



The work that I do can be used and shared by, individuals, nonprofit, for-profit, and governmental organizations alike. It does not prescribe a solution, but rather invites a conversation.

My aim is to make sure that the problem stays top of mind for the most people possible to accelerate positive change.

Your productions are elaborate. With the artificial intelligence (AI) tools now available to image-makers, why not simply create your visuals digitally? What is it about the production process that drives you?

Theoretically, creating the images I envision entirely digitally might be easier than planning and executing projects with large teams. But making “easy” projects is not the driving force behind why I do what I do.

I love the real-world adventures, interactions, and explorations that come as part of creating in a physical space — and I think that the advent of artificial intelligence actually gives my work more value.

In a world where digital content is becoming increasingly accessible, automated, and ubiquitous, the signal-to-noise ratio is getting higher and higher. The amount of mediocre content we see online is extremely high. It’s just not interesting for me to participate in a creation process that is about quantity over quality.

The end result of my efforts is only one part of the larger story. The more valuable part, arguably, is the creative process itself. Stories are what give meaning and value to art, and I think that AI can only take that so far.

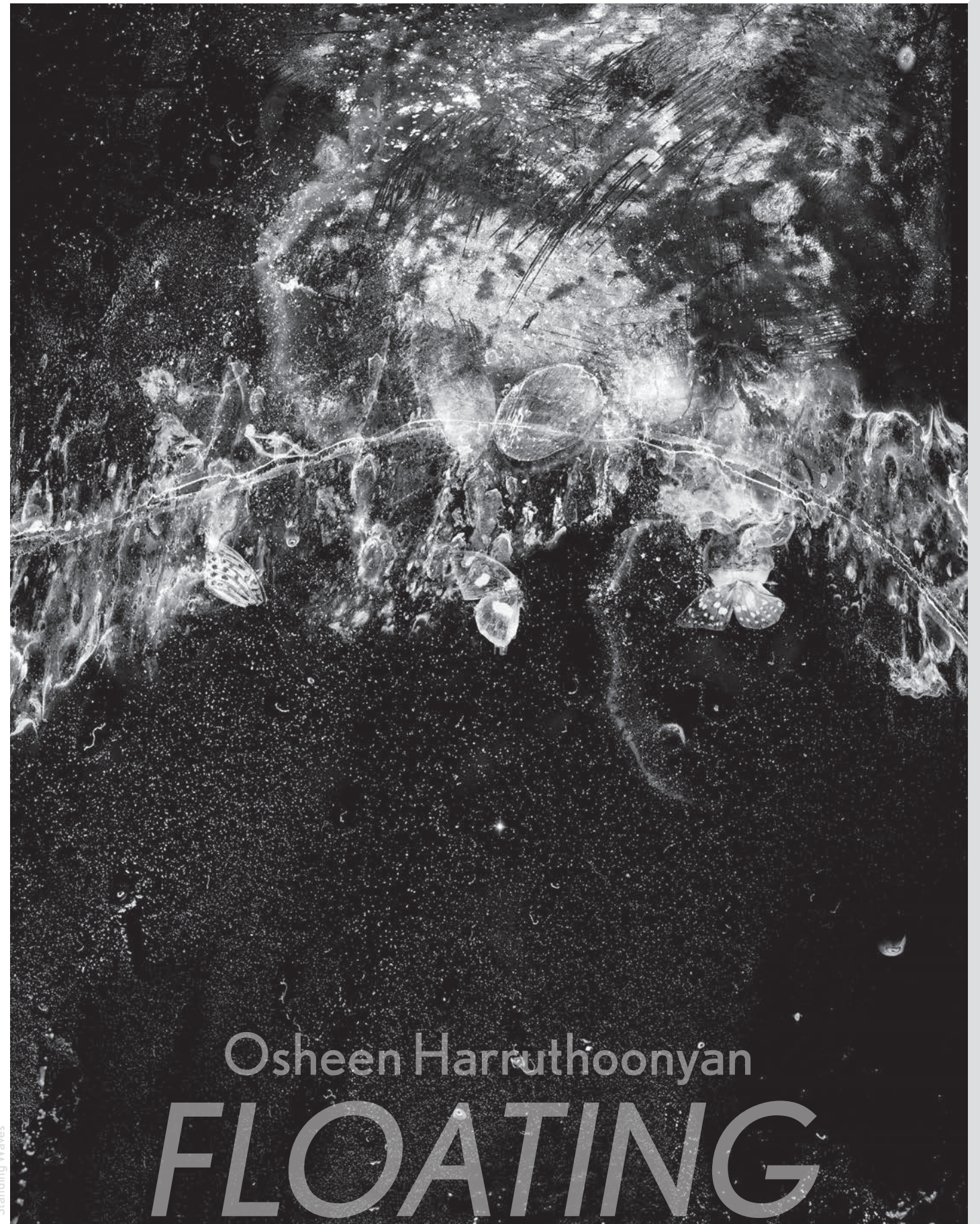
The kind of work that I like to do requires a lot of thought and preparation. I also think about how it could serve larger movements. How and where else could the structures I build or the images I create be used to amplify the topics I’m passionate about towards positive social change?

