

E V O L U T I O N

Photography by Christian Voigt

Impact and Perception

Someone once wrote that you cannot pass by Christian Voigt's photographs without stopping for a closer look. All his images capture your eye and your attention. First you are taken aback, then you are drawn in. And you need to step closer to identify the cause. How can a subject you have encountered a thousand times before suddenly seem so fresh and new, as if seen for the first time? And you begin to marvel with childlike amazement at the beauty of the world. This is how first-time viewers of Christian Voigt's work respond to his monumental, hyper-realistic landscape and architectural photography. Initially, the images feel familiar. But there is that sense of puzzlement. And the more the beholder attempts to come to grips with the source of that puzzlement, the further they are transported on a hallucinatory journey into the depth of the surface of things.

**“We don't see things
as they are, we see
things as we are ...”**

Anaïs Nin

Now we have *Evolution*, a series on prehistoric skeletons. Surely we have been here before? T-Rex, the pop star, its jaws agape, towering threateningly on its hind legs? The feathery Archaeopteryx, flying away across a primitive, rocky landscape with its prey in its claws? Brontosaurus, the gigantic herbivore, each of its steps causing the ground to shake? Dinosaurs, the “terrible lizards” (from the ancient Greek *deinós* for “terrible” or “huge” and *sauros* for “lizard”), have fascinated us all since childhood. They have formed iconic imprints on our visual memory, in the same way as the *Red Cross*, the *Union Jack* and the *Coca-Cola* logo. We have seen them a thousand times, read about them in children's books, collected them as figurines, adored them as cartoon characters, learnt about them in biology class, visited them in natural history museums, and quaked in our cinema seats as they appeared as Hollywood-style monsters in *Jurassic World*. Christian Voigt has again ventured into photographic territory that has been measured, mapped, studied and trivialized to the nth degree. And despite, or because, of this fact he again instantaneously succeeds in casting an enigmatic spell over us.

At first glance, the figures depicted in his monumental, large-format, deep-black photographs appear to be drawn from fantasy fiction — something from Tolkien’s world, but suddenly reality. They are three-dimensional, huge, almost alive. At second glance, however, we detect something strangely familiar. Our body releases an extra rush of adrenaline. But our brain activates its critical faculties. Human intelligence begins to analyze these strange photographs. Is this authentic? Why this color? Is this genuine? If so, why does it look so hyper-real? They have an almost physical impact on us — precisely because there is no addition, intention, or guile. They simply are. This is how Christian Voigt works.

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Born in Munich, and with homes in Hamburg and the south of France, Christian Voigt is a restless traveler, always in search of the “city beyond the hills.” Travel is his life’s purpose, encounters are his life’s elixir, the search for beauty his life’s motif — underpinned by all-pervasive perfectionism. These are the keys to his unfathomably sumptuous images of landscapes and architecture, his unmistakable photographic technique, and visual language — that have catapulted him to rapidly growing, international fame, and made his works sought-after acquisitions in an increasing number of private collections.

For Christian Voigt the artist, it would probably make sense to leave his unique visual language unaltered, and to simply collect new images on new travels to new locations. But for Christian Voigt the traveler, that it is not an option. It would feel as if he had come to the end of the road. “To me, the purpose of travel is the journey itself, not reaching a certain location. As a traveler, as a human being, and as a photographer, I don’t want to be at a point where I say: I’ve reached my destination. This is where I am going to stay.”

With *Evolution*, Christian Voigt has radically expanded both his visual vocabulary and his portfolio of photographic techniques. These are not carefully sought-and-found subjects, as is the case with Voigt’s landscape and architectural panoramas. Instead, he presents us with objects as they are — captured under almost laboratory-like conditions. This is not a heightened depiction of reality, but the systematic staging of it, even to the extent of eliminating the surroundings in favor of black non-light.

“A question always corresponds to a method of finding. Or you could say: a question describes a method of searching.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

