

EVOLUTION

is it for everybody?

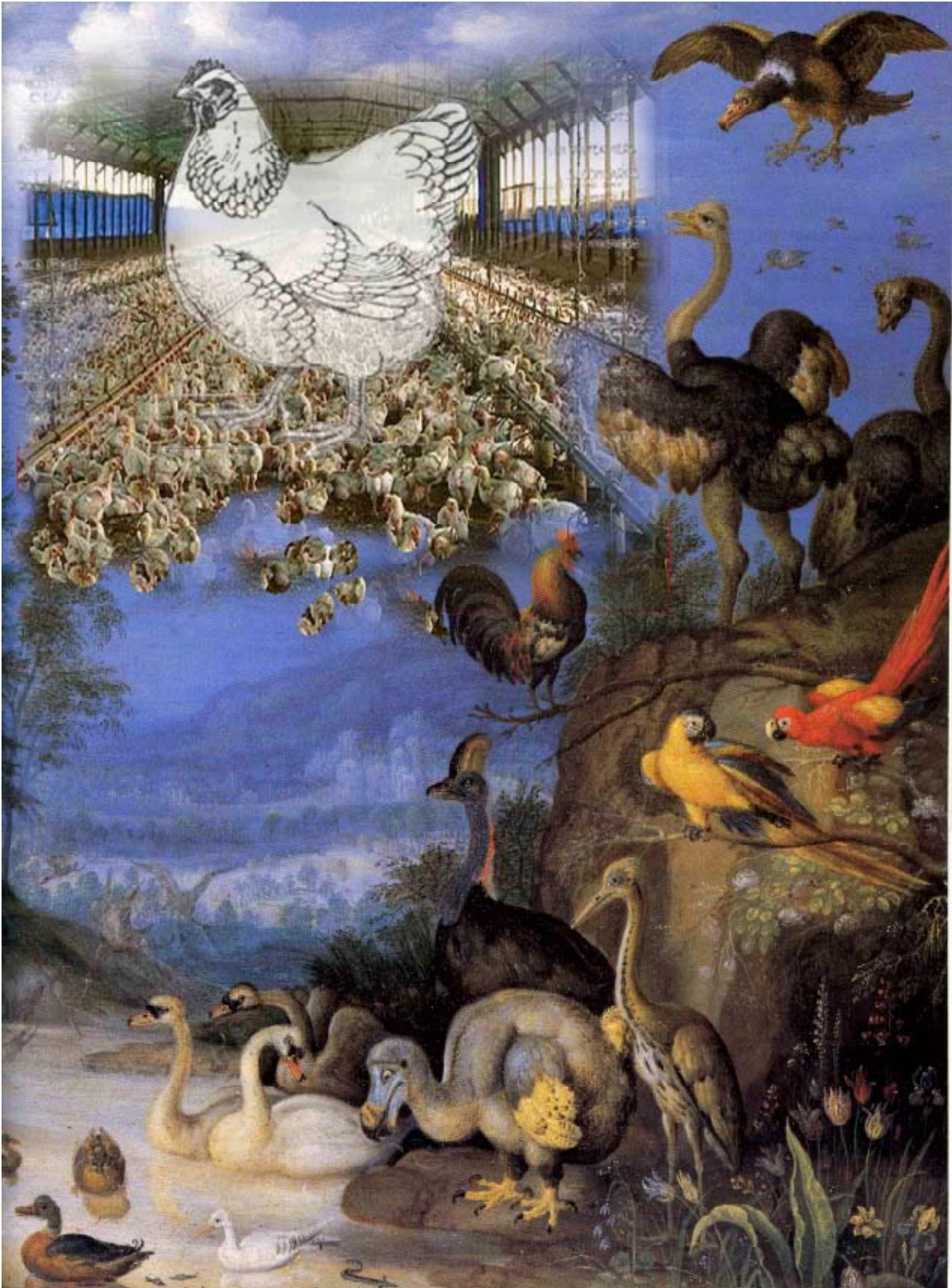


EXTINCT BIRDS PREVIOUSLY CONSUMED BY HUMANS

CHRISTY RUPP

The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it

~ Henry David Thoreau



Futurology, 2008, collage, 16 X 20 inches



above: Carolina Parakeet, 2008, chicken bones, 6 x 6 x 8 inches

below: Carolina Parakeets, 1827, John J. Audubon, aquatint

Last seen in the wild in 1913



“Not all fast food chicken dies in vain. The bones of some hundreds fall into the hands of Christy Rupp who fashions them into exquisite skeletons of their extinct or endangered kin, based on models, themselves works of the imagination, remade by paleontologists. Her witty collages also provoke me, an unregenerate carnivore, to never eat birds that have not lived decent lives.”

