

LORI KELLA *ERIE: LOST AND FOUND*



Lori Kella, *Ghost Species Series*
2017 – 2020

Rosewood Arts Centre, Kettering, Ohio
October 5 – November 13, 2020
www.playkettering.org/gallery



FOREWORD

For over three decades and through more than 400 exhibitions, Rosewood Gallery has featured the work of more than 3,500 artists. Through this gallery space, nestled in a Kettering neighborhood, we have sought to share with the community exhibitions by both emerging and well-established artists. Our goals in 2020 are no different, though the COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with unprecedented challenges. In July 2020, we were thrilled to return to in-person gallery exhibitions, which now include *Erie: Lost and Found*, and are proud to have continued supplying virtual viewing options for those not yet willing to venture into public gallery spaces.

The non-profit FotoFocus was founded in Cincinnati in 2010 with the goal of celebrating all lens-based photographic art. Over the years, it has grown to include venues not only in Cincinnati but also in northern Kentucky, Dayton and Columbus. In 2018, the City of Kettering's Rosewood Gallery joined the slate of photographic exhibitions supported under the FotoFocus Biennial umbrella.

In 2020, Rosewood is once again delighted to be chosen as one of the more than 100 participating venues to showcase photographic art. We are thrilled to present Cleveland-based artist Lori Kella's *Erie: Lost and Found*.

We were saddened that, due to the effects of COVID-19, FotoFocus was forced to cancel the 2020 Biennial. However, FotoFocus has generously and graciously pledged its 2020 Biennial budget to financially support the region's art community during the coronavirus pandemic.

Although Rosewood will be among a smaller pool of venues hosting FotoFocus photographic exhibitions, we are pleased to share with you Kella's remarkable talent as a photographic artist.

While photographs are generally seen as documentation of a person or thing, Kella takes us first on a journey by creating proxies for her subjects — the flora and fauna of Lake Erie. Once created, these dioramas are rendered with the lens.

These compelling dioramas provide powerful and ethereal photographs representing Kella's thesis, that the Great Lakes are falling prey to climate change. Meanwhile, we at Rosewood Gallery are smitten with her "ghost" stand-ins and luminescent landscapes.

Rosewood is grateful for the support of FotoFocus, to our loyal patrons during these uncertain times, and to Lori Kella for sharing her wonderful photographs. Despite all of the ups and downs that we have experienced over the past months, I am thankful to Rosewood and to its staff who are always glad to share the joy of art.

I hope you will enjoy this exhibition as I have, and will continue to explore our many art programs — be they in-person or virtual.

Paula Willmot Kraus

Gallery Coordinator, Rosewood Arts Centre

ESSENTIAL BEAUTY, EPHEMERAL WORLDS

Lori Kella's photographic artworks offer entry into strange worlds that are, at once, familiar and unreal. As simulacra of actual landscapes on Earth, her images carry a sense of place despite being created entirely in the studio. Drawing on reference imagery and her memories of particular landscapes, Kella's work is dense with the tension between reality and fiction. Imagined, constructed, and staged images can effectively communicate deep truths about lived experiences. Such is the case with Kella's photographs, in which we may glimpse, through her interpretive vision, the essence of her personal connections to the landscapes that inspire her work. *Vanishing Shoreline* is informed by the artist's frequent kayaking trips on Euclid Creek, a tributary of Lake Erie located east of Cleveland, Ohio. This body of work and the accompanying *Ghost Species* series highlight the living things Kella has encountered while kayaking the creek and in her research of the Lake Erie shore.

Utilizing her skill as a photographer and sculptor as well as her keen sense of composition and light, Kella painstakingly creates miniature worlds—dioramas constructed specifically and only for the camera in ways that challenge perception. Like diminutive theater sets, Kella's constructed scenes contain illusions of space, atmosphere, scale, and movement. The plants, animals, and surfaces that populate these worlds are recognizable replicas of real things, crafted with sensitivity to their essential details. Through the act of photographing, the artist animates these still objects, granting them interrelationship with one another within the frame of the resulting images. Consider *Dam Building*, in which a beaver delivers material for its own construction project. The rippling surface of the water—modeled in viscous glycerin over acrylic—mimics movement suspended in time. Under strategic lighting and captured from a particular angle, a small drama unfolds, and we may imagine ourselves observing it from our own kayak.