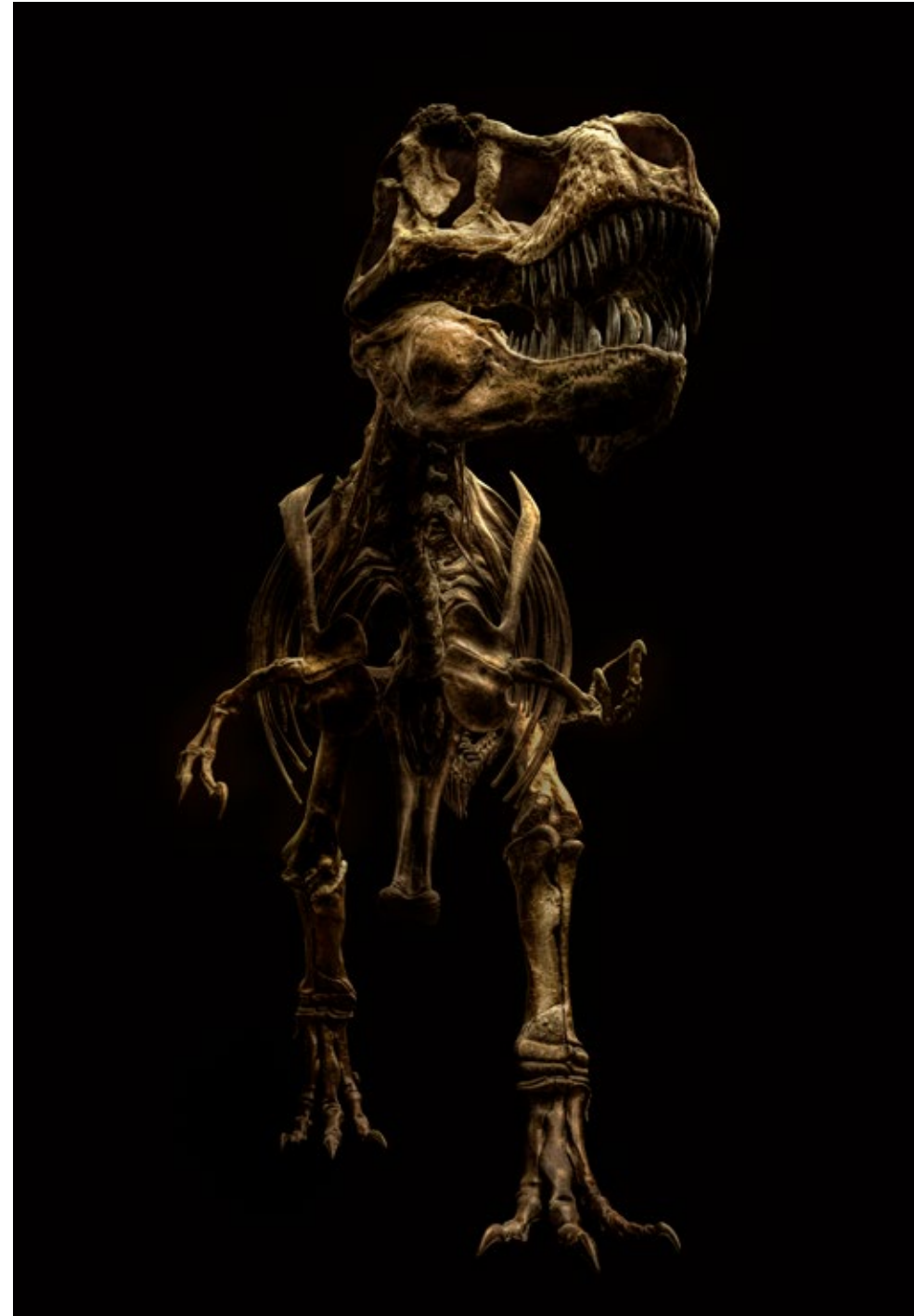
Christian Voigt wants his *Evolution* series to be regarded more as objects than as images. Voigt the perfectionist does all he can to achieve his intended effect: from the choice of large-format paper, to the highly detailed instructions on the lighting, to the specially conceived frames — these are integral parts of the photographs, and were redesigned several times in their making.

“The idea for *Evolution* came to me in 2017 when I was photographing the huge blue whale skeleton suspended from the ceiling of the Hintze Hall in the Natural History Museum in London. For me, there was an odd tension between the archaic power of this huge skeleton and the strict order of the surrounding architecture,” explains Christian Voigt. “I continued to pursue this tension — and arrived at this radical depiction against a black backdrop. Usually, I want my pictures to convey how I see something. But with the dinosaurs, I want to show the impact they have on me. And to do that, I had to find new methods.”

What remains is an X-ray-like view of the surface of things that is so detailed it feels like a hallucination. Much like his landscape photographs, Christian Voigt’s *Evolution* images push the limits of today’s photographic techniques and technology. They are the result of meticulously planned, extremely time-consuming multiple exposures taken with large-format analogue cameras. These images are subsequently layered on top of each other, exposed again and printed on paper to create a single picture. It is a process that often takes weeks. Without adding anything extra to the image itself, each individual bone and each individual detail is modeled one by one, and staged to perfection. As a result, Christian Voigt’s *Evolution* photographs are supernaturally clear depictions, with hyper-ideal lighting and uncannily crisp contours. The result is more real than reality. But their puzzling mystery remains.