~ Bell Chevigny, author, poet and activist

COMMENTS FROM SPARROW

“Could you write about my new work?”
She said. “I’m re-creating the skeletons of extinct birds out of industrially produced poultry bones from the supermarket & fast food restaurants.”

“Sounds thought-provoking,” I replied.

“People don’t understand extinction,” she continued. “Just because a species disappeared, doesn’t mean it wasn’t successful. In fact, someone said, ‘Extinction is the purpose of evolution.’ I think it was...”

Then her cellphone died.

The artist is right, I decided. The extinction of a species is like the death of an individual. The fact that Shakespeare died didn’t mean he failed, for example.

I wonder what Shakespeare said about extinction?

Christy’s sculpture is an act of devotion, retrofitting vanished creatures. Someday, our successors on earth — perhaps large, super-intelligent cockroaches — will carefully assemble human bones to study our doomed species.

Skeletons are mostly air.

Skeletons are cages. (The word “rib cage” makes this point.) In some (rare) cases, you may lock a criminal inside the bones of a mastodon.

Once animals become extinct, they enter the realm of art. Artists must draw extinct beasts because scientists cannot. When only bones remain, painters and sculptors must step in.

Extinct creatures are absurd to us. The hadrosaurid [a duck-billed dinosaur with literally thousands of teeth] or the dodo cause us to giggle — as if the silliness of these creatures killed them. And yet the deep-sea luminescent squid seems reasonable to us, because it survives into our own time.

I share with Christy the urge to make beauty from garbage.

~ Sparrow, author, poet, presidential candidate



County Shopper ad, Thanksgiving 2006



People handing over their turkey and chicken bones.





Two Moas, Auk and Dodo, 2008, chicken bones & mixed media, 114 x 84 x 96 inches

Back in the 1600's, everybody ate Dodos for thanksgiving. They thought that they would never go extinct. The same thing is happening today. Could that be what the sculpture is trying to tell us?

Gus Yafkak, age 12.



Moa skeletons, Canterbury, New Zealand. 1867

I learned that birds can be big and look like other animals. I learned some birds do not exist anymore. These sculptures remind me of dinosaurs but she did not dig up bird bones. She got the bones from the garbage and made art out of it.

Cole Kattan, age 6,

EXTINCT BIRDS PREVIOUSLY CONSUMED BY HUMANS

BY CHRISTY RUPP



*Ivory Billed Woodpecker,
chicken bones & mixed media
18 x 17 x 6 inches*

THURSDAY, JANUARY, 16TH 2008

IT'S ABOUT DIVERSITY

Are chickens less of a presence than a bird gone forever except in a museum? How is it that we have come to accept living in a time of great extinction? How can we notice environmental destruction without examining its causes? This work ponders the futility of proving a negative. As though clever solutions to treat symptoms can fix structural problems.

Due to the reality that you can't prove something is gone, merely because you can't find it, the sculpture here scrutinizes the idea that charismatic species like the Dodo are more significant than innumerable mass-produced birds, grown so rapidly with hormones and antibiotics.

BAD LUCK OR BAD GENES?

Many species are well adapted, but if their habitat changes radically they are unsuited for change. Historically, many animals like the Dodo perished when man's arrival brought hungry people and predators.

Similarly, when the Europeans arrived in the Americas, hundreds of millions of native Americans died because they too, weren't able to adapt to the diseases and destabilization brought by the Europeans.

