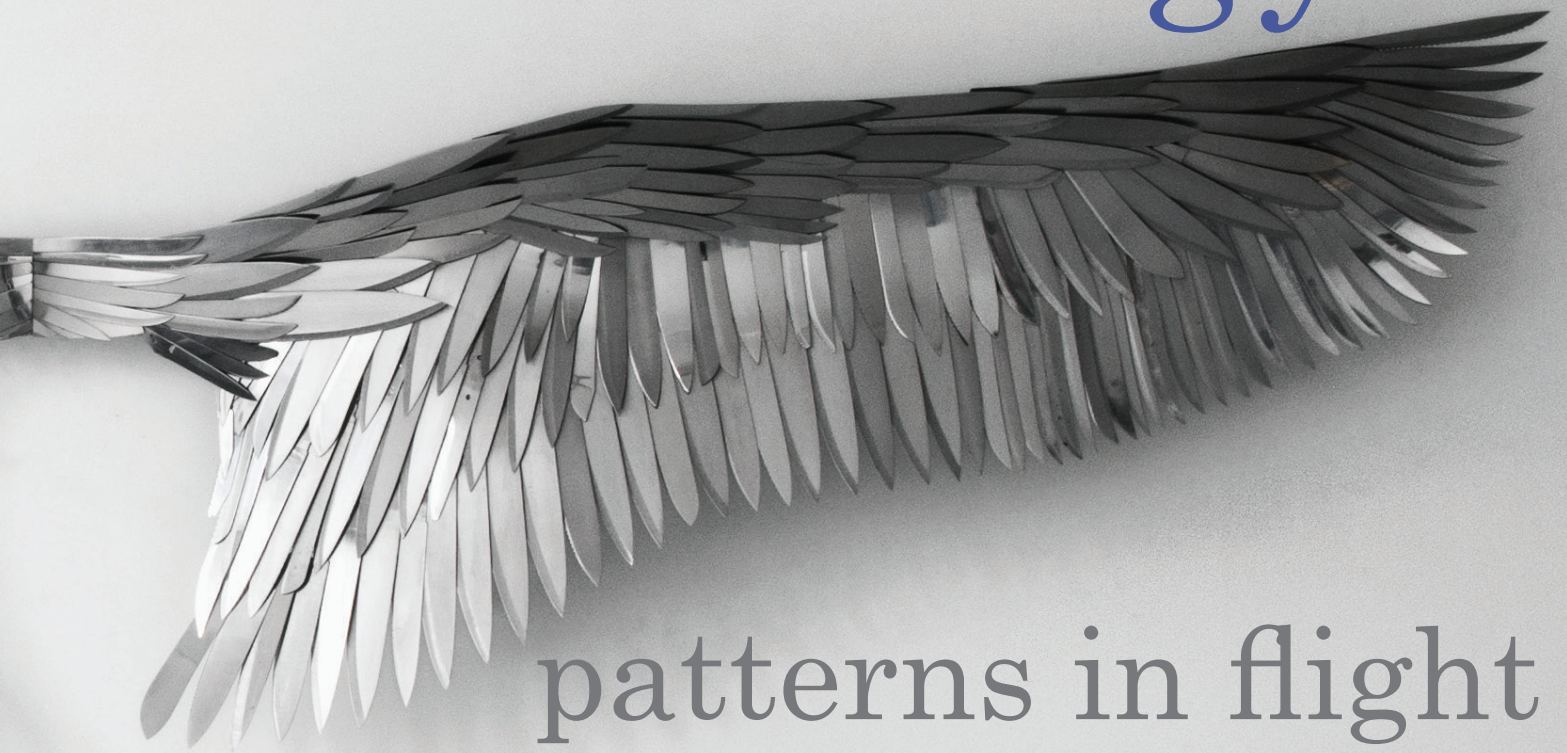


# ornithology



patterns in flight

gallery bergen



## Acknowledgements

The curators and staff of Gallery Bergen extend our deep appreciation to the following people without whom this exhibition would not have been possible:

Gallery Bergen Committee:

Mina Ahn  
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Denise Budd  
Brant Chapman  
Robert Dil  
Greg Fenkart  
Claire McConaughy  
Katherine McGivern  
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and also:

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Dr. Linda Emr  
Maha Faraj  
Dr. Brock Fisher  
Audrey Kim  
Andrew Krikun  
Juan Leon  
Daniel Sheehan



# ornithology



## Artists:

Caroline Bergonzi

Holly Ewald

Lynda Frese

Sarah Haviland

Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison

Paul Villinski

## Composers/Videographers:

Sunbin Kim

Diane Moser & Dennis Connors

David Rothenberg & Ville Tantt

## patterns in flight

Curated by Sarah Haviland and Tim Blunk

Gallery Bergen

February 6 - March 27, 2020



# Ornithology: Bird-ness

## Curatorial Statement

Sarah Haviland's long investigations of birds and the ancient, persistent engagement of human beings with them is the inspiration for this show. Sarah has been drawing and sculpting birds and bird-people for as long as I have known her (over 30 years now!) Her remarkable persistence in these explorations mirrors our species' everlasting fascination with these creatures who seem to mock us with their preternatural talents. They fly. They migrate around the globe. They inhabit the seas. They see, hear and smell things that are many miles away. They hatch their young have them airborne in under a month's time. And they sing. Oh, can they sing! It's not fair. Their abilities are a rebuke to the strange anthropocentric notion that we are somehow "God's chosen creatures." We only managed to get off the ground about 120 years ago, and it is always a dangerous enterprise. Our individual musical abilities are a faint shadow of theirs. And they're not even mammals. It is really not fair.

As Sarah and I assembled the artists and musicians for this exhibition, I realized that my own art and writing was rife with birds and bird references. They find their way into many of my poems and collages. I have vainly tried to model my music after The Bird himself, Charlie Parker. The title for the show comes from a collage I did many years ago using a page of sheet music from Parker's famous tune, "Ornithology."

It is a great joy and a great challenge to be in the company of these thoughtful artists. Their genius exists in helping us all to explore the genius outside of the human domain and where we all connect. I insist that science's next and perhaps most profound discovery in the next 50 years will overturn our assumptions about the innate intelligences of non-human species. Perhaps one reason we require artists in times like these is to remind us of what our ancestors knew so well and what we have all but forgotten.

It is now plain and irrefutable to all but the willfully ignorant that we are living in a time of emergent ecological peril: Cornell scientist Ken Rosenberg recently wrote in *Science* that nearly 30% of North America's bird population has disappeared over the last 50 years – 2.9 billion birds. Anyone who has been paying attention has felt this absence – even in our backyards. It has been gradual, subtle, and steady. The songbirds have not returned to the feeders; the ducks no longer land on the pond. What can be done? Where can we begin?



American Woodcock, found dead on sidewalk outside of Pitkin Hall, Bergen Community College. It most likely died from flying into a plateglass window. Photo by Tim Blunk

The artists in this show are here to remind us first of all of our "bird-ness," of our bird-like aspirations, and our connection to all imperiled species as a first and consequent step toward action. So this is where we begin: We invite you to join us in locating and celebrating that part of you that still wants to fly, to sing.