Tyrannosaurus Rex

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



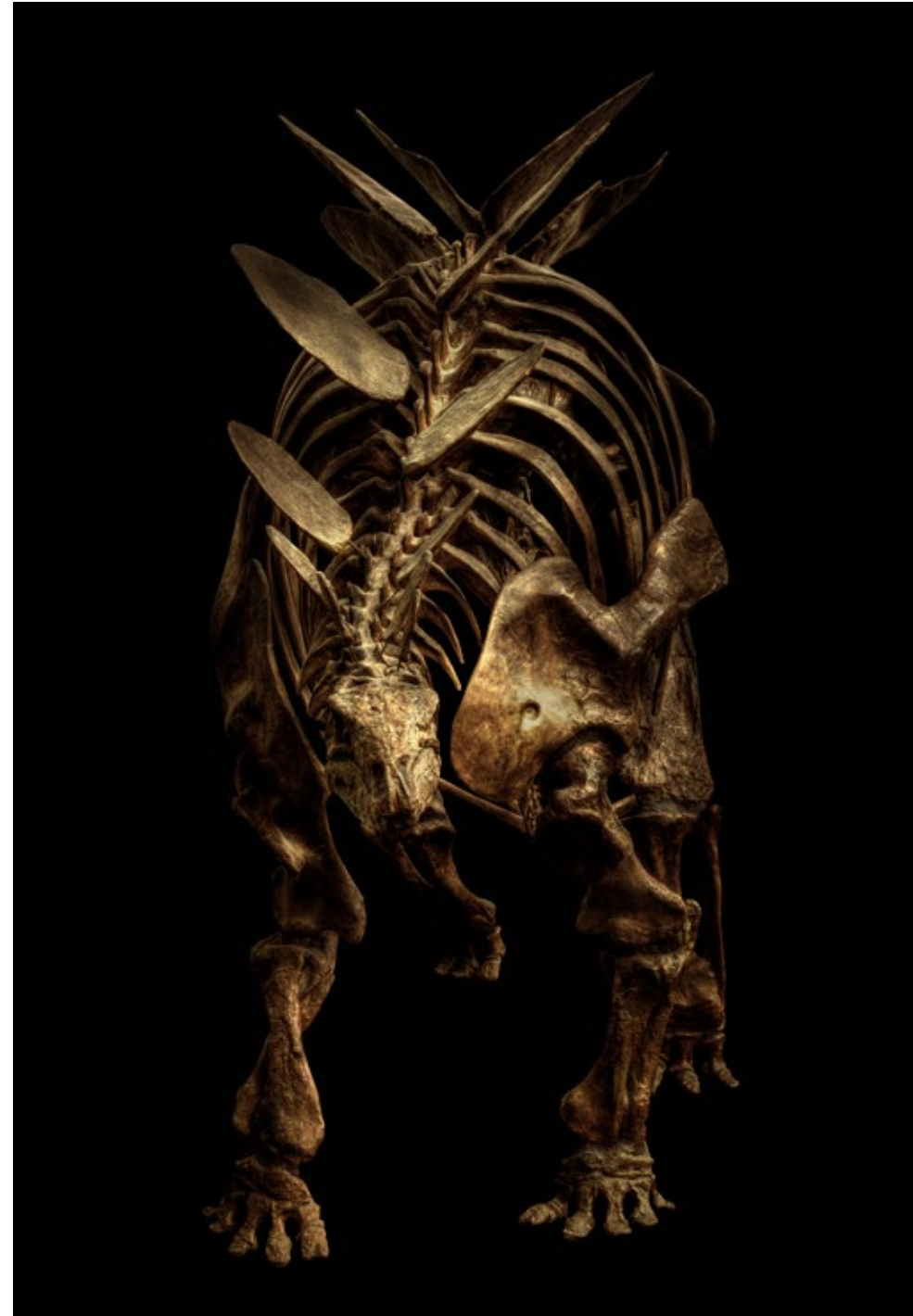
Triceratops Unio

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



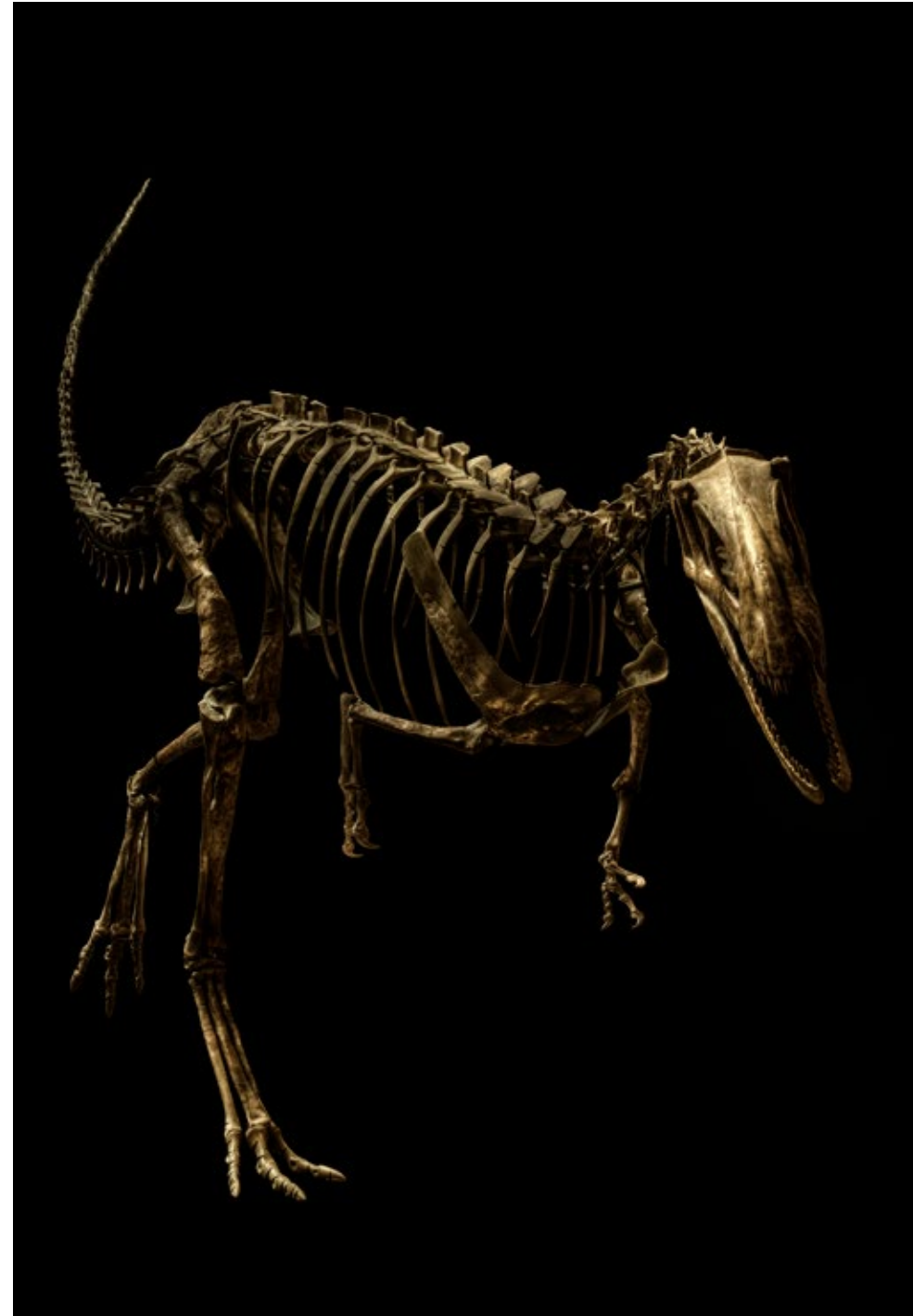
Stegosaurus

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



Dysalotosaurus Lettowvorbecki Unio

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Museum für Naturkunde / Berlin
Limited edition of 12
2018



