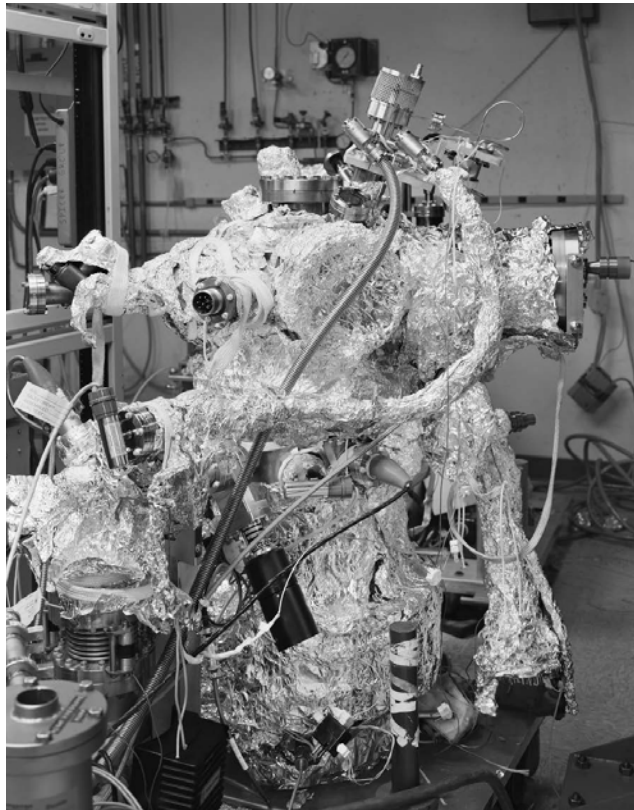


ARTFORUM

Catherine Wagner: "Critics' Picks, Catherine Wagner"

By Glen Helfand

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Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is an enduring work that, with the advent of insidious feats of genetic engineering, is more timely than ever; Catherine Wagner's gorgeous photographic project is inspired by the book's poetic and philosophical trajectories. Three related series veer with the sweep of an epic from locations in the Arctic Circle to state-of-the-art laboratories to stately old halls of science—settings that are unified by their relationship to the history of exploration physical and technological. "Arctic Circle," 2003, shows pale blue landscapes so vast and undifferentiated that the sky seems to meld with the ground. "Frankenstein," 2003, a set of crisp black-and-whites of the Stanford Linear Accelerator labs, shows high-tech vacuum chambers and machines wrapped in crinkly aluminum foil—a strangely quotidian touch. And "History of Science," 2003, portrays a series of cabinets containing early- to mid-twentieth-century molecular models that resemble Eamesian objects. All the pictures, in fact, play off of modernist tropes; the icescapes could be read as monochrome paintings, the Stanford machines as foil-wrapped, biomorphic sculpture. The images point to the limits of perception and to extreme quests for knowledge while venturing into the realm of beauty.

JESSICA
SILVERMAN

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508