As digitally created content becomes more ubiquitous, there is also a growing appreciation for content and stories that are anchored in the real world.

#Strawpocalypse

Benjamin holds the Guinness World Record for the largest drinking straw sculpture (supported), made from reclaimed plastic, including 168 037 straws. The sculpture was created with Zero Waste Saigon (Vietnam) in Ho Chi Minh City in January 2019. The project was sponsored in part by Starbucks, who installed used straw collection bins at a number of its stores in Vietnam.

Follow Benjamin Von Wong’s adventures online:
vonwong.com



Osheen Harruthoonyan FLOATING

BY CORINNA VANGERWEN

THE MOST PROMINENT

thing about Osheen Harruthoonyan's work is the blackness. Reminiscent of Anish Kapoor's Vantablack, the inkiness in Osheen's photographs has a seemingly unlimited depth, like deep space or the complete darkness at the bottom of the ocean. This rich tone simultaneously provides contrast to the ethereal shapes and textures that make up his otherworldly environments, as well as offers a sea for the viewer to sink into — an abyss that helps elicit a physical and psychological reaction akin to being suspended in water. "It's such a different feeling," says the artist of the sensation. "I'm trying to get that across — this floating, other space."

The recurring imagery in Osheen's toned gelatin silver prints — celestial skies, nebulous forms, rolling clouds — are layered with textures to create surreal worlds that feel familiar but different, helping achieve the sense of floating that the artist aims for. In "Pour Etienne et Son Ciel" (which translates to "For Etienne and His Sky"), a circular border offers a portal view of the moonlit sea beneath a starry galaxy. In an unlikely position at the bottom of the window, fluffy clouds peek in. On the right, an unidentifiable translucent, crumpled form hovers mid-sky. The composition, like others of Osheen's, blurs the lines between foreground and background, and the viewer's position in relation to what they see. The stars creep downward over the water, so are they stars or water droplets — or are they the small spots in your eyes floating across your vision?

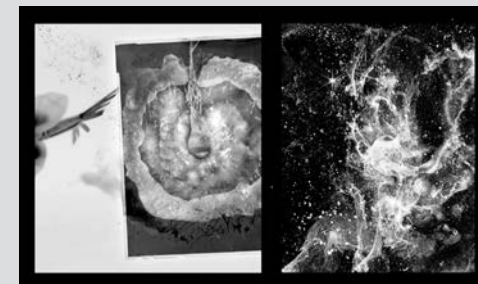
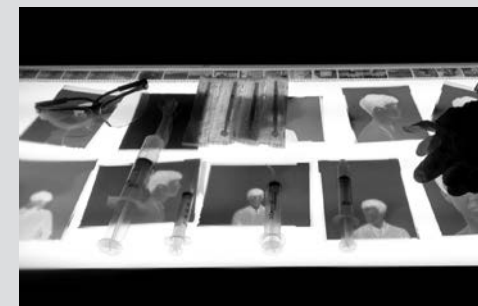
In much of Osheen's work, circular forms offer the impression of planets (as in "Act III Scene VIII" and "Tunnel"), white spots ebb and flow to create milky galaxies ("The Explorers" and "Radiant Meteor Shower"), and various textures evoke watery waves ("Standing Waves"), ripples ("Black Mirror"), and splashes ("In This Dream She Is Terrified of the Pacific"). Sometimes the water-like forms appear to be floating upward or bouncing in response to sound waves.