Triceratops Duo

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



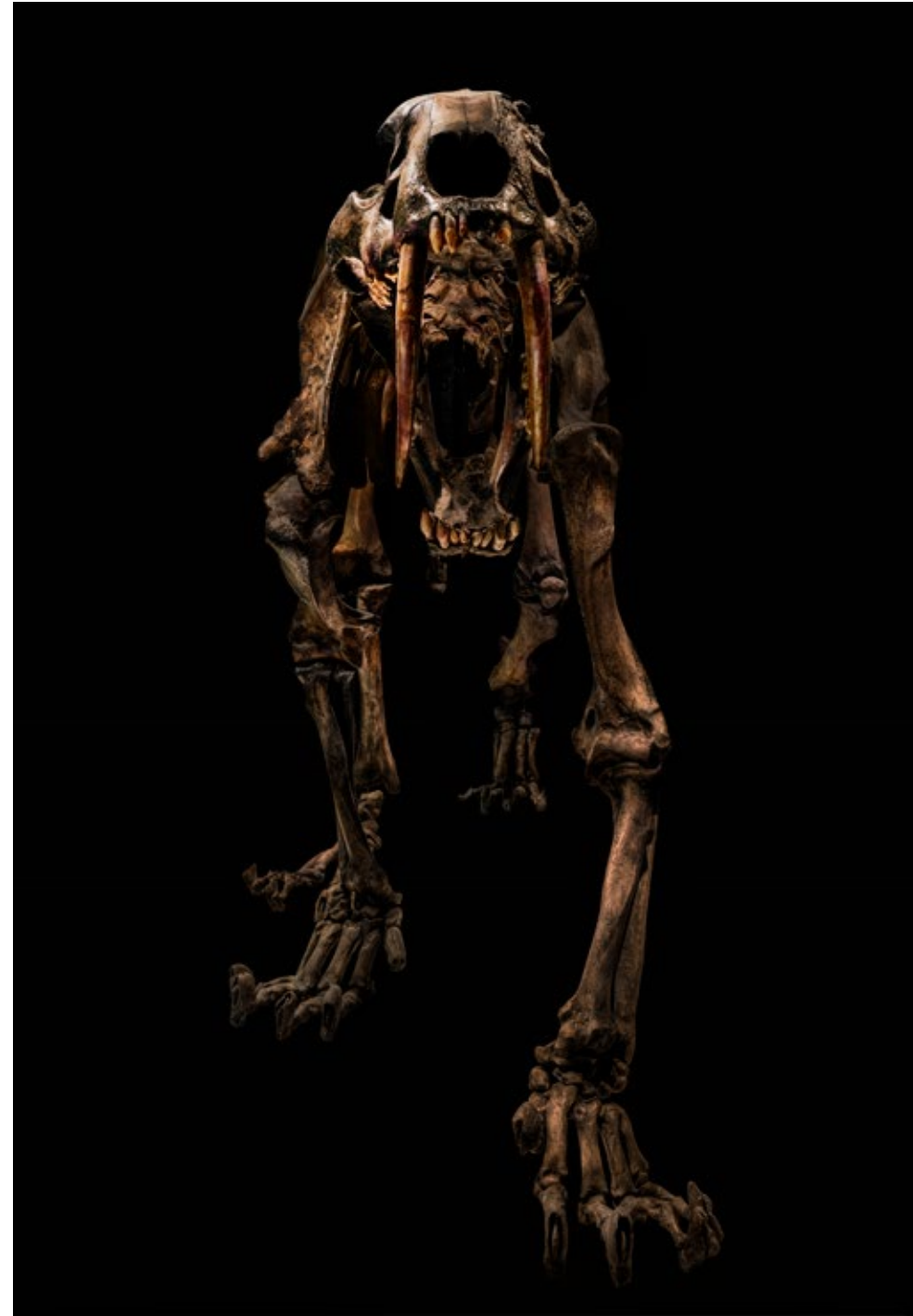
Kentrosaurus Aethiopicus

61 × 84 inch / 155 × 213 cm / frame size
Museum für Naturkunde / Berlin
Limited edition of 12
2018



