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Press Release

Mariana Cook:
OUT OF PLACE — OUT OF TIME

Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G, Basel
20 November 2026 – 14 February 2027
Curated by Beda Achermann

Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G presents *OUT OF PLACE — OUT OF TIME*, the first major exhibition devoted to American photographer Mariana Cook's series of glacial erratics. Developed over eleven years, from 2013 to 2024, the body of work follows Cook's sustained encounter with glacial erratics: boulders displaced by glaciers during successive ice ages and deposited, often far from their geological origins, in landscapes to which they do not materially belong. Curated by Beda Achermann, the exhibition brings together 74 black-and-white photographs, none of which have previously been shown publicly.

Cook travelled extensively in search of these geological presences, photographing erratics in sparsely inhabited landscapes around the world. The series begins and ends on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, a place closely connected to the artist's childhood. Over the course of the project, the erratics came to represent not simply remnants of a distant past, but objects connecting past, present and a geological future that exceeds human duration. Their condition of displacement also opens onto broader reflections on migration, belonging, permanence and transformation.

Cook first became widely recognized for her black-and-white portraiture, photographing leading figures across art, literature, politics and culture, including Barack and Michelle Obama, Jasper Johns, Maurice Sendak and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Her photographs are held in more than thirty major museum collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, the Getty, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. After graduating from university, she apprenticed with Ansel Adams, who taught her the exacting craft of making fine negatives and prints.

In these images of glacial erratics, Cook brings the intensity of observation that has characterized her portraiture into the landscape. Her interest lies less in landscape as spectacle than in the particular presence of the boulder within it. She sought out rocks without recognized monumental status, often in remote or sparsely inhabited environments, approaching them not simply as geological specimens but as individual subjects.

Cook continues to work with medium-format film and natural light, personally developing and printing every photograph in her traditional analogue darkroom. She describes photographing as a form of channeling: a state of concentrated attention in which the artist ceases to experience herself as separate from her subject. Her slow, physical process – travelling, observing, working with film, developing the negatives and making each gelatin silver print by hand – forms a counterpoint to the immense temporal scale embodied by the erratics.

> **"When I photograph these wandering rocks, I see how beauty and loss are wrapped together in nature's work. Each glacial erratic tells a story of forces larger than itself, and of the transience and fragility that shadow every image of seeming permanence."**
> **— Mariana Cook**

The exhibition is accompanied by the monograph *OUT OF PLACE — OUT OF TIME*, published by Hatje Cantz in collaboration with Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G. Alongside a text by Mariana Cook, the publication brings the series into dialogue with the histories of photography, archaeology, geology and ecology through essays by **Sylvie Aubenas**, historian of photography and honorary director of the Department of Prints and Photography at the Bibliothèque nationale de France; **Mark Edmonds**, Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at the University of York; **Paul F. Hoffman**, Sturgis Hooper Professor of Geology Emeritus at Harvard University; and **Jessica L. Allen**, Shirley Tucker Lichenologist at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

> **"Photography has the remarkable ability to transform the way we look at the world, and Mariana Cook's work is a powerful example of this. Through extraordinary precision and sustained attention, she gives presence and meaning to subjects we might otherwise pass by. Bringing these photographs together for the first time allows us to experience the full scope of a body of work developed over eleven years."**
> **— Raphael Suter, Director Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G**

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Mariana Cook

Mariana Cook (b. 1955) is an American photographer whose practice encompasses portraiture, landscape and still life. She first became widely recognized for her black-and-white portraiture, photographing prominent figures across art, literature, politics, science and public life. Her subjects have included **Barack and Michelle Obama, Jasper Johns, Maurice Sendak, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Desmond Tutu and Kofi Annan**. Her 1996 portrait of Barack and Michelle Obama, photographed in their Chicago home before Barack Obama's rise to national prominence, is among her best-known images and is held in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Cook's work is held in more than thirty major public collections internationally, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; the National Gallery of Canada; the National Gallery of Art and National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Cook studied photography within Walker Evans's department at Yale and wrote her thesis on Alfred Stieglitz. Following her studies, she apprenticed with photographer and conservationist **Ansel Adams**, from whom she learned the rigorous craft of making fine negatives and prints. She continues to work exclusively with medium-format film and natural light, personally developing and making her gelatin silver prints in a traditional analogue darkroom.

Cook is the author of thirteen books. Her portrait projects include *Fathers and Daughters* (1994), which brought together portraits exploring the relationship between fathers and their daughters. *OUT OF PLACE — OUT OF TIME* is Cook's second collection of landscape work and her thirteenth book.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Ginevra Fiorentini
ginevrafiorentini@artspr.co.uk
+44 7889888797
www.artspr.co.uk