This imagery is drawn from Osheen's interest in astronomy, quantum mechanics, and astrophysics, and his fascination with how they're connected to biology. The dance between gravity and time, the space in between that connects them, is depicted through the negative space in his work. "That emptiness is still connected to the rest of



ABOVE: "Act III Scene VIII"
Inspired by the early astronomical drawings of observations of the night sky and ideas of the solar system. Photographed in an "alternate" Atina, Italy.

BELOW: "Tunnel"
Twins ride comets into the unknown. Photographs of stars and chemical reactions, multiple exposures on 4x5 film.



To achieve his alternate worlds, Osheen invented a process to manipulate black and white film ... a unique chemistry he's named Formula 5000.

TOP RIGHT: "Pour Etienne et Son Ciel"
Inspired by the early astronomical drawings of Étienne Trouvel and the unrealized architectural design of the Cenotaph for Newton by Étienne-Louis Boullée. Meant to be seen as looking through both a telescope and microscope at a newly discovered world, where the laws of nature are still unknown to us.

LEFT: "Eye Nebula"
In progress on large format film.

the image; there's always something that, from behind, binds it all," he says. These voids pull the viewer in, raising questions and memories.

To achieve his alternate worlds, Osheen invented a process to manipulate black and white film — a technique that secured him an O-1 visa to the United States, for Individuals with Extraordinary Ability or Achievement. In a petri dish, he floats a negative in a mixture of water and chemicals — a unique chemistry he's named Formula 5000 — then manipulates the film using dental and jewellery-making tools, as well as syringes. (One can see the negative carrying a material memory of this chemical bath into Osheen's final prints, such as in "Morphogenegis," where a similarly translucent form appears to have been soaked and softly crumpled, floating in liquid.) After he removes the solution, he continues to manipulate the negative while it's drying. In the darkroom — where he sometimes layers multiple negatives — he tones his prints with sepia gold and selenium. This gives the final black and white prints a subtle tritone look, with cool shadows, pinkish mid-tones, and warmer highlights that create a 3D effect.

In Osheen's *Black Garden* series, which depicts landscapes of Armenia and Artsakh, the otherworldly results of his darkroom techniques convey the concept of a place's history. Though the Iranian-born Osheen had never been before, he was startled to discover that he felt a visceral connection to the South Caucasus region when he was there. His historical and ancestral ties to the area, the intergenerational trauma and the stories he heard growing up made him feel as though he remembered the place. In *Black Garden*, he attempted to communicate that feeling — "memories of a place that you've never been to."

Osheen speculates that his drive to create these uncomfortable, surreal environments that, as he describes it, "feel like memories," stems from his own experiences of feeling like an outsider as he was growing up. Refugees from the Iran-Iraq War, Osheen and his family lived in Athens, Greece, eventually landing in Vancouver. Not knowing the language of either country, Osheen didn't speak much as a child, and he says he "communicated more visually."

The language of his work is of other earths and familiar spaces, but it is those deep blacks that centre his images, creating movement and giving them weight. Says Osheen, "It makes people question their space, their environment, or their psychological state."



OPPOSITE PAGE; TOP LEFT: "The Explorers"

From the series, *Saw the Splendor*. Two explorers travel between mirrors to discover faraway worlds.

BOTTOM LEFT: "In This Dream She Is Terrified of the Pacific"

Another Pacific, on another Earth.

LEFT: "Radiant Meteor Shower"

Bilateral symmetry of the butterflies' patterns, float off

their wings and become part of the night sky.

BELOW: "Black Mirror"

A photograph of a field of walnut trees in Garni, Armenia, not far from a 2800-year-old temple. The blurry imagery is inspired by early landscape paintings using Claude Glass, or "black mirrors," where artists would paint the reflection of the scene in front of them.



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