Smilodon Californicus

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



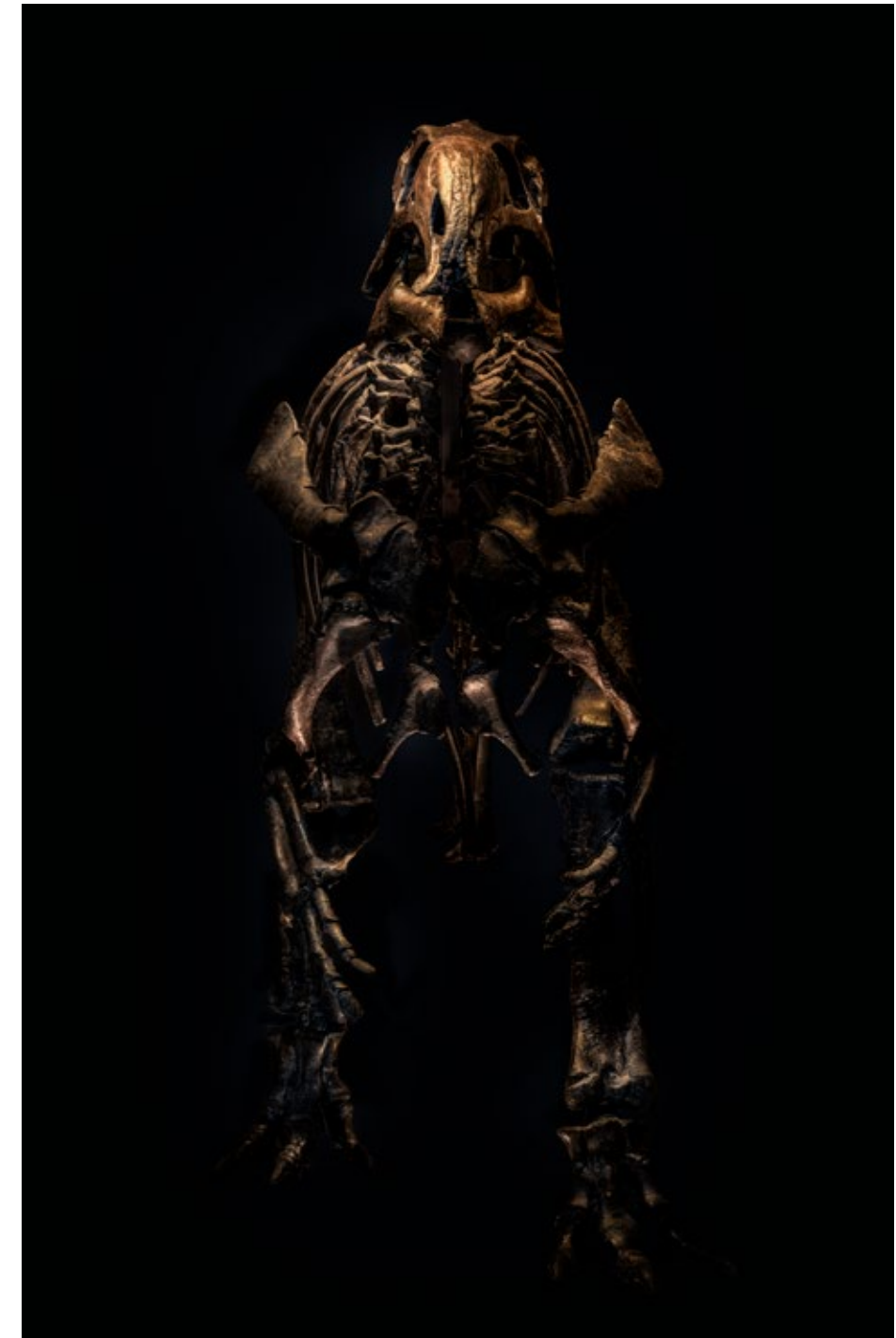
Stygmoloch Spinifer

61 × 84 inch / 155 × 213 cm / frame size
Museum für Naturkunde / Berlin
Limited edition of 12
2018