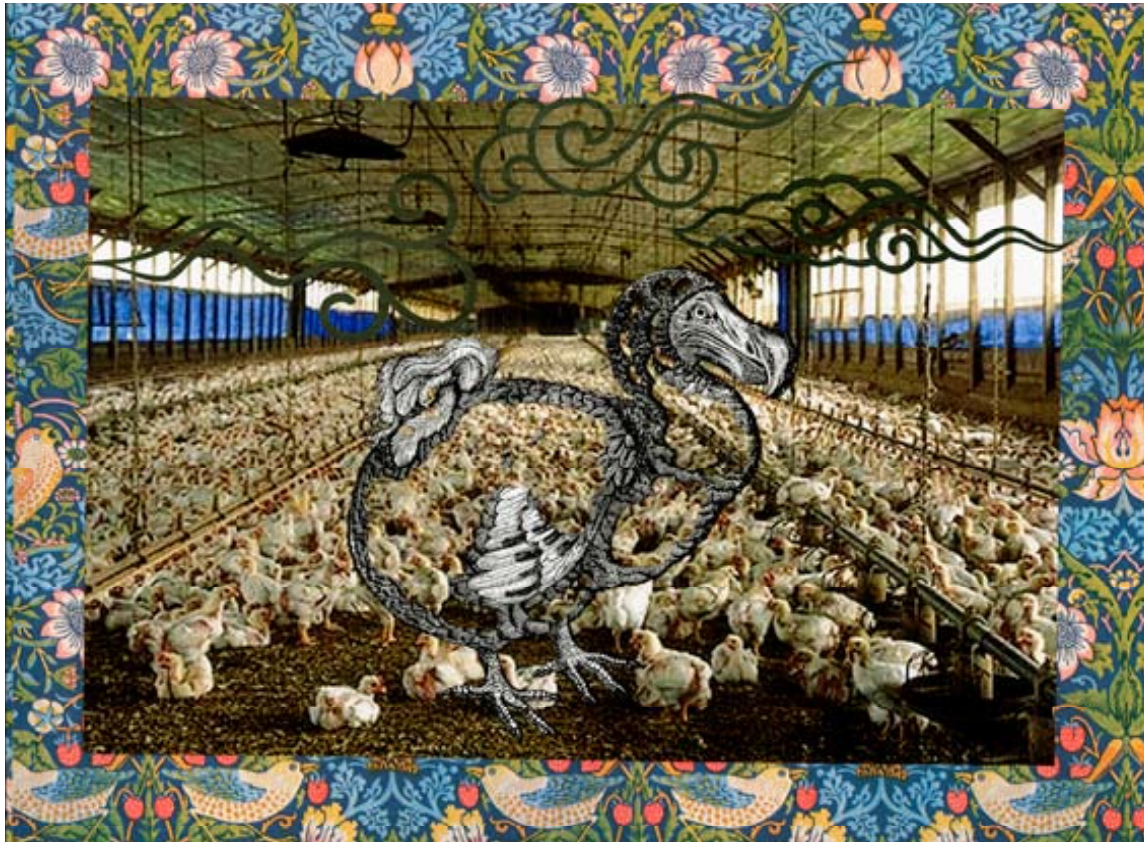
Migratory species depend on different types of habitats over the seasons. If they happen to nest in an area that has recently experienced an oil spill, their journey will end there regardless of the health of their other destinations. Migration is the result of evolution, reliance on a set of instincts being ultimately an act of faith.

Climate change and economic pressures complicate dispersal for many creatures due to the availability of food that can be altered by minute temperature shifts.

Additionally, collectors eager to possess the last specimen of a vanishing form have hunted countless species into extinction.



Ivory Billed Woodpecker specimens in drawer at the museum



"Brinkiness", 2008, collage, 16 X 20 inches

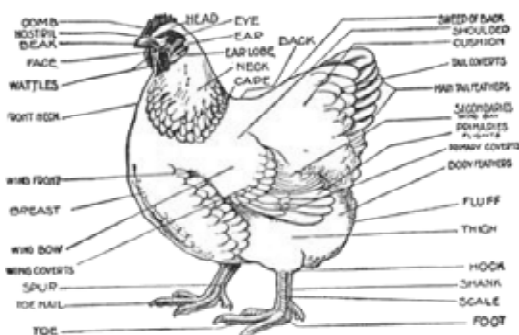
Species are generally not proclaimed extinct until 50 years after the last reliable sighting. Might we ascertain that many other species are probably lost but not yet noticed? In the oceans today, factory ships vacuum the water for species yet undiscovered.

