

Susan Eley  
Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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***Divergence of Birds***  
***Photographs by Carolyn Monastra***  
***Notes on Earth Day in the Era of COVID-19***

April 22 – 30, 2020



Online Exclusive Exhibition

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A consequence of COVID-19 and our enforced time inside our homes is that we now, strangely, have more time to consider the environment outside. Our pause from our regular lives and our separation from the outdoors have thrown into relief our ties to the natural world. With more time to gaze through our windows, we watch birds landing on branches and flitting off again. We may feel a certain envy in their freedom to move through space, as we shelter in one place.

During walks through parks, on hiking trails in the mountains or through fields, we notice the trees, the stars, the moving clouds, and we are reminded of what is larger than our daily existence, and that the natural world is fragile, ravaged in so many places by climate change.

So, it is with a renewed appreciation for and sense of the beauty of nature that we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day on April 22, 2020, with the online exhibition *Divergence of Birds*, comprised of ten photographs by Carolyn Monastra. Drawn from an ongoing series, each photograph depicts a paper cutout of a bird threatened by climate change and photographed in its natural North American habitat.

For the past 15 years, Monastra's work has focused on creating and discovering mystery in the natural world, and as a result has brought attention to the devastation

caused by climate change. A series of grants, awards and international residencies has enabled her to photograph barren landscapes and icebergs in Iceland, and to launch *The Witness Tree*, comprised of photographs made around the world of places affected by climate change, and more recently, *The Divergence of Birds*.

For her important work bringing into focus the effects of climate change through her stunning photographs, Monastra was selected by The Climate Reality Project to become one of their Climate Leaders. The artist's awards include a production grant from the Puffin Foundation, a multi-media fellowship from BRIC and a travel grant from the English Speaking Union.

### **CAROLYN MONASTRA ARTIST STATEMENT**

My conceptual environmental project, *Divergence of Birds*, takes inspiration from two texts: the National Audubon Society's "Birds and Climate Change Report" which projects that, by 2080, climate change will affect the range of habitat of over half of North American birds; and Philip K. Dick's dystopian novel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?", where electric versions of once-commonplace animals are so realistic that they even fool veterinarians. *Divergence of Birds* addresses the prospect that, one day, only simulacra of climate-impacted animals will be left.

Combining the documentary style of my previous climate project, *The Witness Tree*, with my earlier narrative fictional approach, I photograph paper cutouts (from appropriated online images) of climate-threatened birds. I place the cutouts within the birds' current habitats so that they look real, but upon inspection, reveal themselves to be photos within photos—the gaze within the gaze upon nature—as actual birds recede into marginal zones of survival.

The images are meant to disrupt the casual gaze, disarming the expectations of nature photography, leaving viewers disturbed and curious.

As we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day on April 22, 2020, the world finds itself disturbed and disarmed by our current situation with COVID-19. As birds are taking flight to migrate to their summer homes, we must "shelter-in-place," unable to travel to our schools, jobs, loved ones or, for some, even the corner store.

One consequence of less human activity is that pollution is decreasing and, if you believe some of the viral social media, wildlife is reclaiming land and waters that were once naturally theirs. The truth is that many of these animals have been there all along—but we are now slowing down enough to notice them. My intent with "*Divergence of Birds*" is to get viewers to look more carefully at the faux birds in my pictures, with the hope that, when outside, they will look

more carefully at the *real* birds and develop a deeper appreciation of the wildlife we still have as well as an urge to protect what we risk losing.

I was looking forward to marching with hundreds of thousands of others in New York City on Earth Day to celebrate this year's theme of climate action. Since I can't, I will spend the day observing and appreciating the birds in Connecticut where I am sheltering: the chickadees, nuthatches, cardinals, sparrows and robins as well as some ospreys, herons and even the noisy Canada Geese that are having turf wars on a nearby pond. I will watch them and take hope in their song, their colors and their freedom of flight.

To find out how you can join the world's largest environmental movement, go to [earthday.org](http://earthday.org). To learn about which bird species are being threatened by climate change in your region, visit [audubon.org](http://audubon.org). And, from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, check out these [ten actions](#) you can take to protect birds, and read up on the ways birds can provide [happiness and hope](#) to us during these next weeks at home.

## **CAROLYN MONASTRA ARTIST BIO**

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Carolyn Monastra received her MFA in photography from The Yale School of Art. For the past fifteen years her work has focused on creating and discovering mystery in the natural world. Artist residencies at The Djerassi Foundation, Blue Mountain Center, and the Saltonstall Foundation have given her inspirational environments in which to create her work. After being on a residency at the Skaftfell Visual Arts Center in Iceland, Carolyn was motivated to begin her current project, *The Witness Tree*, a project to honor and preserve places affected by climate change. Monastra visited and photographed on every continent while researching and documenting the climate crisis. Her new project, *Divergence of Birds*, also focuses on climate concerns, but with an emphasis on the threat of species extinction.

Over the past four years she has visited nineteen US states, seventeen countries and every continent researching and photographing for this project. In 2012, she was selected by The Climate Reality Project to become one of their Climate Leaders. Some of Carolyn's awards include a production grant from The Puffin Foundation, a travel grant from the English Speaking Union, and a multi-media fellowship from BRIC. Her work is in the Marguiles collection in Miami and has been exhibited in venues across the United States and in China, Northern Ireland, and Switzerland. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.