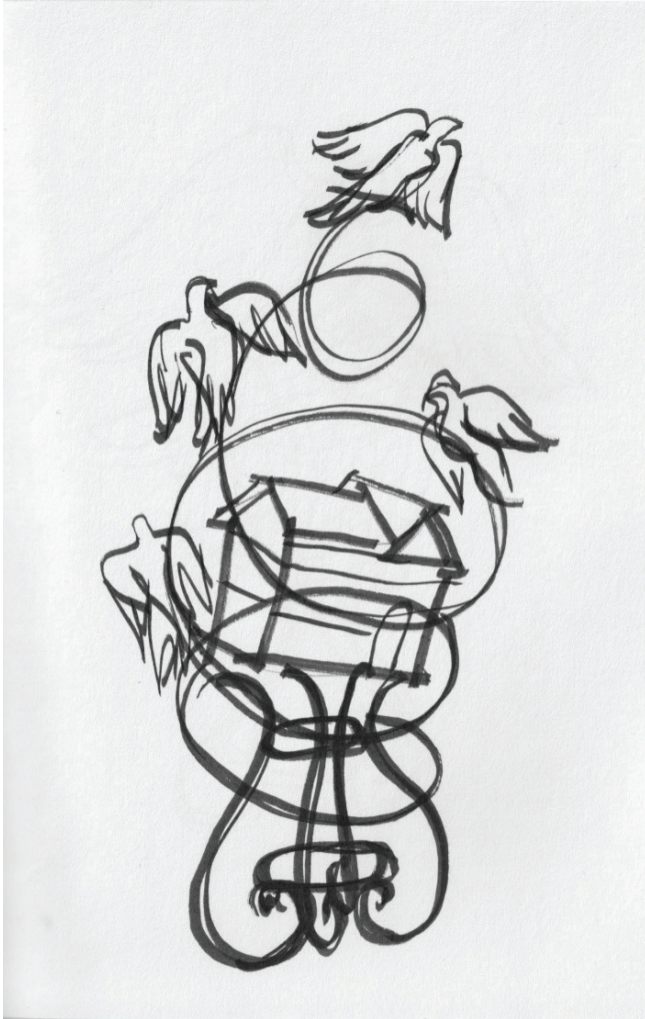
Tim Blunk  
Co-Curator  
Director, Gallery Bergen





## Co-Curator Statement

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to develop “Ornithology: Patterns in Flight” with Bergen Gallery Director Tim Blunk and the remarkable individuals we invited to participate. In fact, the creative process of curation has deepened my own awareness of the theme and of connections among practitioners in many disciplines.



Sarah Haviland. *Not Kansas*. 2018. Ink on paper. 8" x 4"

These visual and sound artists share a fascination with the qualities and mysteries of birds in all their variety: songbirds, birds of prey, water birds, birds of night, birds in their habitat, migrating birds, and birds transformed by human projection and imagination. Since the first signs of human creativity on cave walls nearly 20,000 years ago, our species has identified with birds, studied them, and imitated their appearance, sound, and movement. As fellow creatures, these artists ask: What do birds mean to us and what can we learn from them?

The music and artworks presented here respond with complex visions. The exhibition brings together techniques of sculpture, painting, collage, installation, photography, video, and sound composition to suggest patterns in our thoughts and emotions, ideas about our potential and about protection of our natural environment. We hope that the show, with accompanying catalog, provokes discussion and illuminates some of the ways that avians, in their beauty, flight, and song, continue to uplift and speak to us—messengers not from another world but from this one.

Sarah Haviland  
January 2020





# Caroline Bergonzi

Caroline Bergonzi is a multidisciplinary artist who developed, over the last decade, a very special sculpture technique, and this developed it all the way to monumental public installations. She draws intrinsic lines with a piece of chalk on a flat square or rectangular thin sheet of metal, cuts out the detailed shape and folds it into one very complex body. This transition from plane to tri-dimensional structures is only the geometric aspect of her works. Transformation is her recurring theme, through phoenix, (symmetric) winged shapes, and mandala (concentric) shapes.

To add to the alchemy, Bergonzi often brazes brass onto the steel, to create a powerful vintage looking texture. She applies the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi, perfectly imperfect, as it means to her a tangible quality, an organic nature, with a powerful set of strength and vulnerability. The silhouettes she creates, light and moving like some floating calligraphy, do look both threatening and fragile.

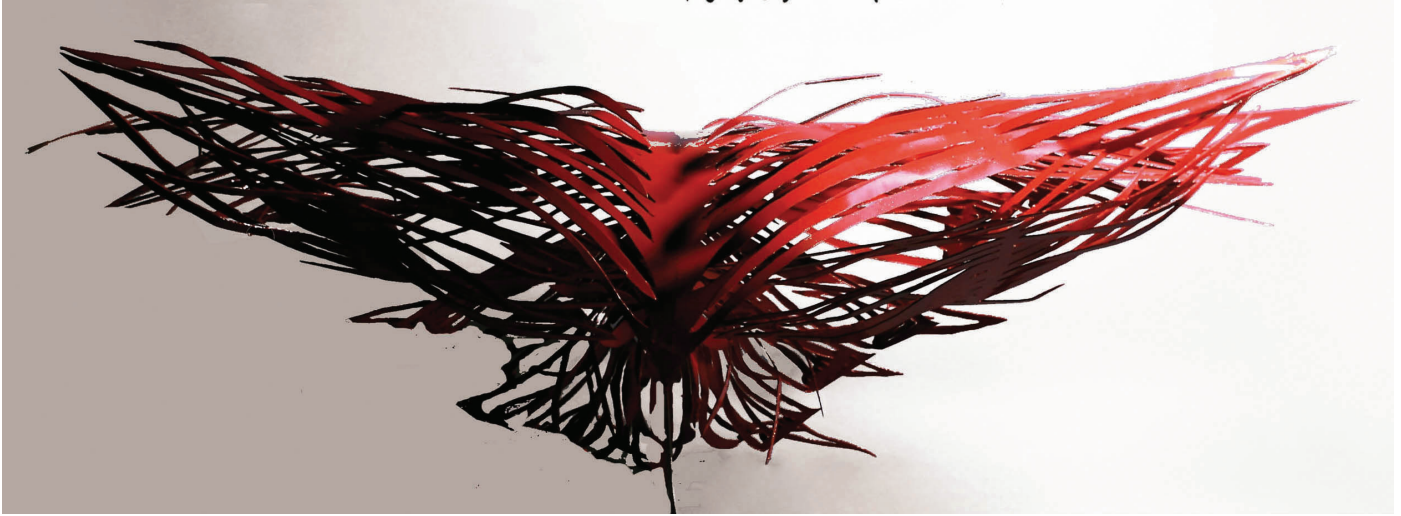


A bird of prey in flight, reminiscent of the Osprey, a red semi abstract stretched and straight posture, and a series of golden birds in motion, each one grounded by a 3D egg-shaped shadow. The three pieces on display for this exhibition represent various states of the phoenix, the transformation, and each one's life journey.





*Prey I*, Steel,



Caroline Bergonzi. *Phoenix 1*. Steel.

## The Phoenix

The Phoenix is an admirable and lovely bird which lives in Hindustan. It has no mate and lives alone. Its beak, which is very long and hard, is pierced like a flute with nearly a hundred holes. Each of these holes gives out a sound and in each sound is a particular secret. Sometimes he makes music through the holes, and when the birds and the fishes hear his sweet plaintive notes they are agitated, and the most ferocious beasts are in rapture; then they all become silent. A philosopher once visited this bird and learnt from him the science of music. The Phoenix lives about a thousand years and he knows exactly the day of his death. When his time comes he gathers round him a quantity of palm leaves and, distraught among the leaves, utters plaintive cries. From the openings in his beak he sends forth varied notes, and this music is drawn from the depths of his heart. His lamentations express the sorrow of death, and he trembles like a leaf. At the sound of his trumpet the birds and the beasts draw near to assist at the spectacle. Now they fall into bewilderment, and many die because their strength fails them. While the Phoenix still has breath, he beats his wings and ruffles his feathers, and by this produces fire. The fire spreads to the palm fronds, and soon both the fronds and the bird are reduced to living coals and then to ashes. But when the last spark has flickered out a new small Phoenix arises from the ashes.

From *A Conference of the Birds*, A Sufi Fable by Farid ud-Din Attar.





*Ashes to Gold.* Steel and bronze. Kintetic.



*Prey I, detail.* Steel.

# Holly Ewald

Over the 12 years since creating *Languages of the Land*, I have concentrated my studio and community-engaged public art work on a nearby Providence site, Mashapaug Pond, and its adjacent brownfield, the former Gorham Silver Manufacturing Co. The Rhode Island Department of Health and Rhode Island State Council on the Arts had commissioned me to work with the community surrounding the pond to design new universally understood warning signs not to eat the fish or swim in the waters. When I first explored the 177 acre pond I was intrigued by the large expanse of water, naturally vegetated shore line, cottage type houses, industrial park and new school construction with multiple fencing surrounding it. What was the story of this place? This question led to the creation of UPPArts, a 10-year project to raise awareness and foster stewardship of an overlooked gem. I worked with artists, community members, and diverse educational groups - including local schools, an oral history class at Brown University Public Humanities Program, the Brown Superfund Research Program and a state Indigenous museum - to collect and share a wealth of stories about this site that many had turned their backs on. With research from multiple disciplines preserved and shared about Mashapaug Pond engaged project, UPPArts, now preserved at the Providence Public Library, the relationships we fostered among artists, scientists, historians, schools, politicians and the local community are continuing to produce action to preserve the pond.

