



LAY
YOUR
HEAD IN
WATER

LOOKING FOR LIGHT
IN THE UNFAMILIAR

ALADDIN ISHMAEL









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Leggja Höfuðið í Bleyti

ICELANDIC PHRASE

I have been traveling with my family since I was a child.

My parents believe that travel is what enables discovery of self — that it is vital to leave what is familiar and embed one's self in other cultures. For my siblings and me that meant we would eventually leave our home and our family and embark to new environments. My first solo journey came at 16.

I credit my upbringing with my ongoing deep reverence and respect for travel. Be it around the block or around the world, travel remains one of the best paths for discovery — its ripple effects a reminder of what is possible when we tell ourselves to not only see, but also to share, what we see in the world.

Then came Iceland, with its inexhaustible beauty, my introduction to the true majesty of nature. And while it might have been easy to be overcome by its beauty, or to be transported to a place of deep calm; in the end, it fired my imagination, challenged me to study its light and shadows.

I am indebted to the country, to this remote land of fire and ice and its ability to invoke a deep journey of reflection and exploration. For these times, the Icelandic have a phrase “lay your head in water,” or Leggja Höfuðið í Bleyti,— for when you really have to ponder purposefully and thoughtfully about something.

These resulting images live as a shared reference point to these words and emotions, to the voices that continue to inspire me to keep looking for the light in the unfamiliar.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY

Aladdin Ishmael

















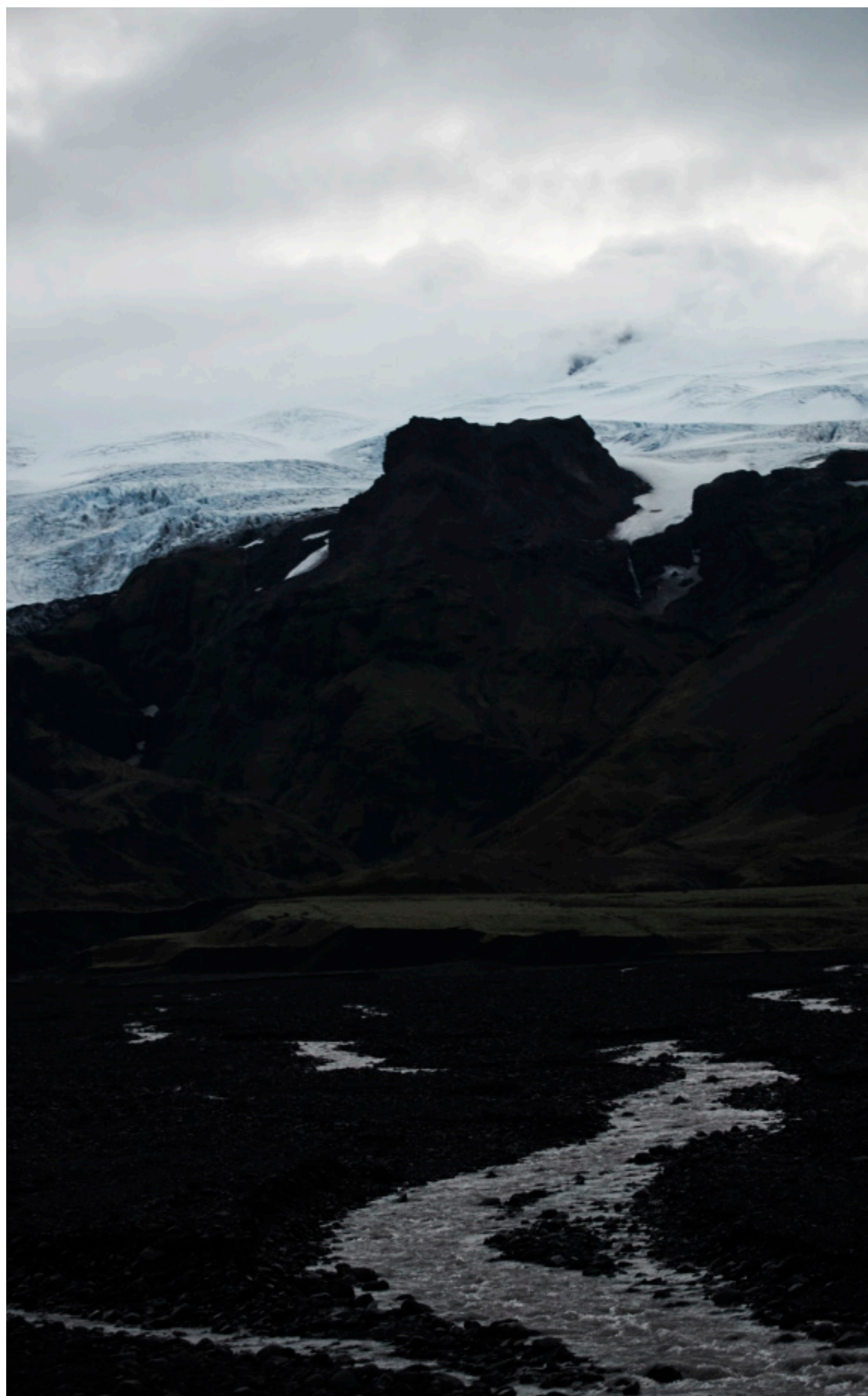




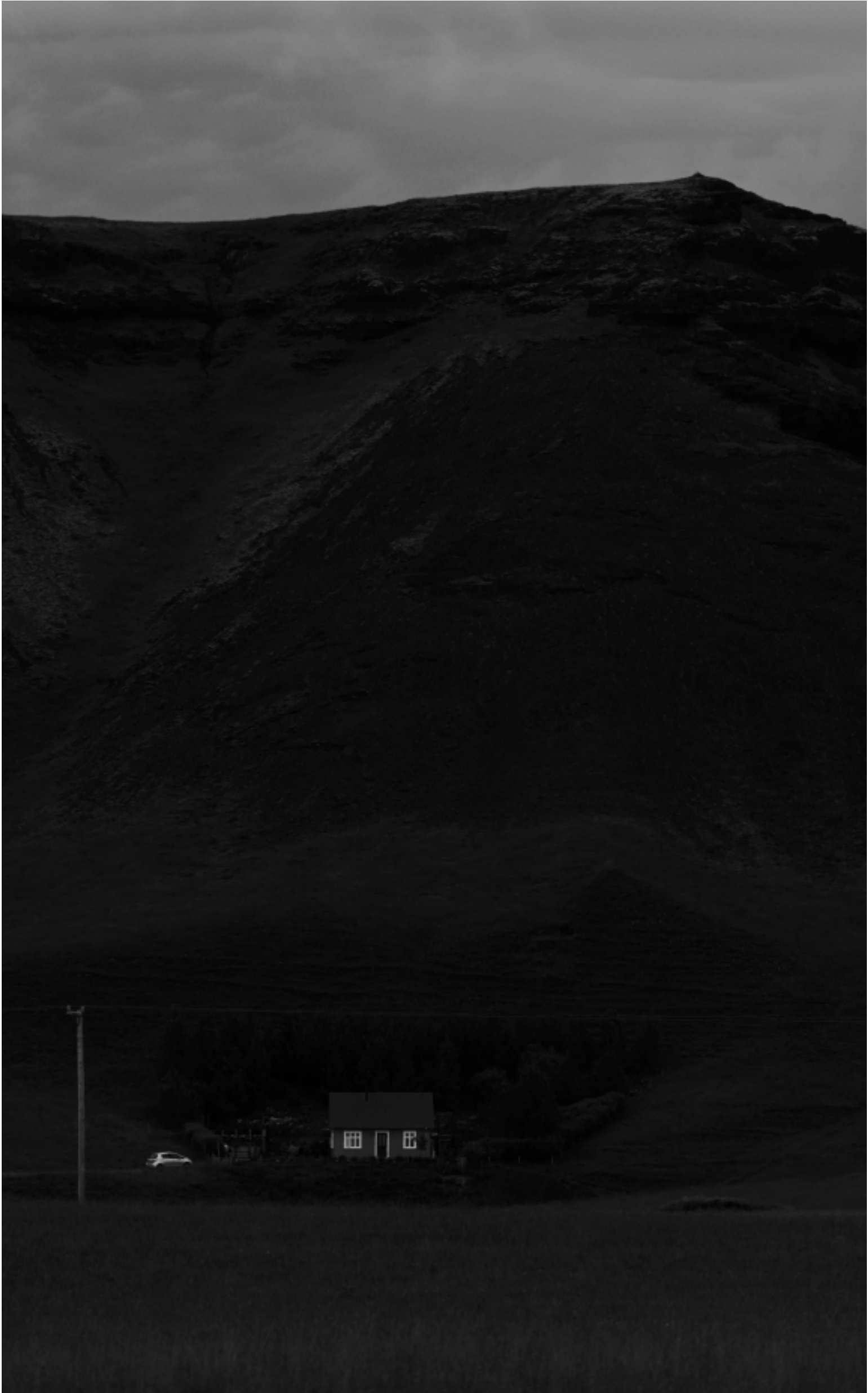












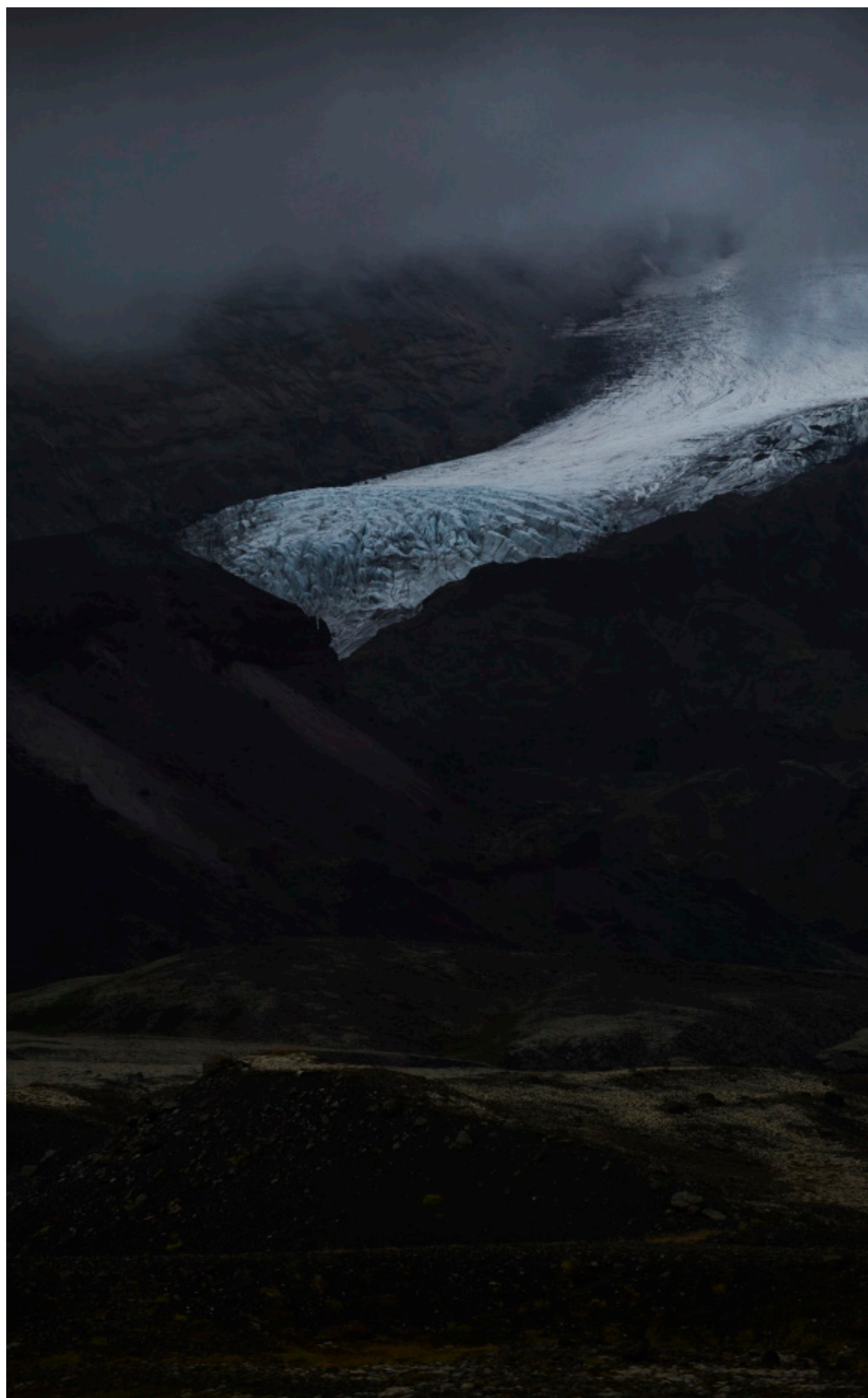






























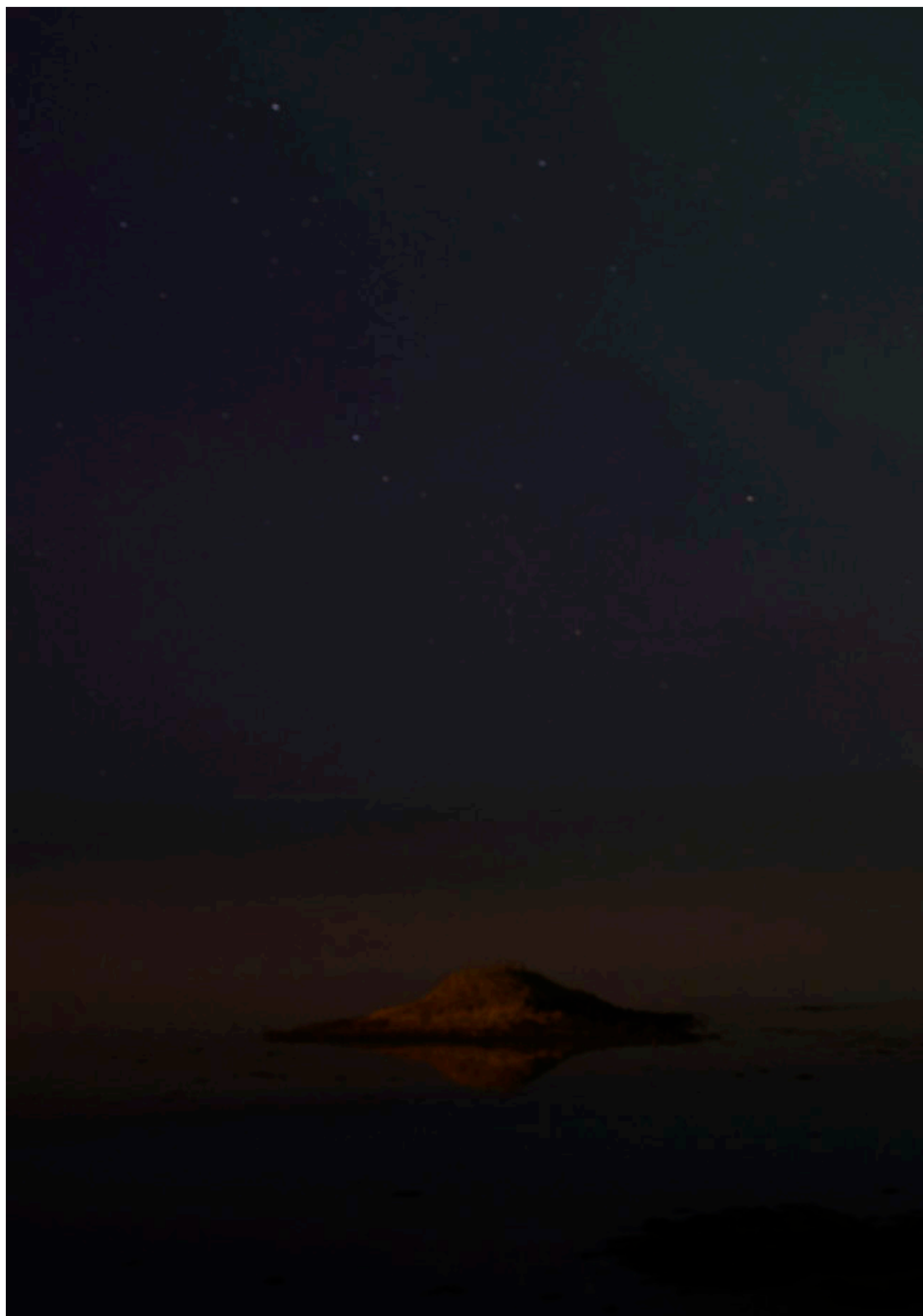


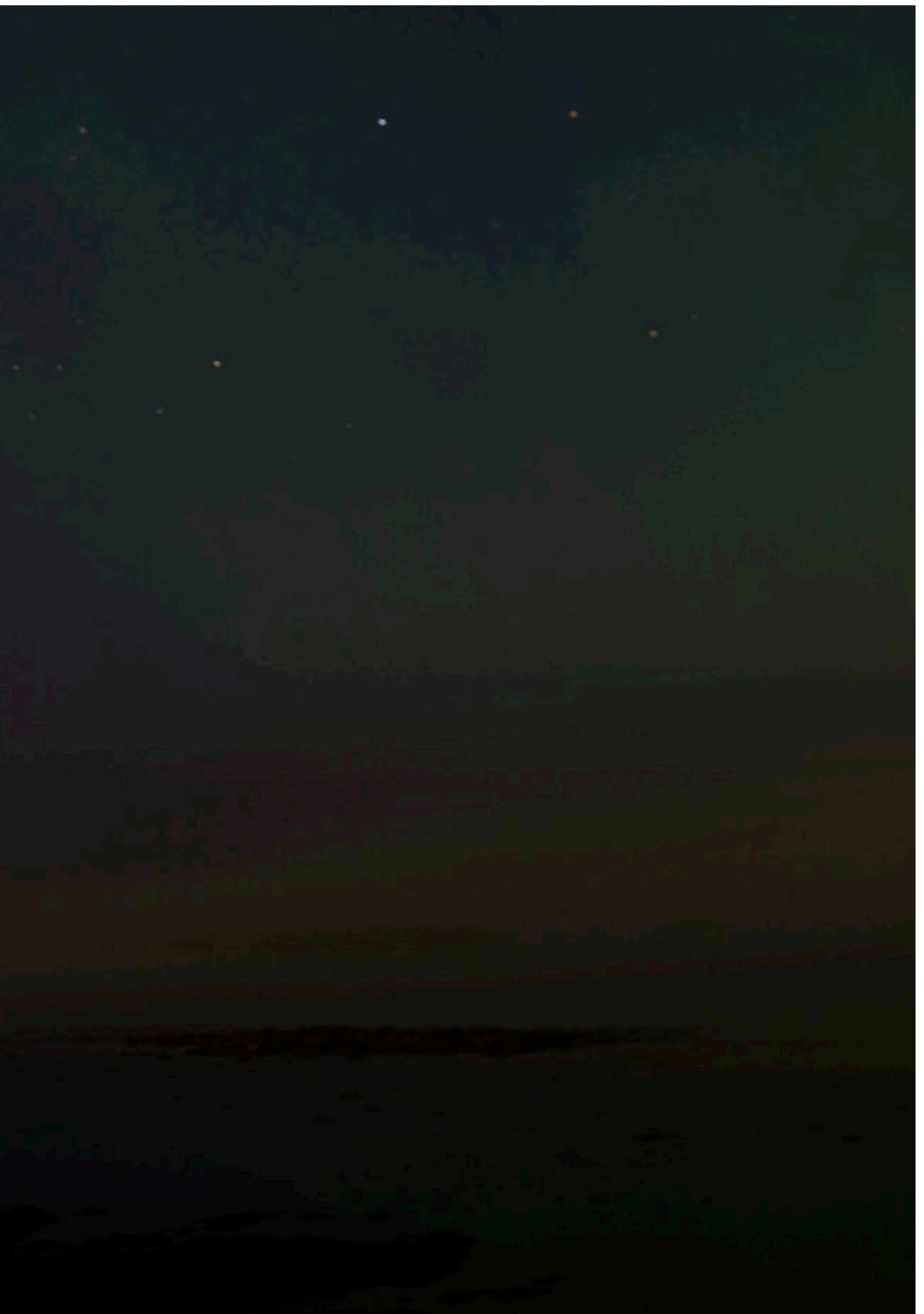
















ABOUT ALADDIN

For over twenty years, Aladdin Ishmael has created imagery that can appropriately be categorized as fashion photography, even as the reach of his expansive practice often transcends categorization. The work blurring the boundaries between genres, moving freely between entire worlds, fanatical in its terms of care and attention to things people might not see immediately.

