeur of the romantic individual that he approaches his subject, but with a reverence for its insurmountable power. "It's about being at this edge, this boundary between something that is fantastic and terrifying. I'm most interested in this feeling and the place of man in the landscape." His intricate studies are thus devoid of the sentimental tropes of romanticism, filled instead with a sense of wonder at nature's enigmatic phenomena. Driven by mystery, they seek to achieve the impossible: to represent what essentially cannot be represented.

The "machine eye" of the large-format camera shares an equal role to the human eye in this process. Interested in the autonomous activity of analogue film, de Ridder uses the camera to penetrate a reality that we are not witness to. "I work with analogue film as a medium itself. I know film will pick up certain colours in a different way. You see different colours with the human eye, which tends to correct things." His most recent series *Falaise*, which consists of abstractions of the chalky cliff face in Ault in Normandy, France, harnesses the revelatory power of photography to capture the continuous metamorphosis of the cliffs. Once a celebrated holiday destination, where Monet is believed to have developed Impressionism, the area has become forgotten as it is encroached upon by the sea, which is gradually swallowing its surroundings.

Shooting with his back to the sea, de Ridder turned his attention to the minutiae of the cliff face. To the human eye, the surface is white. To the "machine eye", the surface is in motion, capable of kaleidoscopic transformations. The film has a life of its own, capturing a spectrum of different colours and seasonal textures, induced by the orange of sunset, the rich blue of dawn and the yellow moss of spring. With light coming from the sky as well as light reflected by the sea, the cliffs become a canvas, subject to renewal as blocks of chalk break away into the water to reveal layers of fresh white. *Falaise* is an ode to its lifespan, celebrating the mystique of 160 million years of sediment.