HEALTH OF THE PLANET/PEOPLE

It is mind boggling that industrialized food companies can produce a chicken from egg to meat in 6 weeks. It takes seconds for a living bird to be transformed into a plastic shrouded product ready to cook. Equally unbelievable is how cheap meat is to produce, due to subsidies and the volume of animals processed.

To make a profit, companies receive a lot of outside help from the government, in cheap energy, pesticides, hormones, fertilizer, refrigerated containers and a pool of marginalized workers. Industrial agriculture contributes to Global Warming by consuming tons of petrochemical fuel, fertilizer, and creating vast quantities of waste pollution.

When there looms a health scare like avian flu, mass quantities of otherwise healthy birds can be exterminated in a very short time, with little thought to anything but providing a clean product recall.





AVIAN FLU SCORE

Dim View, 2008,
collage, 16 X 20 inches

Ideas about this work were hatched pursuant to an interest in the hype surrounding avian flu. Remember about 3 years ago they worried about an unstoppable pandemic that would sweep across the globe from Asia? The dreaded “Bird Flu” hysteria is a scam to scare us into submission. Countless millions of domestic ducks and chickens have been liquidated globally in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus. Billions of dollars are being allocated to the development of a new “pandemic” vaccine and the stockpiling of drugs, which are touted to “treat” the infection. Mandatory vaccination and military enforced quarantine await us as part of new Patriot Act mandates.

What forces are really at work? Could it be that drug companies’ patents will be our only chance at survival? Or maybe Virus H5N1 is a proprietary war on terror, designed to increase market share. The belief that the virus can be easily passed between humans remains unsubstantiated.

So much of what we see in the media shows animals in the context of cruelty and sacrifice. An untarnished brand is the goal, while images of the slaughter of millions of animals, in the search for offending microbes permeate our experience.



Zero balance frog, 2007, credit cards and welded steel, 10 x 9 X 5 inches

GLOBAL WARMING

Three-quarters of biodiversity in crops has been lost in the last century, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. In Mexico, only 20 percent of the corn types that existed in the 1930's exist today. In the United States, 95 percent of cabbage varieties and 94 percent of pea types are gone.

Animal agriculture accounts for most of the wasted resources consumed, while, in this country, we contribute two-thirds of the world's acid-rain-causing ammonia, which represents the largest source of water pollution-killing entire river and marine ecosystems, destroying coral reefs, and of course, making people sick. Try to imagine the prodigious volumes of manure churned out by modern American farms: 5 million tons a day, more than a hundred times that of the human population, and far more than our land can possibly absorb. The acres and acres of cesspools stretching over much of our countryside, polluting the air and contaminating our water, make the Exxon Valdez oil spill look minor in comparison. All of which we can fix surprisingly easily, just by realigning our appetites for more green stuff and less meat.



No Way Home, 2008, collage, 16 X 20 inches

HUMAN ATTITUDES TOWARD WILDLIFE

This work is less about endangered species, and more concerned with how we treat animals that already exist. Do humans notice much about other species — or is it our own image we're looking for when we view animals on TV and in movies?

We create charismatic stars like *Smokey*, *Flipper* and *Pale Male*, defining them through our experience. Yet infinite quantities of mass produced meat animals are considered less notable because they are cheap to produce and short lived.

FAST FOOD AS A COMMODITY

Mass-produced in the speediest, cheapest and unhealthy of conditions, fast food poultry is unhealthy and engineered to grow rapidly and die young. Their bones are very weak, their feet can't support the weight gain- when sanctuaries rescue these animals, they must bandage their feet to enable them to support their own bodies. We eat them, ingesting also their antibiotics, hormones and pesticides. The chicken is produced to make it fatter and cheaper.

As globalization “flattens” the world, more commerce replicating western food choices is becoming common, in turn promoting a model of hyper consumption.



Although observed from actual bird prototypes, the works embody absurdity, as they are a creation of human hands. They reflect the preposterous notion that humans can put things back together, implying that merely by good intentions nature could be retrofitted for the better and placate our guilt.