Now that I am once again concentrating on my own studio artwork, I have turned my focus to closer observation of the natural wildlife at Mashapaug Pond. The Audubon bird tour of Mashapaug Park on the former brownfield site of the Gorham Silver Manufacturing Co. on August 27, 2019 served as a perfect place for me to begin a more focused investigation. This was my first birding tour. My skepticism for the somewhat nerdy hobby soon gave way as I observed the careful observations of the seasoned birders. Their close looking reminded me of my way of drawing from observation. I appreciated and envied their focus and respect

for these birds that I could barely find in the binoculars supplied by Audubon. A couple months later as I read in Elizabeth Rush's book *Rising, Dispatches from the New American Shore* about



Section from installation: *Languages of the Land, Dialogue with the Downs*

climate change research being done through the study of bird migration and habitat shifting at the H J Andrews Experimental Forest in Oregon, my commitment to drawing the birds of Mashapaug to help tell the story of this place increased. Equipped with the list of 20 birds identified by the birders that day, I drew copies of the birds to scale at half their original size. John Audubon's expressive and informative illustrations of birds created in the early 19th century served as resource for my renderings.



The geometric hardware cloth suspended with the bird images in the installation draws connections with the limited freedom and health of urban birds trapped by the environmental hazards of our industrial pasts, loss of habitat and changing climate.

- Holly Ewald



Sections from installation: *Languages of the Land, Dialogue with the Downs*

To American Indians who believe that the past is to a people as dreams are to a person, stories are the communal snaggings of generations, the nets that keep people from free-falling toward pointlessness. Indians widely believe that the past belongs to everyone, but only the proper storyteller can open it, and archeologists know that in a dig some shards remain mute, isolated, and disconnected, waiting for other hands to come along and discover their pattern and reassemble them.

- William Least Heat Moon





“ 2.9 billion birds have vanished across North America since 1970, a decline of roughly 30%.”

- Ken Rosenberg, Cornell University

# 2.9 billion birds



## The Mockingbird

All summer  
the mocking bird  
in his pearl-grey coat  
and his white-windowed wings

flies  
from the hedge to the top of the pine  
and begins to sing, but it's neither  
lilting or lovely,  
for he is the thief of other sounds —  
whistles and truck brakes and dry hinges  
plus all the songs  
of other birds in his neighborhood;

mimicking and elaborating,  
he sings with humor and bravado,  
so I have to wait a long time  
for the softer voice of his own life

to come through. He begins  
by giving up all his usual flutter  
and settling down on the pine's forelock  
then looking around

as though to make sure he's alone;  
then he slaps each wing against his breast,  
where his heart is,  
and, copying nothing, begins

easing into it  
as though it was not half so easy  
as rollicking,  
as though his subject now

was his true self,  
which of course was as dark and secret  
as anyone else's,  
and it was too hard —

perhaps you understand—  
to speak or to sing it  
to anything or anyone  
but the sky.

- Mary Oliver

## Poem of One World

This morning  
the beautiful white heron  
was floating along above the  
water

and then into the sky of this  
the one world  
we all belong to

where everything  
sooner or later  
is part of everything else

which thought made me feel  
for a little while  
quite beautiful myself.

- Mary Oliver



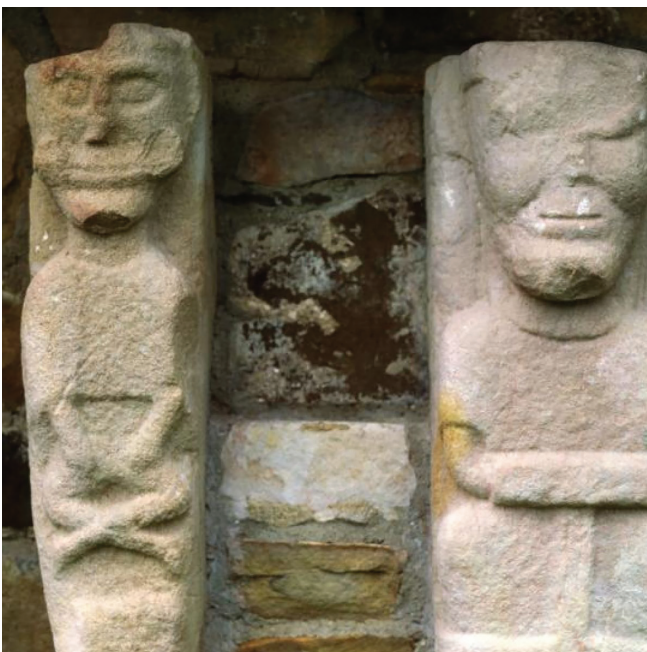
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Xinca: "The bird's wing is white."

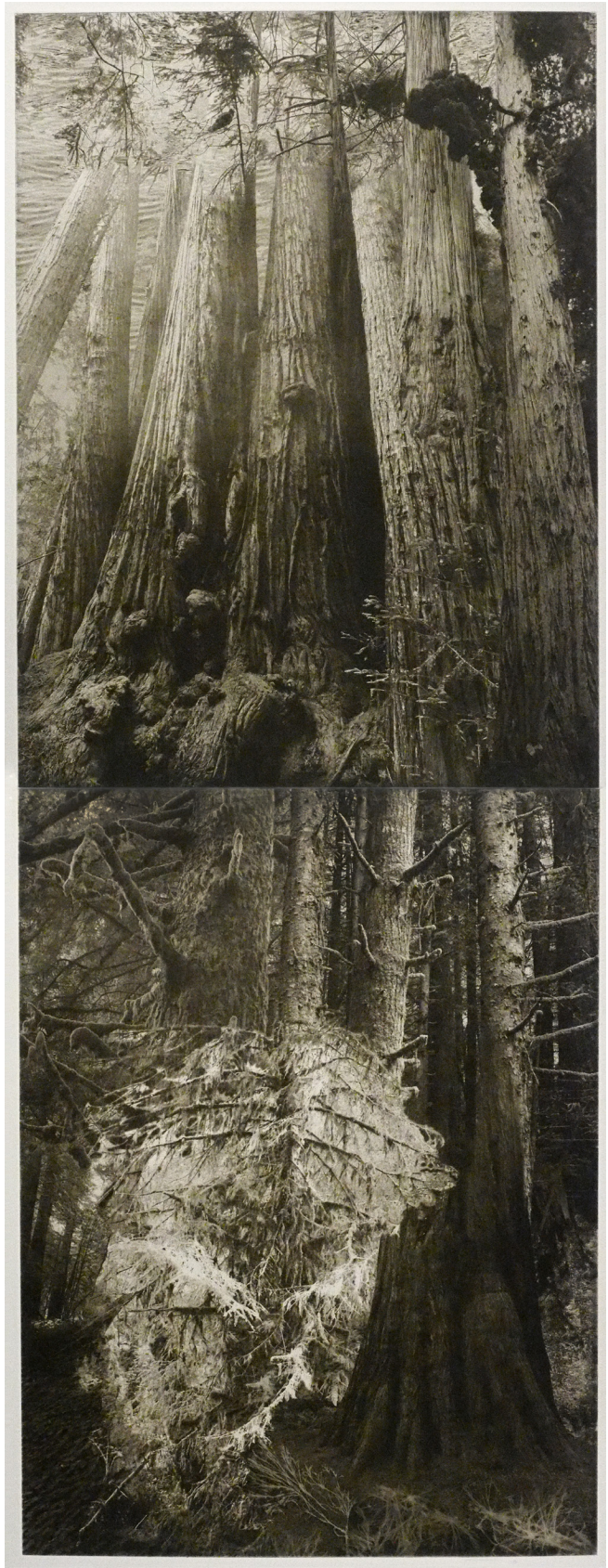
# Lynda Frese

While hiking in the redwood forest and much too preoccupied with my camera, I wandered into a thicket of poison oak. It was hard to extract myself, and I cursed my luck and the possible consequences. In a stormy mood, I was again no longer paying attention to the elevated path that skirted the treetops with the Eel River far below, when there was an absolutely arresting sight. There before me at eye level was a gigantic blond eagle, imperial, sitting on her nest scanning the river for prey. Somehow, she didn't see me. I sat and watched her, transfixed. At last my mind was still and clear. When she finally took flight, her wingspan was enormous— (possibly seven feet)—; this stunning flying creature was much larger than me. The eagle and her nest in the environment are part of my photo etching *Wild Trees*. The idea for a long vertical piece came to me on these hikes; I want to convey a sense of the forest's vastness, and the voices of the redwood trees.

