

HACKEL BURY

A TRAGEDY OF INFINITE BEAUTY

Doug & Mike Starn

9 October 2025 - 28 February 2026



Doug & Mike Starn, *you are my flower, you are my power*, 2025

HackelBury presents *A Tragedy of Infinite Beauty*, a solo exhibition by American artists Doug & Mike Starn.

The twins present new works which reflect on impermanence, perception, and the tension between beauty and destruction. The two series on view, *Under the Sky* and *Everything Is Liquid*, explore the overwhelming yet often unnoticed forces - atmospheric, emotional, geological, and cultural - which shape our lives.

The Starns navigate the world with the conviction that interconnection and interdependence are not abstract ideas, but conditions of being. This presents an exigence for them in their work — responding to the constant flow of objects in time, and reflect the dynamic forces of nature. Skies drift and billow, oceans crash, mountains rise — each moving at a different pace, from the immediate and fleeting to the glacial and imperceptible. From this perspective of shifting landscapes, the work pulls us inward through their intricacies of surface and gestural mark-making.

Created using hand-coated papers, photographic fragments, adhesive, varnish, wax and pigment, the works resist classification. Photographs dissolve into paintings taking on the presence of sculptural objects. Their surfaces recall the carved and inked textures of Japanese woodcuts, particularly those rooted in Buddhist print traditions. These early prints were devotional objects made through repetition and touch, shaped by time and intention. The Starns draw on this spirit through their own layered process, where images are assembled, erased and remade — interrupting detail, smoothing tonal range, scraping away form, until what remains is an image which is felt as much as seen.

“starting with the clarity of high-definition photography, we break it down - zooming in, smoothing, revealing the texture of digital noise - until a simulacrum of perception is presented. Vision isn’t a camera. The image is made in your head.” - Doug & Mike Starn

In the *Under the Sky* series, the Starns create objects of something which we always see but cannot touch - a contemplative space to reflect on the harshness of our humanity.

"The cloud is the inevitable thought, the thing with no permanent shape, drifting through the clarity of blue and silent mind. As the cloud changes continually, the watcher only watches it until losing interest, and as awareness of it slips by, the thought's gone out of sight. They always will be — old, worn, and always new." - Doug & Mike Starn

Everything is Liquid also explores transformation, the idea that everything is fluid and constantly changing. What we perceive is not fixed, but shaped by memory, experience and attention. For the Starns, vision is not a passive act, rather an active process, taped together moment by moment, formed and reformed as we move through the world. As with the landscapes they depict, we too are fluid, evolving, incomplete.



Doug & Mike Starn, MTN 123 Crop 2, 2021-22

The exhibition title, *A Tragedy of Infinite Beauty*, from the artists' own writing reflects on the sky as a symbol of sublime indifference: ever-present, immeasurably beautiful, and entirely unmoved by human suffering. Yet, within this indifference, the works register an urgent emotional resonance - one which speaks to vulnerability and the fragile act of seeing.

"The Sky covers and continues at all times and in all places, covering us, over us. With its beauty, the horror we create on each other is made all the more horrific. It's a tragedy of infinite beauty with no regard of our never-ending war waging and the oppression of each other. The Sky is completely, and utterly, oblivious.

But the beauty of the sky both shames and inspires. The situation is our own making, and the sky is ours... taking cover under its beauty, it's beauty to strive for, try to live up to it, to see our reflection in it, recognize it.



Doug & Mike Starn, *it's a beautiful day*, 2025

It's a beautiful day - be a friend to the weak and love justice. All the violence and suffering of humankind. Nature doesn't even notice it" - Doug & Mike Starn

About Doug & Mike Starn

Doug and Mike Starn, American artists, identical twins, were born in 1961. They first received international attention at the 1987 Whitney Biennial, and for more than twenty years they were primarily known for working conceptually with photography. Their work has evolved through combining traditionally separate disciplines such as photography, sculpture, architecture - most notably their series *Big Bambú*. Major themes of their work include chaos, interconnection and interdependence.

At their mammoth laboratory studio in Beacon, New York, the former Tallich Foundry, the Starns work in dialogue between their many concurrent series: most recently *The No Mind Not Thinks No Things* and other Buddhist explorations – the *Absorption of Light* concept, *allevrythingthat is you* - their photomicrographs of snow crystals, and their re-exploration of the late 19th century colour carbon printing process. Through their carbon-prints, the Starns mingle gilding techniques to the painterly photo-process, and further advance their metaphorical lexicon on light with photographs of Buddhist statuary.

The Starns were represented by Leo Castelli from 1989 until his death in 1999. The Starns have received many

honours including two National Endowment for the Arts Grants in 1987 and 1995; The International Center for Photography's Infinity Award for Fine Art Photography in 1992; and, artists in residency at NASA in the mid-nineties. They have received critical acclaim in *The New York Times*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Le Figaro*, *The Times* (London), *Art in America*, and *Artforum*, amongst many other notable media. Major artworks by the Starns are represented in public and private collections including: The Museum of Modern Art (NYC); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SF); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, (NYC); The Jewish Museum, (NYC); The Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC); Moderna Museet (Stockholm); The National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne); Whitney Museum of American Art (NYC); Yokohama Museum of Art (Japan); La Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris); La Maison Européenne de la Photographie (Paris); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among others.

About HackelBury

HackelBury was founded twenty-six years ago by Marcus Bury and Sascha Hackel. The gallery is committed to championing artists working with the visual arts who push the boundaries of their medium to create meaningful and contemplative work.

The London based gallery initially showcased classic photography from the 20th century including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Berenice Abbott, Malick Sidibe, and Sebastião Salgado. The transition from traditional photography to more conceptual work was as intuitive as it was organic, beginning with artists such as William Klein, Pascal Kern, Doug and Mike Starn, Garry Fabian Miller, Katja Liebmann, Ian McKeever, Stephen Inggis and Bill Armstrong.

In recent years the gallery has taken on emerging artists such as Oli Kellett, Nadezda Nikolova, Alys Tomlinson, Coral Woodbury and Sharon Walters.

Each artist, whether emerging or established, creates work defined by a depth of thought and breadth and consistency of approach. The small group of artists with whom HackelBury work, represent a diversity of practice yet share an artistic integrity which the gallery is fully committed to supporting in the long-term.

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