Mantellisaurus Atherfieldensis

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
National History Museum / London
Limited edition of 12
2017



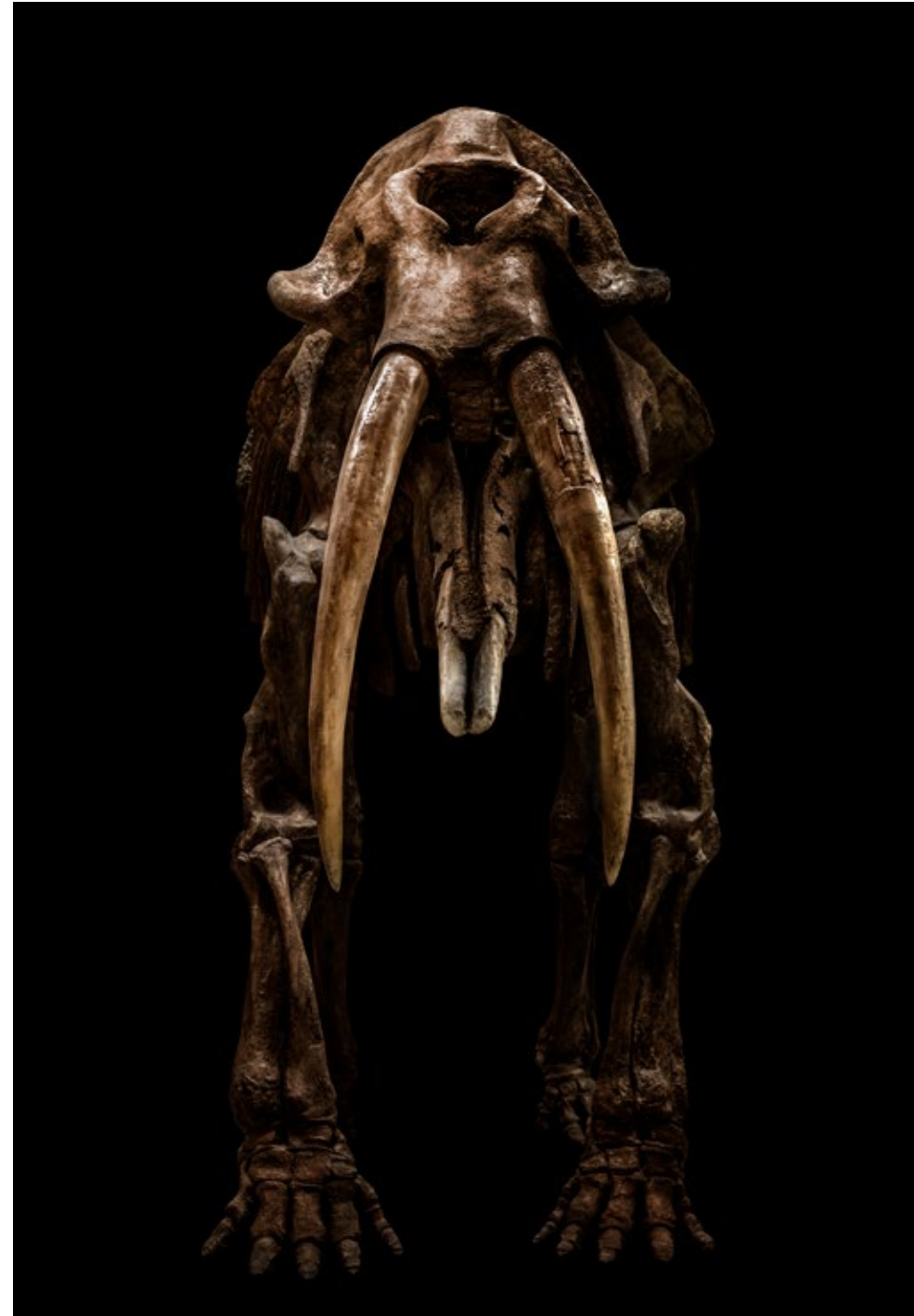
Tyrannosaurus Rex Rocky

61 × 84 inch / 155 × 213 cm / frame size
Dinosaurier-Park Altmühltal
Limited edition of 12
2018



Gomphotherium Angustidens

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



Tyrannosaurus Rex Tristan

61 × 84 inch / 155 × 213 cm / frame size
Museum für Naturkunde / Berlin
Limited edition of 12
2018