In my piece *Femme Chauve-Souris (Batwoman)*, the mythical bird/woman from a gothic church postcard seems related to the Sheela na gigs, which I have seen in the rural churches of Ireland and France. They hold themselves open, and the world is coming out. It is so surprising this blending of Christianity and old pagan Europe. These powerful stone works hold a strange place as devotional objects.



Sheela na Gig carving on White Island, Lough Erne, Co Fermanagh.



*Wild Trees*, photoetching.



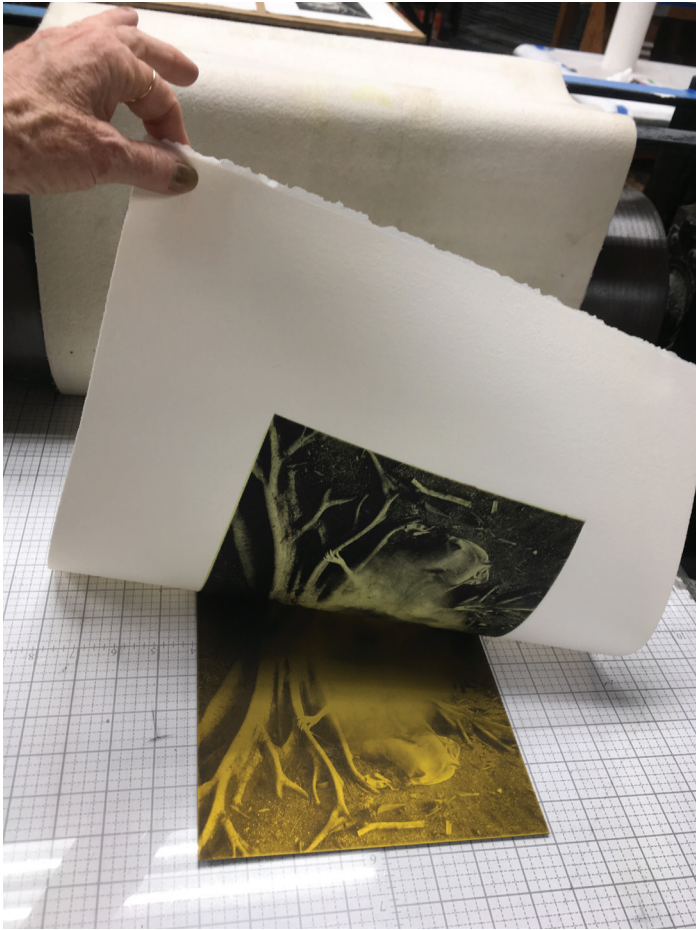


*Femme Chauve-Souris (Batwoman)*, photoetching.

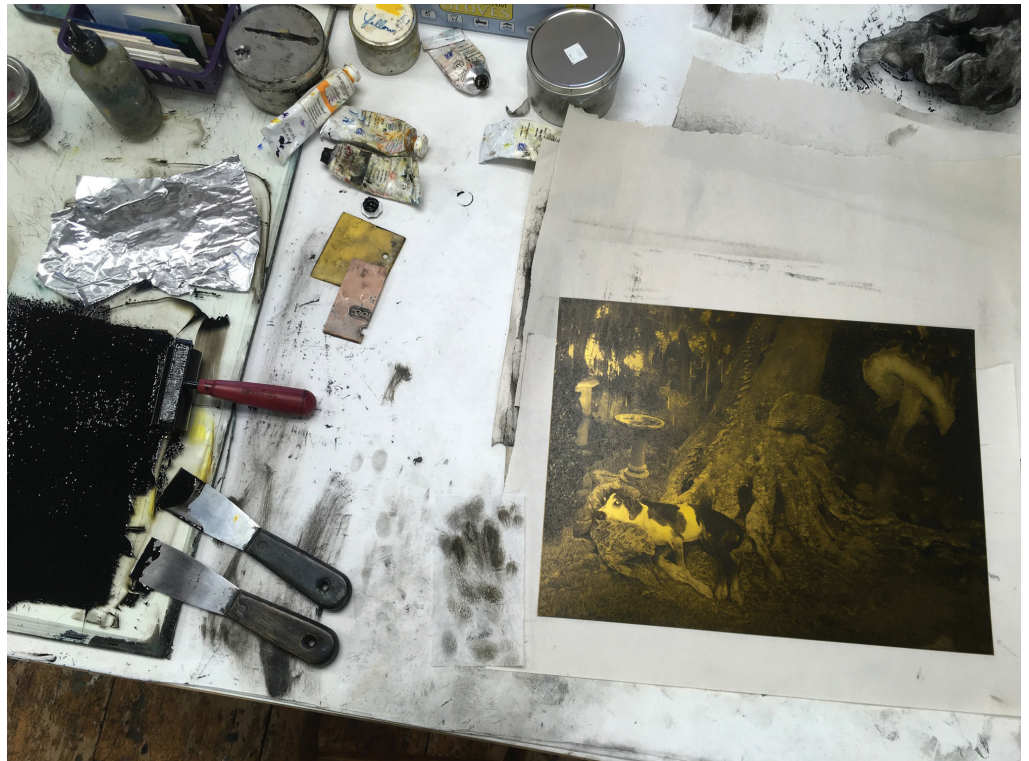
ALL THE BIRDS of the world, known and unknown, were assembled together. They said: 'No country in the world is without a king. How comes it, then, that the kingdom of the birds is without a ruler! This state of things cannot last. We must make effort together and search for one; for no country can have a good administration and a good organization without a king.'

From *A Conference of the Birds*, A Sufi Fable by Farid ud-Din Attar.





Photoetching process. Pulling prints for *Ornithology*.





