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© Stephen Vaughan

Stephen Vaughan
Ultima Thule

13 February to 13 April 2008

These large-scale landscape photographs explore the connections between geology, archaeology and history.

Ultima Thule was a term used in ancient history to describe the unknown region of the Earth at the extreme northern limit of exploration. Vaughan's work is inspired by an actual voyage made 2300 years ago by Pytheas, a Greek explorer. Pytheas made an epic journey beyond the edge of the discovered world, to a region that modern historians believe to be present-day Iceland and the Arctic Circle.

Vaughan made these photographs over the last four years, using a cumbersome large format camera to make highly detailed studies. They show volcanic fissures, vast glaciers and steaming sulphurous pools. Some photographs were made at a site where European and American tectonic plates are moving apart. Vaughan says *"My photographs depict some of the rawest and youngest surfaces on Earth, allowing the viewer to imagine the prehistoric beginnings of the landscape, void of any human presence or history."*

The region is considered by many to be the closest place on Earth to the surfaces of the Moon and Mars. Vaughan chose to make some of the photographs at sites where NASA astronauts trained in the 1960s in preparation for the Apollo moon landings. In this way his work can be seen to make connections between Pytheas' ancient voyage of discovery and present day inter-planetary exploration, revealing the persistent human urge to explore unknown territory.

To find out more browse the reading table in our Lounge or watch the specially made film featuring an interview with Stephen Vaughan. More images from *Ultima Thule* can be seen in a one-off artist made book, on view every Thursday after 6pm and all day Sunday. Pick up one of our leaflets for details of more events including talks, film screenings and *Archive Connections* at Insight (The National Media Museum).