

MURMURATION

Corinne Diop
Red Wings, 2019

A flash of red caught my attention as I walked towards the door. Red bird wings were flattened and lifeless on the ground, yet were spread open in symmetry as if recalling the graceful flights of an earlier existence. Aside from a few shreds that still clung to the wings, the rest of the bird was gone. No more cheerful singing and trilling. Instead, the quiet stillness allowed me to closely examine the exquisitely tiered wing structures and the nuance of the darker and brighter shades of red feathers. I felt a compulsion to preserve this beauty discovered on a bleak day.

I found a question posted on Quora: “What does it mean to find a dead red cardinal at your doorstep?” One responder suggested the event should be interpreted as an awake dream, with the bird representing intuition or spirit and its death representing “the new that wants to come”. “Red Wings” is a series of photographs and mixed media that examines this question.

Julia Merkel
Absent, 2017

Artists' books are a hybrid form that allow for great flexibility with content, materials, and imagery. "Absent" is from the body of work "Absence/Presence: Drawing from Grief" created after the death of my son. There are no words; there is no text written within the pages. The pages themselves are torn from tar paper and sewn into cherry boards with long tendrils or guts spilling out from the pages and meant to evoke the shock and expurgation after a sudden loss. "Absent" is one of a pair. "Present" is its opposite and made from creamy white Arches drawing paper. The tendrils torn from the pages of "Present" float out from the boards and curl upwards like smoke.

"Murmuration" is a three-volume set of artists' books created specifically for this 2020 exhibit. Abstracted silhouettes of terns are used in movable or "pop-up" formats alternately exposed or hidden when the boards of the books are open and closed. I am particularly drawn to bird imagery as a symbol for the spirit. Byzantine angels were painted in a jumble of three sets of frenetic wings--making this set of three books with their boards outstretched an acknowledgment of an iconoclastic past. Likewise, the tombstone shapes of the boards are intended as a homage for an endangered bird species and a warning for our future. The Roseate Tern is not yet extinct which leaves room *for hope*.

Variation II



Kristin Skees

Maternal Memory, 2020

"One need not write in order to have a voice. A mother speaks to her children through the generations."

Terry Tempest Williams, "When Women Were Birds"

"Maternal Memory" explores what it means to understand and create a personal history through photographs. At its heart is the knowledge that women have often been the caretakers of family albums, and family history, and how this creative force is so often taken for granted.

As a daughter, I pored over my family photo albums, seeing my grandmother in her youth, meeting her as I would never know her in my own present moment. I constructed my own memories from photos of me running through a backyard I barely remember, with a dog who was given away when I was three.

I learned history through these objects. From yellowed, cardboard mounted baby grandmothers. To sleek, squared teenagers in bobby socks, black and white with white scalloped borders. To myself in red overalls, faded colors, rounded corners, still with a smell of musty processing chemicals. To saturated, glossy 4x6 little brother riding a bike for the first time.

As a photographer, I come back to these images and understand them as meaningless relics of a shared cultural history. They are both the foundation of my identity, and they are nothing to the world outside my family. They were curated by mother and grandmothers, with carefully written captions, penciled dates and cursive names found on the back. They are as ordinary as the flea market box of nameless images I sift through each week.

As a mother, I continue to create my family through photographs, as did my mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother. To memorialize, carefully capture, and ultimately reconstruct my family's history. It is simultaneously the most meaningful work I'll make and the least exalted.

“Maternal Memory” is created from my personal family photos, past and present, rephotographed as polaroids, reconstructing them into a different time, a different form. And like a murmuration of starlings, the memories flock together, pushing, shaping, reforming, until the singular gives way to the whole.



COVER IMAGE: Corinne Diop, "Red Wings," detail, 2019

FIRST FOLD: Julia Merkel, "Murmuration 3," 2020

INTERIOR: Kristin Skees, "Maternal Memory," 2020

Variation I (Nava Levenson, Martha Saunders, Rebecca Silberman)

Reception: January 29, 5:00 - 7:30 PM

January 22 - February 7, 2020

Variation II (Corinne Diop, Julia Merkel, Kristin Skees)

Reception: February 12, 5:00 - 7:30 PM

February 12 - February 28, 2020

Variation III (Christa Bowden, Dymph de Wild, Rosemary Jesionowski)

Reception: March 18, 5:00 - 7:30 PM

March 4 - April 24, 2020

New Image Gallery MSC 7101, James Madison University 131 West Grace Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22807 540.568.7175

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Gallery Hours:
Wed - Thurs, 2-4 PM
Fri - Sat, 12-2 PM
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