Born in Amman, Jordan and raised by his mother among a house of sisters, meant learning about life from a variety of female perspectives. The house was an intense convergence of old cultural norms of politics and religion blended with the new. From stacks of fashion magazines and the pan-European satellite channel Music Box, came an early fascination with the transformative power of clothing at its most material level — draping, movement, color, light, and shadow — but also its alchemical power; how people used clothing and chose to present themselves to the world.

After emigrating to the United States as a young man, he studied at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco where his early work was encouraged by Marion Peterson, a protege of Ansel Adams, and Ruth Bernhard, the German-born photographer considered one of the leading studio practitioners of the nude form.

Ishmael's practice benefits from these deeply-embedded influences of female perspectives. His study of the human form eschews the gratuity of the male gaze. Rather, his imagery of bodies possesses a certain tenderness, embracing a promise of freedom informed by its absence. His vision is based in the hope of creating new ways of seeing, and in that seeing, new threads of understanding.

His impressionistic eye is particularly interested in the agency of women and the power of the female body, framing his subjects as beacons of openness and modernity among a world which continues to seek to cloister them. His practice internalizing the fantasy and glamour of fashion imagery's long tradition while also subverting it into something unique, conjures an enveloping and consumptive mystique that feels at once familiar and bristles with the frisson of the unknown.

Reflected throughout is Ishmael's attraction to photojournalism — it's a quality on full view in his series *Fight Like a Girl* which demonstrates a hybrid effort to find a third way between sober record and artful expression, colliding documentary and staged imagery to synthesize an essential truth about femininity and the legacy of feminist movements in the United States.

His *Rebirth of Earth*, pushes these ideas further still, steeping them in surrealist contemplation. Ishmael places the dancer Larsen Thompson within an otherworldly terrain — simultaneously scorched earth and new spring — creating an atmospheric elegy for our estrangement from nature, and a spiritual tone poem of regeneration borne from a fertile expression of liberation.

Ishmael's first monograph, *My Hotel Room*, is an intimate collection of images culminated from a three year period of research, travel, and human connection. Born from a deep reverence and respect of travel cultivated from the time he received his first passport as a child, the images present a multi-textured paean to hotel life; more than a luxurious stopover or sanctuary — though it touches those things — but also a powerful locus of energy, mysterious and enveloping, charged with emotional affinity. Ishmael's hotel rooms contain multitudes conveyed through his subjects: a correspondence of ideas, culture, vulnerabilities and possibilities. *My Hotel Room* finds Ishmael fully open to them all.



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