Eagle Poem  
- Joy Harjo

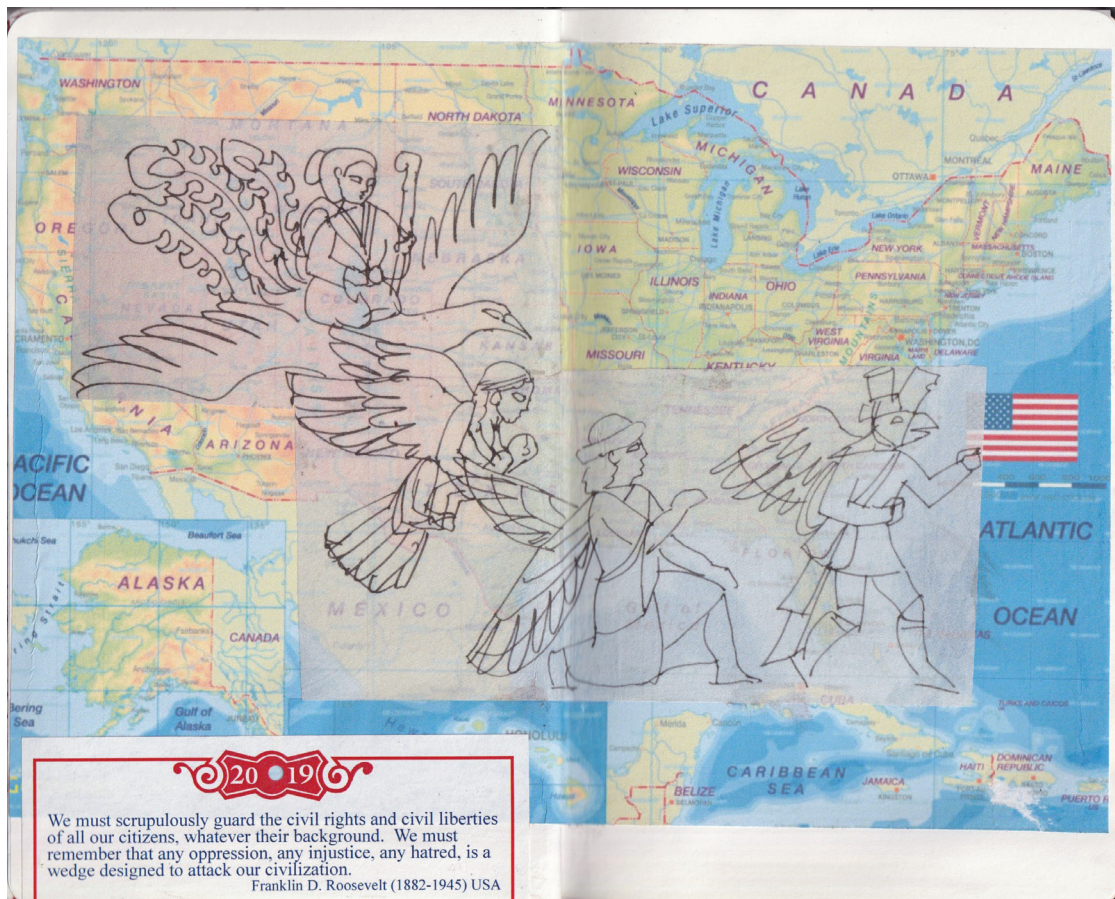
To pray you open your whole self  
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon  
To one whole voice that is you.  
And know there is more  
That you can't see, can't hear;  
Can't know except in moments  
Steadily growing, and in languages  
That aren't always sound but other  
Circles of motion.  
Like eagle that Sunday morning  
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky  
In wind, swept our hearts clean  
With sacred wings.  
We see you, see ourselves and know  
That we must take the utmost care  
And kindness in all things.  
Breathe in, knowing we are made of  
All this, and breathe, knowing  
We are truly blessed because we  
Were born, and die soon within a  
True circle of motion,  
Like eagle rounding out the morning  
Inside us.  
We pray that it will be done  
In beauty.  
In beauty.

# Sarah Haviland

In my recent sculptures, drawings, and installations, real birds combine with mythical stories. They reflect human-bird connections around the world as well as contemporary societal issues. Using simple materials and flights of fancy, they call attention to endangered species, migration of birds and humans, and our own psychic condition.

My fascination with bird-figures began with the kinesthetic experience of gesture and observation of people and birds, alone and in relationship. Further inspired by stories and images from many cultures, my drawings and sculptures speak of human aspirations and the soul, and of conflicts between our internal impulses and awareness of the outside world. From ancient winged deities to popular culture's flying heroines and villains, such icons affirm our desire to reach beyond the human realm.

Seeking resonance, I aim for concentrated images in surprising materials that address contemporary life with archetypal form. In my sculptures I use common hardware-store wire mesh, found objects, and recycled materials. Using tinsnips and pliers, welding or wiring, and techniques borrowed from sewing, metalwork, and paper craft, I turn everyday materials into volumetric drawings in space.



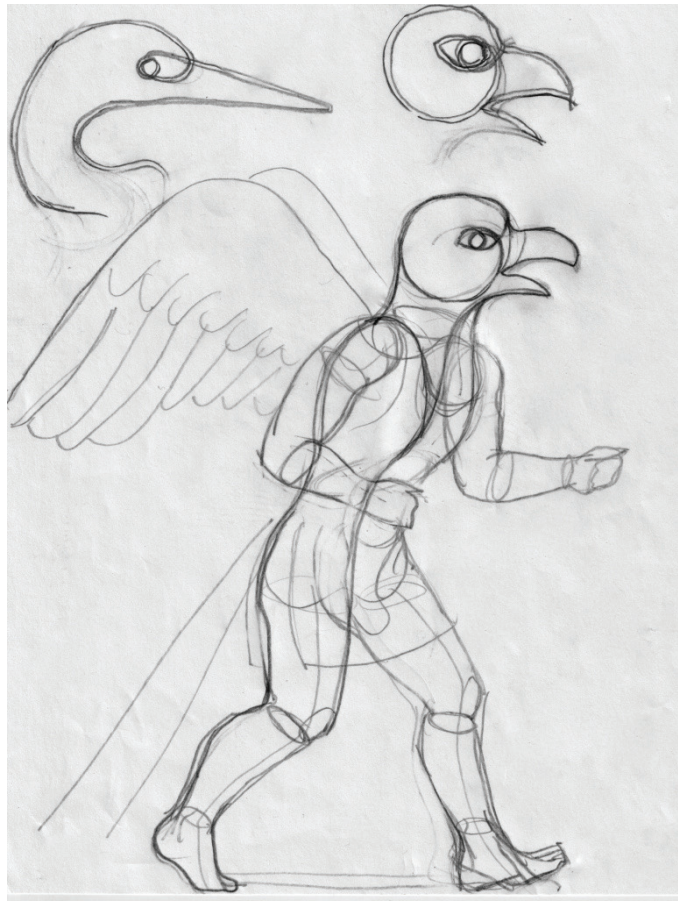
*Migrant-Bird Caravan*  
From the Arc of the Moral Universe  
Notebook Project. 2019. Collage. 8"x 10"





*Deep Song*. 2018. Steel, wire mesh, enamel, found objects. 5"x48"x35."

Deep Song belongs to my "Aviary" series of sculptures that combine bird-figures, birdcage structures, and symbolic or votive objects. This piece, with reference to the Spanish Cante Jondo, was made after the election of 2016 and shows a black bird spreading its wings over a tilting house-shaped cage, inside of which hangs a snarl of line with crystal drops.



Bird-Man working sketch. 2019.  
Pencil on paper.  
11" x 8-1/2"

Moche Bird-Runner was designed after seeing a small mosaic earring showing an ancient Peruvian bird-figure at the Metropolitan Museum. The running bird-man with beak and wings also appears in Moche red pottery, but in the mosaic, he is depicted in vividly colored stones like a modern superhero. In this year when caravans of immigrants from Latin America seek refuge at the US border, this figure seemed to offer hope.



Drawing by  
Donna McClelland, for the  
Metropolitan Museum of Art



‘The cante jondo approaches the rhythm of the birds and the natural music of the black poplar and the waves; it is simple in oldness and style. It is also a rare example of primitive song, the oldest of all Europe, where the ruins of history, the lyrical fragment eaten by the sand, appear live like the first morning of its life.’

— Federico García Lorca, Granada, 1931



*Moche Bird-Runner*. 2020. Steel, wire mesh, enamel. 60" x 30" x 18."

# Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison

“Without an ecological conscience, we have very little hope for change. But our imaginative powers, as well as our moral intelligence can help us find this consciousness.”

Gyorgy Kepes, art theorist, 1972.

We are at the precipice of what could become the long and painful road to extinction. What sets us apart from other inhabitants of this beautiful planet is that we have a choice. We can choose to change. We can choose to stop this destruction. We have ingenuity. This ability allows us to dream of better worlds, to invent solutions. But we must choose to invent wisely, imagine in smarter, sustainable ways, not just for ourselves, but for the planet and all of its inhabitants. As artists we choose to harness hope to encourage change on a significant scale.

Our understanding of this coming reality coincided with our realization that our Art must speak to viewers in a meaningful, soulful way. In the early 1990's as we studied the ideas of Josef Beuys' social sculpture, our emerging purpose for our Art began to form. We determined our Art would speak to change, to influencing viewers toward visceral, sustained contemplation of their own place in our evolving existence. Our work explores the complex relationship linking humans, nature and technology. Within each body of work this triangular narrative ebbs and flows. We use this loose narrative as a means to communicate with viewers about our collective fate and our shared ability to create positive change.