Through her intricate process of building and

photographing dioramas, Kella has made multiple bodies of work that respond to her personal experiences as well as popular conceptions and universal archetypes of landscapes. As examples, *Looking West* (2012–2013) was inspired by the Midwest and Kella's travels to Wyoming; *Strange Crossings* (2014–2015) was partially inspired by the drifting debris from the Tohoku Tsunami; and *The Seven Summits* (2016) recreates each continent's highest peak through the artist's study of other people's travel photographs. Her work relates to a long history in art of translating the vastness of open spaces to two dimensions; that history informs our collective understanding of what landscapes look and feel like.

The ethereal *Vanishing Shoreline* photographs convey the beauty of natural spaces, of the life they sustain, and of encounters that are possible when we immerse ourselves in nature. Like visual poems, they communicate the essence of such beauty through precise presentation of minimal information. The negative space of each image is rich with omission—as in poetry, where words left unsaid also contribute meaning. A calm and uncluttered scene, *The Night Herons Wait* is visually dramatic, with its broad expanse of white punctuated by the twisting form of a fallen tree and its watery reflection. Subjects are rendered with sharp, focused clarity while peripheral details fade. In the mirage-like beauty of *Monarchs and Milkweed*, segments of land and specters of plants and animals seem to emerge from a pale fog—only pertinent details come into focus, in the way the mind recalls memories or dreams.

Without blue skies, green foliage, brown mud, or colorful blossoms, the palette of this strange land is strikingly stark. Also absent snow and ice, these are not winter scenes; the landscape itself is desaturated. Vivid amphibians, birds, fish, insects, and deer whose coloring would typically provide camouflage are easily spotted here among unpigmented soil, leaves, and glassy water. The

simple delight of coming upon creatures such as a sunning turtle *Slip into the Fog and Vanish* (Painted Turtle) or swimming fish *Habitat Restoration* is deeply familiar, akin to the wonder of discovering wildlife in nature.

The calm, crystalline beauty of this landscape is also ominous. In the natural world, white and gray commonly signal age or death. When corals die on the floor of the ocean, they lose their vibrant colors and their bleached white skeletons remain as ghosts of communal organisms that once sustained entire ecosystems. I think about coral as I contemplate *Spatterdock*, Kella's close portrait of a common flora similar to water lilies. *Spatterdock's* normally green leaves and submerged stems provide shelter for small organisms, hunting grounds for birds, and food for a variety of wildlife. Kella's ghostly homage to a simple, impactful plant hints at the question: when will spatterdock fade—along with the other flora, fauna, and landscapes of our natural areas—and to what extent?

Kella's dioramas are ephemeral subjects, made to be photographed, then disassembled. Ephemeral, too, are the natural world around us and its inhabitants. Environments have always experienced cycles of change: life and death, geological movement, seasons, evolution. Today, environmental change is occurring so rapidly that we can see locally, year to year, the effects of increasing global temperatures, pollution, and the spread of invasive species. Kella has observed the shifting ice cycles on Lake Erie as an area resident; the shore of the lake is eroding, exacerbated by rising water levels, threatening human developments and wild lands. The ephemeral, fading beauty of Kella's photographs portends the impending dissolution of this natural landscape as it exists today. The shoreline as we know it will eventually vanish, as the title of this series reminds us, and it may happen more quickly than we expect.

We share the natural world with the living things whose likenesses appear in *Vanishing Shoreline* and are catalogued in *Ghost Species*, which the artist describes as a "visual archive of what might disappear... ephemeral portraits [that] offer contemplation on what may be, or is already lost." Someday—whether tomorrow or eons from now—change will come, and even those species that are relatively abundant and familiar to us today may become only ghosts of memory, entries in textbooks, and specimens in natural history museums. In ethereal images of a constructed microcosmic world and spectral creatures, Kella reminds us that the real world offers ephemeral, tenuous, irreplaceable beauty.

Liz Carney

Liz Carney is a writer, researcher, and independent curator of modern and contemporary art based in Ithaca, New York. Previously, Liz was a curator at the Akron Art Museum. She has contributed to curatorial projects at The Courtauld Gallery; Tate Modern; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland. Liz holds her MA in Curating the Art Museum from The Courtauld Institute of Art (2012) and BA in Art History from Case Western Reserve University (2010). Her research interests include peripheral aspects of art-viewing experiences, such as installation practices, photographic reproduction of art, and the history, ethics, and accessibility of art institutions. Liz is a member of the Board of Directors of The Cherry Arts, Ithaca.