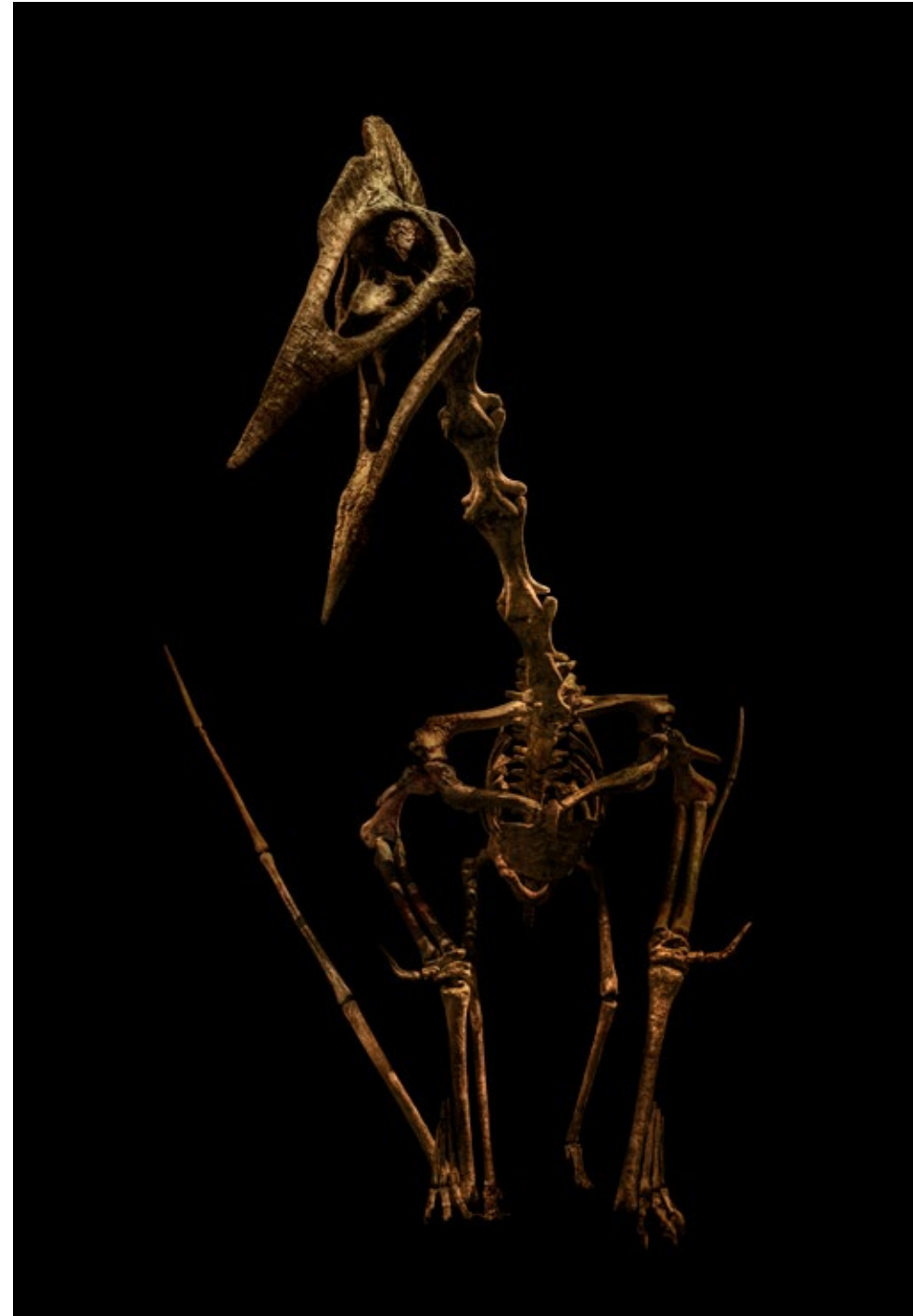
Dysalotosaurus Lettowvorbecki Duo

61 × 84 inch / 155 × 213 cm / frame size
Museum für Naturkunde / Berlin
Limited edition of 12
2018



Pterosauria Dracula

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Dinosaurier-Park Altmühltal
Limited edition of 12
2018