Our photographs offer visual poems of loss, human struggle, and personal exploration within landscapes scarred by technology and over-use. As collaborative artists, we strive to metaphorically and poetically link laborious actions, idiosyncratic rituals and strangely crude machines into tales about our contemporary experiences. We construct elaborate sets made from found objects. Our scenes combine real and constructed landscapes. These scenes have a sense of determination and irony while addressing mankind's responsibility to heal the damage inflicted on the environment.

Staged images offer endless possibilities for exploration while offering viewers personal interpretation. By allowing viewers to complete the story before them, we allow agency to take hold within them. We develop layers of duality: hope and despair, success and failure, desire and disdain, destruction and stewardship. We explore the fragile human condition, and the overarching shadow of environmental destruction. Perhaps the only true hope for our world and our human spirit rests in our ability to imagine.

The Hoopoe replied: ‘I speak to you as your guide. He who loves does not think about his own life; to love truly a man must forget about himself, be he ascetic or libertine.

If your desires do not accord with your spirit, sacrifice them, and you will come to the end of your journey. If the body of desire obstructs the way, reject it; then fix your eyes in front and contemplate. An ignorant person will ask, “What connection is there between belief or unbelief, and love?” But I say, “Do lovers regard their lives? The lover sets fire to all hope of harvest, he puts the blade to his neck, he pierces his body. With love comes sorrow and the heart's blood. Love loves the difficult things.”

*From A Conference of the Birds,  
A Sufi Fable by Farid ud-Din Attar.*





*Entr'acte.* 2019. Unique pigment print on theatrical gauze with acrylic and varnish. 95 x 120."

# chu-pikii-lhi

Xinca: "the little birds."



# Paul Villinski



*Aerialist 1.* Knives, steel, wood.

Much of my work has wings of one sort or another. As an “Air Force brat,” I grew up surrounded by planes and pilots with clouds in their eyes, and eventually got my own “ticket.” I can’t glance out the window without studying the sky and wishing I were in it. I’m not alone in this: from Leonardo to Lindbergh to Lenny Kravitz, the desire to “fly away” has had a grip on our collective imagination for millennia. Now and then, I have the extraordinary luck to spend a few hours floating along on currents of warm air, the earth’s surface slipping silently by, the mundane anxieties of daily life thousands of feet below the long, white wings of my glider. Back in the studio, I wish I could bring everyone I’ve ever met along in the tiny cockpit of my sailplane. Instead, I look for forms to describe the longing to enter the sky, to get us all aloft, even from within the confines of the gallery.







*Long-playing birds. LP records, found objects.*



In my work, I want to somehow share the transformative experience of flight, of becoming unbound, of spiraling upward toward the cumulus accompanied by a red-tailed hawk. My work and my “hobby” are in constant dialog: my subject matter wings; airplane and sailplane forms; butterflies; birds, all sky-bound.







*Aerialist 1*. Knives, steel, wood.

But for his manifestation there would not have been so much noise in the world concerning this mysterious Being.

This sign of his existence is a token of his glory. All souls carry an impression of the image of his feather. Since the description of it has neither head nor tail, beginning nor end, it is not necessary to say more about it. Now, any of you who are for this road, prepare yourselves, and put your feet on the Way.

From *A Conference of the Birds*, A Sufi Fable by Farid ud-Din Attar.

## Sunbin Kim

### “To the makers of music—” (after Olivier Messiaen and Carl Sagan)

Electronic sound piece.  
12 minutes.

This sound-piece was first inspired by the songs of four birds of recently extinct or uncertain state. These four birds are:

- Kaua'i O'o (moho braccatus—Hawai'i, USA)
- Cozumel thrasher (toxostoma guttatum—Cozumel Island, Mexico)
- Spix's macaw (cyanopsitta spixii—Brazil)
- Slender-billed curlew (numenius tenuirostris—Western Siberia, Russia).

Over time, the piece grew into a sort of sound-essay about the loss of these birdsongs—and how this connects to the future of people. I thus included another kind of song—human music, recorded in the Golden Record in the Voyager spacecrafts. These samples are taken from:

- The Cavatina from Beethoven's 13th string quartet
- “Puspawarna,” a Javanese gamelan piece
- “Jaat Kahan Ho,” a Hindustani khyal song
- Percussion from West Africa



Kaua'i O'o (*Moho braccatus*). Once native to Hawai'i, now extinct. The last Kaua'i O'o was male, and his song was recorded for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The male was recorded singing a mating call, to a female that would never come. He died in 1987.

These pieces are of such beauty that, by including them in the Record, they were chosen to represent the best of humanity to any sapient life who finds it.

Yet the music is also a warning, for it is also heard together with three nearly-extinct forms of human speech—Achumawi (USA), Xinca (Guatemala), and Lemerig (Vanuatu). None of these languages possess any more speakers with native fluency. The musical samples from the Record represent the classical high art of their cultures. Human speech, on the other hand, is the sound of everyday life—for which the loss of language is part of a slow, painful uprooting.

Near the end, these three elements are all brought together, almost as if about to converse with one another—but they fall short of achieving this counterpoint. Neither bird- nor human song are again heard. The ending is a retrospective on the rest of the piece. It is a reflection on the centripetal forces of global capital and power at the root of the process, that causes both the erosion of art and culture and the destruction of the environment—and by extension, the people living there.



Xinca elders, Guatemala. (Cesar Castillo.)

# (mu-)müüm'ü toktok

“Song of the mockingbird” in the Xincan language indigenous to southwest Guatemala. (It is now considered a dead language with fewer than 10 living speakers and none who have native fluency.)



“In my hours of gloom, when I am suddenly aware of my own futility...what is left for me but to seek out the true, lost face of music, somewhere off in the forest, in the fields, in the mountains or on the seashore, among the birds.”

- Olivier Messiaen

I was delighted with the suggestion of sending a record for a different reason: we could send music. Our previous messages had contained information about what we perceive and how we think. But there is much more to human beings than perceiving and thinking. We are feeling creatures. However, our emotional life is more difficult to communicate, particularly to beings of very different biological make-up. Music, it seemed to me, was at least a creditable attempt to convey human emotions. Perhaps a sufficiently advanced civilization would have made an inventory of the music of species on many planets, and by comparing our music with such a library, might be able to deduce a great deal about us.

- Carl Sagan

“Pioneers 10 and 11, which preceded Voyager, both carried small metal plaques identifying their time and place of origin for the benefit of any other spacefarers that might find them in the distant future. With this example before them, NASA placed a more ambitious message aboard Voyager 1 and 2, a kind of time capsule, intended to communicate a story of our world to extraterrestrials. The Voyager message is carried by a phonograph record, a 12-inch gold-plated copper disk containing sounds and images selected to portray the diversity of life and culture on Earth.”

- Jet Propulsion Laboratory/NASA



The Golden Record (photo courtesy of JPL-NASA.)

na pik'i man hin a-pata- 'Ø-saaka-

“That bird is not able to fly,” in the Xincan language (phonetic.)