VANISHING SHORELINE

**Archival Pigment Prints
Edition of 5**



Monarchs and Milkweed, 2019
40 x 30 inches



Slip into the Fog and Vanish (Painted Turtle), 2019
30 x 20 inches



The Night Herons Wait, 2019
40 x 30 inches



Downy Pair, 2020
30 x 22-½ inches



Dam Building, 2019
30 x 20 inches



Framed Heron, 2019
40 x 30 inches



Euclid's Mirror, 2019
30 x 45 inches



Spatterdock, 2019
30 x 22-1/2 inches



The Pond's Edge, 2019
20 x 30 inches



Forage, 2020
30 x 45 inches



Skimming the Water, 2020
30 x 22-1/2 inches



Habitat Restoration, 2019
40 x 30 inches

GHOST SPECIES

**Archival Pigment Prints
20 x 20 inches each
Edition of 5**



Ghost Species Grid 16



Clover, 2020



Blackberry Vine, 2020



Wild Strawberry, 2020



Dandelion, 2020



Swamp Rose Mallow, 2020



Mudpuppy, 2020



Imperial Moth, 2020



Yellow Perch, 2020



Green Darner, 2020



Spatterdock Specimen, 2020



Little Brown Bat, 2020



Night Heron, 2019



Leopard Frog, 2019



Mayflies in the Glow, 2018



Mayfly, 2018



Lake Erie Watersnake, 2018



Water Smartweed, 2018



Bladderwort, 2018



Trout Chase, 2018



Gizzard Shad, 2018



Lake Trout, 2018



Diporeia, 2018



Blue Pike, 2018



Milkweed, 2017



Pear Blossom, 2017



Ghost Pear, 2017



Debris Field, 2017

- 3 deer running through the field

- 2 crows feeding on carrion

March 11-

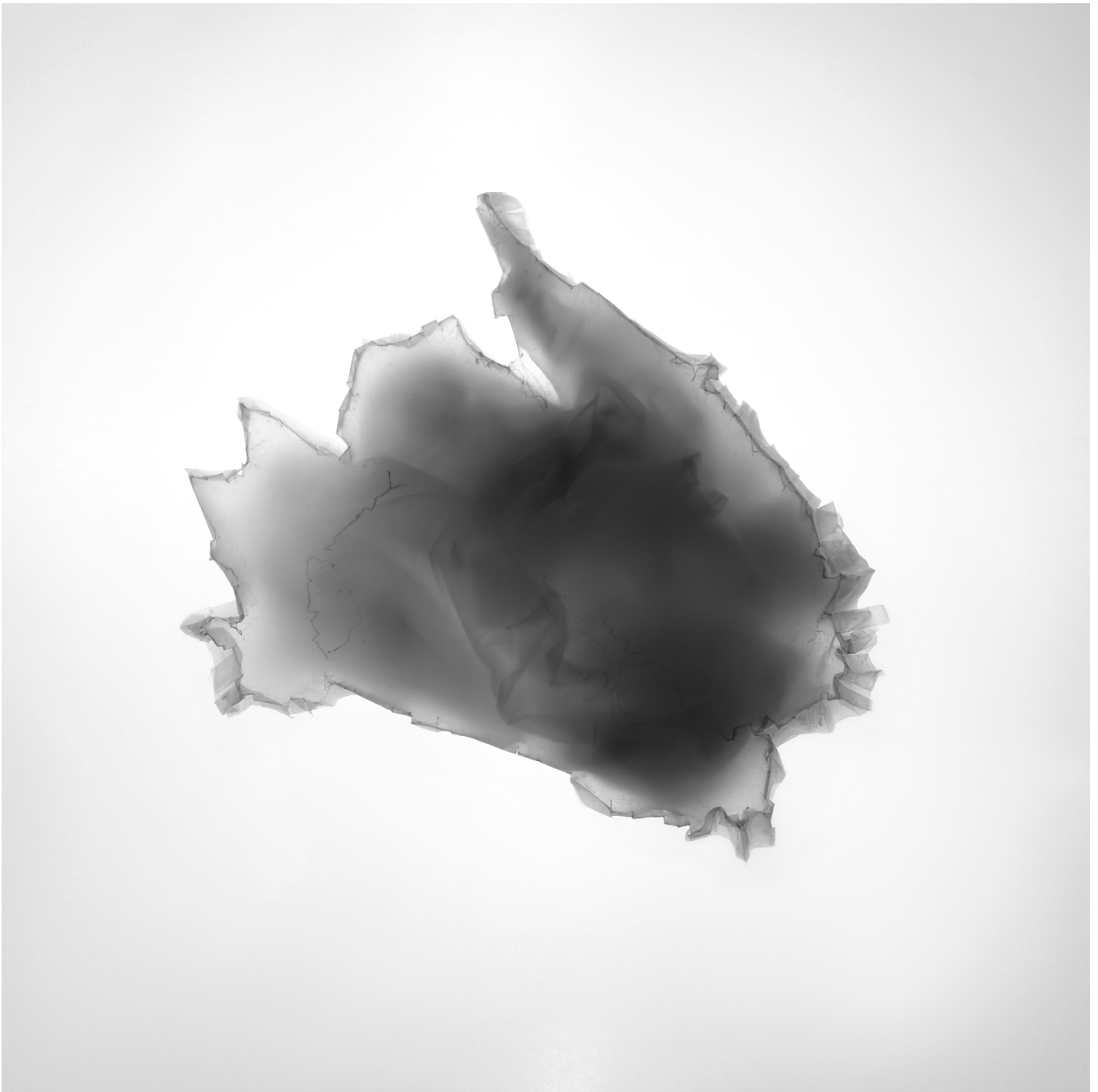
driving to MI
day of Nancy Reagan's funeral