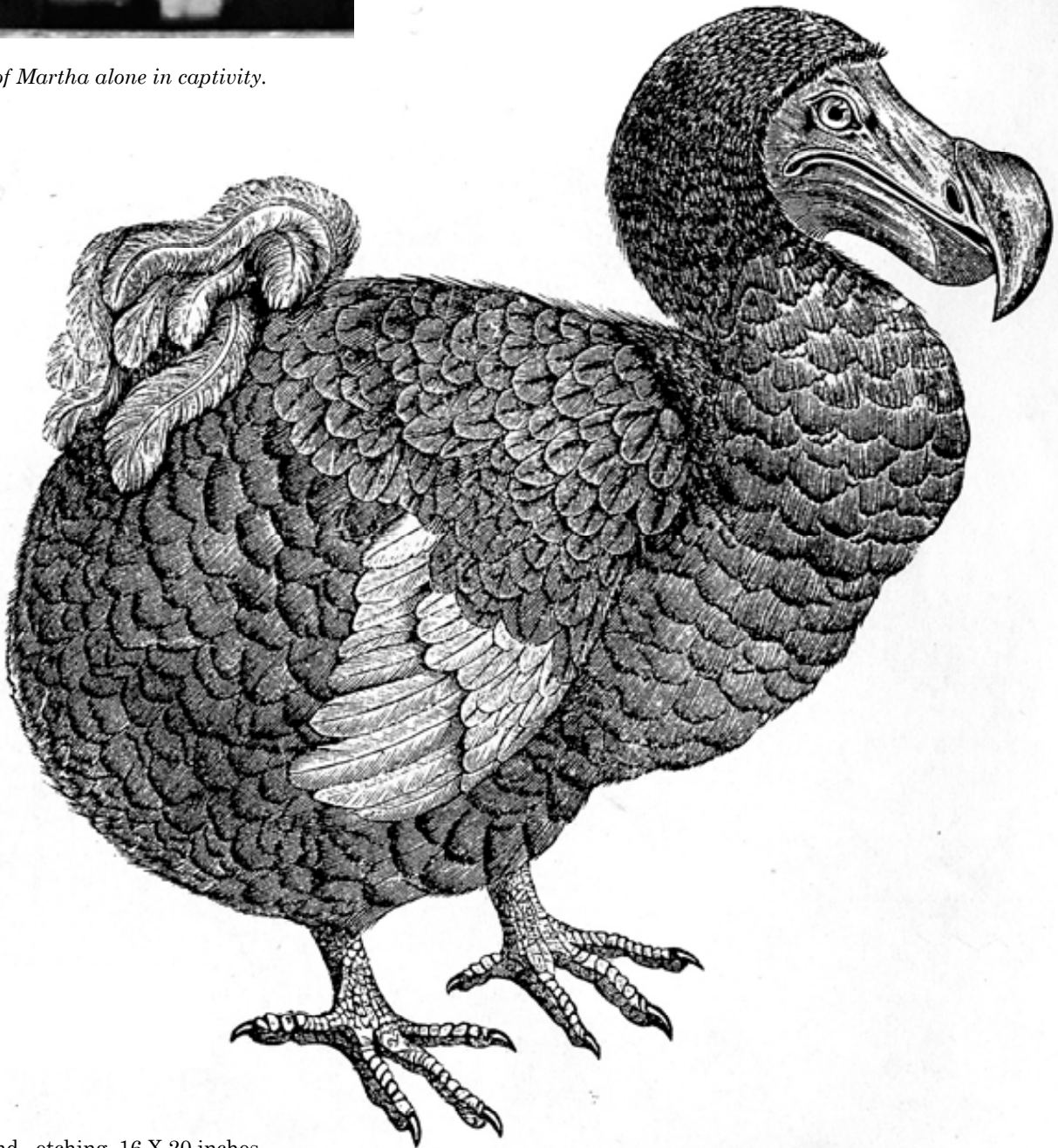
Great Auk, 2007,
bones & mixed media,
28 x 30 x 17 inches



Photo of Martha alone in captivity.

Nature does not see individual animals — only colonies of breeding populations. Yet our experience of extinction is one of charismatic icons, like Martha, the last passenger pigeon, who lived caged and alone for 18 years in the Cincinnati Zoo.

The value of resources unharvested is hard to measure; we prefer to equate the life of an endangered spotted owl with the loss of 40,000 jobs. By what criteria does one have value and not the other?



Dodo, nd., etching, 16 X 20 inches

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