# Diane Moser & Dennis Connors

## “Come, Walk, Listen”

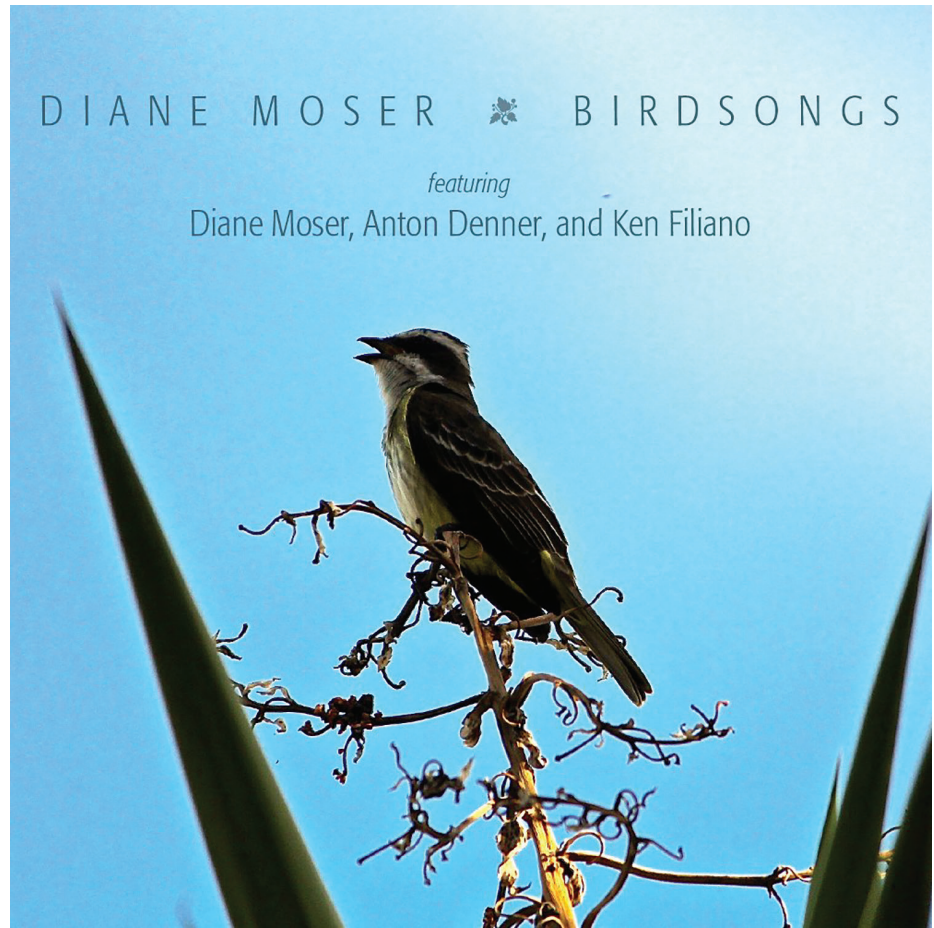
Video with soundscape composition and music.

Diane Moser pianist/  
composer  
Dennis Connors  
videographer/  
photographer  
duration 10:05 mins

Diane Moser-field  
recordings/soundscape  
composition  
Diane Moser-piano,  
Anton Denner-flute,  
Ken Filiano-bass

“This came out of the blue,  
it’s out of my comfort zone, I  
normally photograph people,  
but ever since we started this  
project, it became more and  
more interesting and I want to  
do more!”

- Dennis Connors



“This video came about because of two events: a project I am currently working on “Waterbirds: Environmental Dialogues Through Music”, made possible by a Faculty Research Grant from The New School Office of the Provost and Research Support, and an invitation to be on an artists panel titled: “Waterlines, Melody Lines, and the Environmental Imagination: Mobilizing Community through Music” for the Conference on Communication and Environment hosted by The International Association of Environmental Communication at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada in 2019. I was going to take my Birdsong Project, but the idea of mobilizing community resonated with me and inspired me to do something different. I asked photographer/videographer Dennis Connors if he would create a video montage to go with my soundscape composition with improvisations from my trio, and thankfully he said yes! I made field recordings while on bird hikes with the Bergen County Audubon Society, the New Jersey Audubon Society and the Cape May Bird Observatory, which were and still are incredible experiences. Dennis and I made several trips to the Hackensack Meadowlands and to the Sandy Hook National Recreational Area, speaking with NPS rangers along the way. While making field recordings, I was very aware of not just bird sounds, but all of the soundscape, and started formulating how our trio would improvise with those sounds. Many of the bird sounds in the recording are endangered or threatened birds such as: Killdeer, American Oystercatcher, Red Winged Blackbirds, Mute Swans, Snow Geese and Brant Geese. If the planet gets much warmer, we may not hear those sounds again in our life time.”

- Diane Moser



“One of the benefits of being a performer-composer are the ensembles that I lead, and other people’s ensembles that I perform with, where I can arrange the music I compose for any combination of instruments. Throughout these performances, I constantly referred to my original recordings, making sure I was staying true to what the birds and I had created, and especially to the surrounding soundscape which was the palette for the compositions. I also created more space in the notated score for improvisation, but with the caveat that the improvisations needed to reflect the bird songs and the motifs. Thankfully, the musicians I performed with had a wide range of musical experiences and could untether themselves from the standard go-to licks, as we say in the jazz world.

I took a different approach for my next bird song composition, *Birdsongs for Eric*, a 20-minute suite for septet, based on the flute improvisations of the iconic jazz musician and composer, Eric Dolphy, commissioned for the “Eric Dolphy: Freedom of Sound Celebration Series.”

In 1962, Eric Dolphy told *Downbeat* magazine interviewer Don DeMichael, “At home [in California] I used to play, and the birds always used to whistle with me. I would stop what I was working on and play with the birds.” I can totally relate to that quote! Happens to me all the time. The quote and Dolphy’s music inspired me to try a different type of process. With the help of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird site and their online Macaulay Library, I was able to study the birds in the area of Los Angeles where Dolphy grew up. I compared those bird songs with as many recordings of Dolphy that I could find and discovered that in virtually every solo he took, not to mention melodies he wrote, there were bird songs or motifs that clearly represented bird songs. I improvised with those bird songs for a bit, then chose the songs I wanted to incorporate into the composition and gave instructions to the musicians to base their improvisations on those motifs.”

The image displays a page from a musical score for Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*. The score is written for piano (left hand) and flute (right hand). The tempo is marked "Bien modéré (♩ = 108)". The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into several systems, each with a measure rest (S) at the beginning. The first system includes dynamics *f*, *dim.*, and *p*, with the instruction "(tragique et désolé, dans le sentiment d'un glissando)". The second system includes *cresc.* and "(Péd. sempre)". The third system includes *f* and *dim.*. The fourth system includes "V.C." and "(sans ralentir)". The fifth system includes *ppp* and "(Péd. sempre)". The score concludes with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note.

Olivier Messiaen, *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*.

# David Rothenberg & Ville Tantt

## “Nightingales in Berlin”

a feature documentary directed  
by Ville Tantt  
produced by Playart Productions, Finland  
52 minutes.

I used to make interspecies music largely on my own, seeing myself as some kind of individual explorer seeking out musical ideas with creatures we can't even talk to. But in recent years I've decided that the point of musical contact with another species is to convince other people to join me. Over five years, from 2014 through 2019, I invited the best and most adventurous musicians I know to connect in musical collaboration—humans with nightingales, in Berlin and Helsinki.

The nightingales have helped me find the perfect sound. By assembling just the right group of kindred spirits, together we dream of a way that humans and nature might live closer together. Our species is warming the planet beyond recognition,