5 years ago
earthquake in Japan
lost 300 miles of
coastline

- large plumes of smoke from the fields near Barmen Springs

greenroom®

Notes: March 11, 2016, 2017



Ross Ice Sheet, 2017

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

In my photography, I explore historical, environmental, and personal connections to the land. Typically, I build tabletop dioramas out of everyday materials such as paper, soap, and wool, crafting these fabrications as an elaborate still life meant only for the camera's lens. Once constructed, I use lighting to dramatically transform these tableaux, bringing to the surface hidden truths that belie our understanding of the natural world; for the images unfolding in front of the camera are an amalgamation of familiar places, unexplored wilderness, and pure fiction. It is this visual tension, the uncanny and artificial nature of the photographs, that calls into question the permanence of our surroundings and hints at the dramatic shifts our environment is undergoing.

As a native of the Great Lakes, I have returned my gaze toward our inland seas, examining the fragility and resilience of this complex ecosystem. The resulting body of work, *Erie: Lost and Found*, reimagines the shoreline of Lake Erie and its tributaries in a visual homage to a horizon that has captivated me for three decades. The artificial landscapes, created from paper, painted plastic, and translucent glycerin, record observations of different species nestled into the landscape; and the resulting photographs hint at the ephemeral nature of these environments while preserving them as an imperfect record that ponders both absence and rediscovery. Coupled with these grand panoramas are translucent photographic replicas of native species essential to the area. This catalogue of species becomes a visual archive of what may disappear; and these ephemeral portraits offer contemplation on what may be, or is already lost, suggesting that paper replicas may eventually be our only reference to the once grand Great Lakes. Together these photographic works investigate the realm of loss in the face of pervasive environmental threats, while also offering a moment of reflection and a renewed discovery of the natural world.

Lori Kella

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lori Kella was born in St. Joseph, Michigan in 1974. She received a BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art and her MFA from Cornell University in 2001. Kella has exhibited in prestigious venues such as Galerie Drei and the Rathuas Galerie in Dresden Germany, The Print Center in Philadelphia, Site: Brooklyn in NY, MOCA Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Artspace in Raleigh, NC, Filter Photo in Chicago, IL, and William Busta Gallery in Cleveland, OH. Recently her work was featured in Scale3 at The Cleveland Print Room. This exhibition showcased 14 large-scale photographs depicting the *Seven Summits* as a metaphor for artistic triumph and failure. A selection of this work was also included in the exhibition *Serial Intent*, at the Akron Art Museum. Lori Kella has received four Ohio Arts Council Individual Fellowships Awards, a full fellowship to attend Vermont Studio Center, a Creative Workforce Fellowship from Culture & Cuyahoga Arts and Culture, and individual funding from the Andy Warhol Foundation through the Satellite Fund. Lori Kella lives in Cleveland and she teaches photography and visual art at Laurel School in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

ABOUT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rosewood Gallery is sponsored by the City of Kettering Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department, with support from the Ohio Arts Council.



This exhibition was originally slated to be part of the 2020 FotoFocus Biennial. In lieu of presenting the fifth FotoFocus Biennial, *light&*, FotoFocus has pledged its 2020 Biennial budget to financially support the region's art community during the coronavirus pandemic.

FOTOFOCUS

Thank you to the City of Kettering team that made

Lori Kella, *Erie: Lost and Found* possible:

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Paula Willmot Kraus, Gallery Coordinator
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