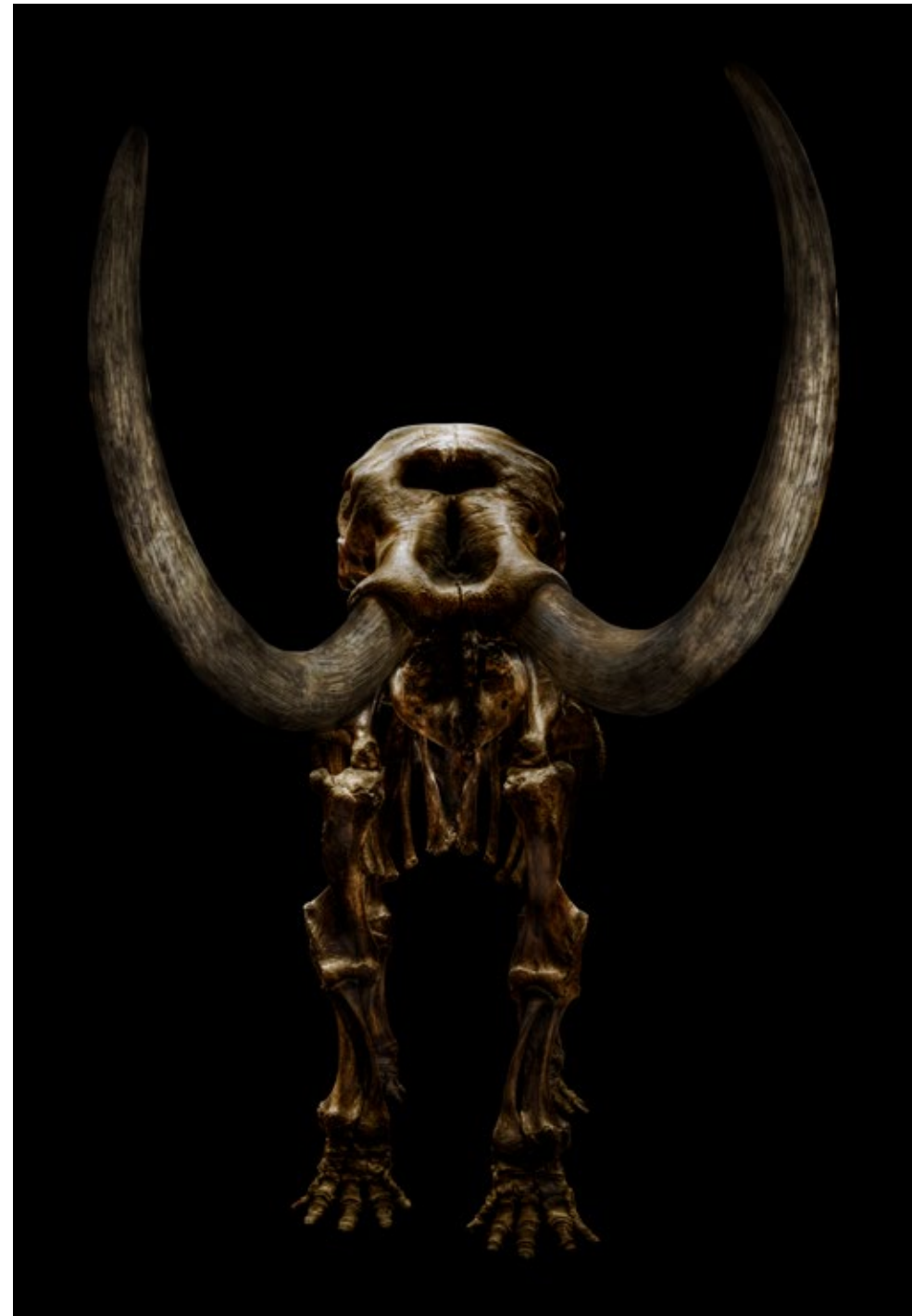
Euoplocephalus

61 × 84 inch / 155 × 213 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



Mammut Americanum

84 × 61inch / 213 × 155 cm / frame size
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
Limited edition of 12
2018



Special Thanks

Museum für Naturkunde / Berlin
Senckenberg Naturmuseum / Frankfurt am Main
National History Museum / London
Dinosaurier-Park Altmühltal

Interview

***Evolution* has a special place in Christian Voigt's life work. We asked the Hamburg-based photographer how he came to choose this subject and why he made such a radical departure from his previous pictorial language.**

You are known for your opulent panoramas of museums, libraries and landscapes — and now come these maximally reduced *Evolution* photographs. What enticed you to make such an abrupt departure from your usual style?

"In June 2017 I returned from a photo shoot in the the Himalayas that took me to my limits in several senses of the word. It wasn't just the 6.000 meters in altitude. As a landscape photographer, for the first time, I had the feeling: Okay, and what comes now? I had to step back a little from my previous work and try something new. I got the idea for *Evolution* when photographing the huge skeleton of a blue whale hanging in the halls of the Natural History Museum in London. Something fascinated me about that skeleton — and I took two additional, unplanned photographs of other specimens on the same day."

Can you describe what fascinated you so much?

"At first glance it was the odd tension between the archaic power of the skeleton and the strict order of the surrounding architecture. On second glance, it was recognizing that the bones — the ulnae and the radii and many other details — are strikingly similar to what we have as humans. Usually we only pay attention to the large-scale, spectacular, impressive features of these animals. To me, however, the most impressive thing is how close we as humans still are to 200 million years of evolution."



In photographing the *Evolution* series, you worked with high-end camera technology and maximum resolution. Why?

"Before I decided to do this series, I checked to make sure no one had ever done a project like it before. After all, the subject is hardly a new one. Like my previous work, I wanted to be sure that I could portray this story in an all-new way. I want viewers to be able to see more in the pictures than they can with the naked eye. And in order to achieve that, I have to push the limits of technology. I don't want to 'run out of pixels', so to speak, when working on the image of a bone or some other tiny detail. All of my work would be pointless then."

So does *Evolution* have a double meaning? One in the sense of natural history and one in the sense of "evolution" of your work?

"Yes. That is really true. You might say I traded my wide-range viewpoint for an up-close view of the details, but kept working with my technical means. This was truly a kind of 'evolution' for me and opened the door to new horizons in my mind."

What now? Are you going to continue moving in this direction?

"No! Or to be more accurate, I don't know yet. This work is finished — and that also always means a new beginning for me. It is like reaching the end of a journey. Every ending is also a new beginning."

"I traded my wide-range viewpoint for an up-close view of the details, but kept working with my technical means."

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