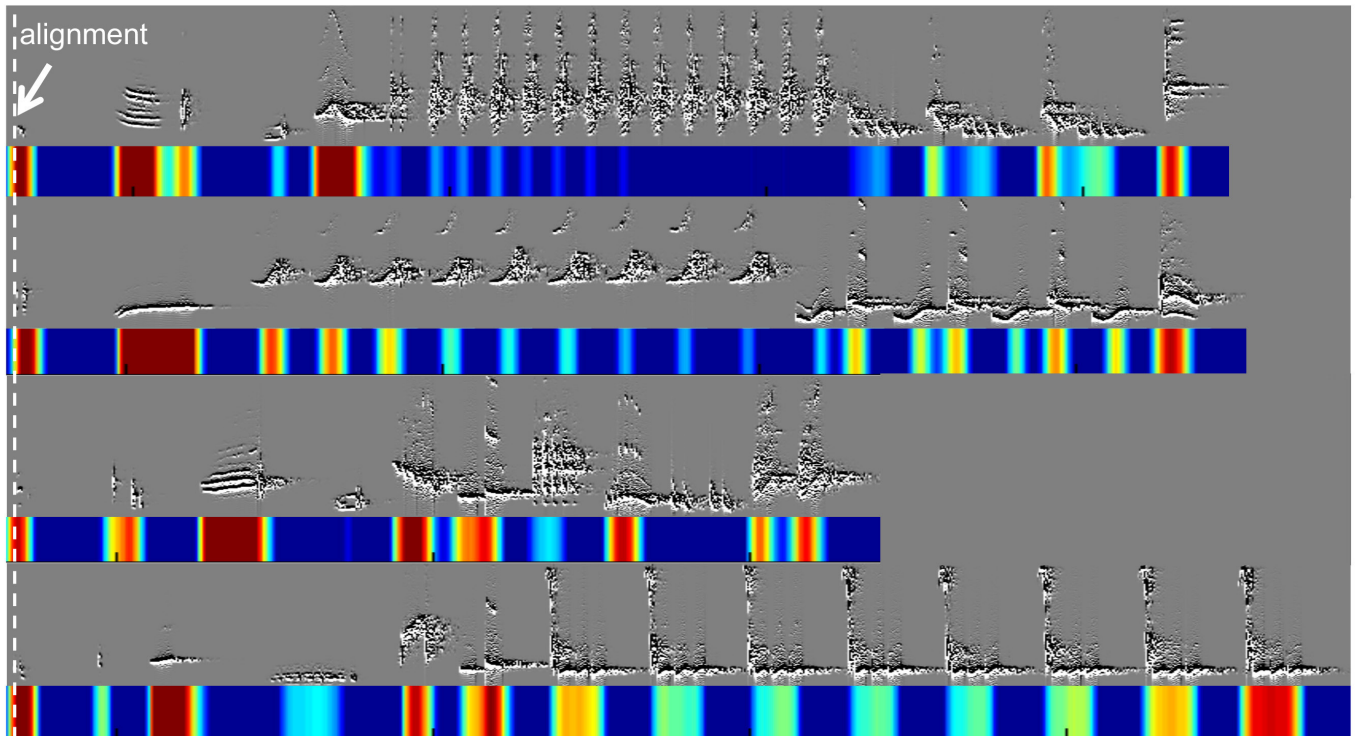


and this could mean the end of our reign over this place. Yet there are still these moments during which humans can touch nature through sound happening all around us, as we make music along with the nightingales of Helsinki and Berlin. The paths to animal music sit right before us.

I love to listen to different musicians respond to the song of the nightingale for the very first time. I have played with these birds for several years now, and sometimes I wonder why I keep trying to make music with musicians with whom I cannot speak, who live as birds—such different lives than people who may join the band. Some human critics think it's all delusion, that I intrude upon the birds' ancient world of perfect sound and struggle, but whenever I bring a new musician along to play with nightingales, I realize why I began this process in the first place. We all feel such joy and hope when music can carry meaning from one species to another. The planet becomes a more harmonious place.

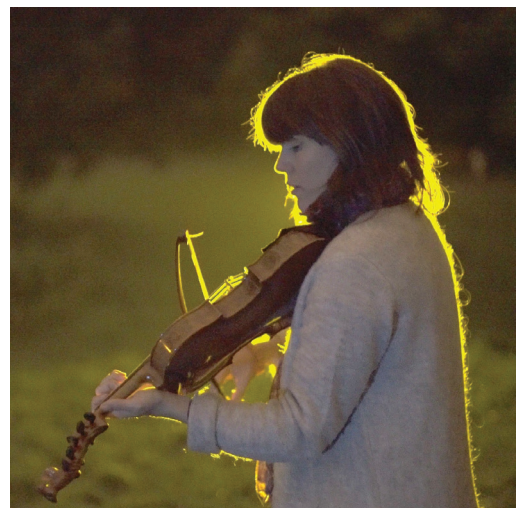
This film directed by Ville Tantt was filmed over three seasons of nightingale music, in the month of May in Berlin in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Some years the weather was near freezing, other years we were swimming in the Wannsee. I hope as you watch it here you will see how much fun we had and how touched we all were by the experience.





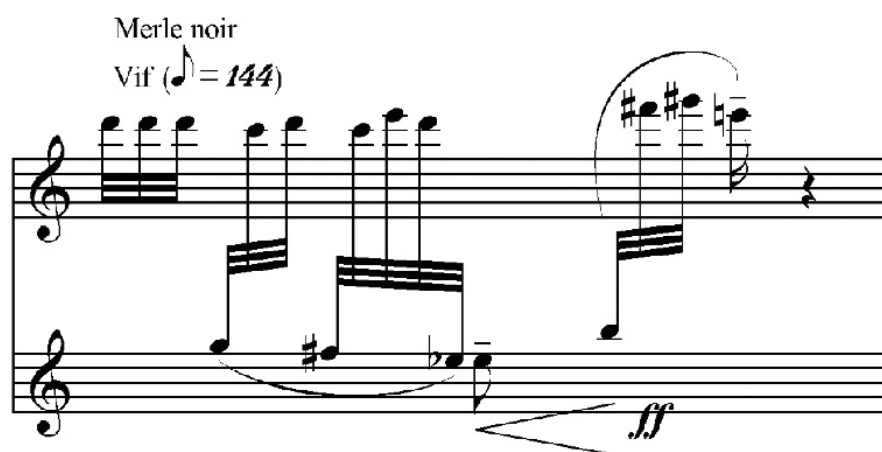
Salutations, O Nightingale of the Garden of Love !  
Utter your plaintive notes caused by the wounds and pains of love.  
Lament sweetly from the heart, like David.  
Open your melodious throat and sing of spiritual things.  
By your songs show men the true Way.  
Make the iron of your heart as soft as wax,  
and you will be like David, fervent in the love of God.

From *The Conference of Birds*, Farid Ud-din Attar.





Zebra finches. - the favorite subject for scientists studying the neurophysiology of bird song.



Notation of a blackbird song taken from Olivier Messaien's *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*.



# The Kingfisher

- Amy Clampitt

In a year the nightingales were said to be so loud  
they drowned out slumber, and peafowl strolled screaming  
beside the ruined nunnery, through the long evening  
of a dazzled pub crawl, the halcyon color, portholed  
by those eye-spots' stunning tapestry, unsettled  
the pastoral nightfall with amazements opening.

Months later, intermission in a pub on Fifty-fifth Street  
found one of them still breathless, the other quizzical,  
acting the philistine, puncturing Stravinsky—"Tell  
me, what was that racket in the orchestra about?"—  
hauling down the Firebird, harum-scarum, like a kite,  
a burnished, breathing wreck that didn't hurt at all.

Among the Bronx Zoo's exiled jungle fowl, they heard  
through headphones of a separating panic, the bellbird  
reiterate its single chong, a scream nobody answered.  
When he mourned, "The poetry is gone," she quailed,  
seeing how his hands shook, sobered into feeling old.  
By midnight, yet another fifth would have been killed.

A Sunday morning, the November of their cataclysm  
(Dylan Thomas brought in in extremis to St. Vincent's,  
that same week, a symptomatic datum) found them  
wandering a downtown churchyard. Among its headstones,  
while from unruined choirs the noise of Christendom  
poured over Wall Street, a benison in vestments,

a late thrush paused, in transit from some grizzled  
spruce bog to the humid equatorial fireside: berry-  
eyed, bark-brown above, with dark hints of trauma  
in the stigmata of its underparts—or so, too bruised  
just then to have invented anything so fancy,  
later, re-embroidering a retrospect, she had supposed.

In gray England, years of muted recrimination (then  
dead silence) later, she could not have said how many  
spoiled takeoffs, how many entanglements gone sodden,  
how many gaudy evenings made frantic by just one  
insomniac nightingale, how many liaisons gone down  
screaming in a stroll beside the ruined nunnery;

a kingfisher's burnished plunge, the color  
of felicity afire, came glancing like an arrow  
through landscapes of untended memory: ardor  
illuminating with its terrifying currency  
now no mere glimpse, no porthole vista  
but, down on down, the uninhabitable sorrow.

## Texts:

*The Conference of Birds*, Farid Ud-din Attar,  
Shambala, Berkeley. 1971.

“The Mockingbird,” Mary Oliver. The Poetry  
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“Poem of One World.” Mary Oliver. The Poetry  
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“Eagle Poem,” Joy Harjo. The Poetry Foundation.

“Hope is the thing with feathers (254,)” Emily  
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*The Book of Music and Nature: An Anthology of  
Sounds, Words, Thoughts*  
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Graphic design by Tim Blunk  
Cover graphic: *Aerialist 1*, Paul Villinski (detail). Steel knives.







Hope is the thing with feathers (254)  
Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.