

ecotopia

THE SECOND ICP
TRIENNIAL
OF PHOTOGRAPHY
AND VIDEO

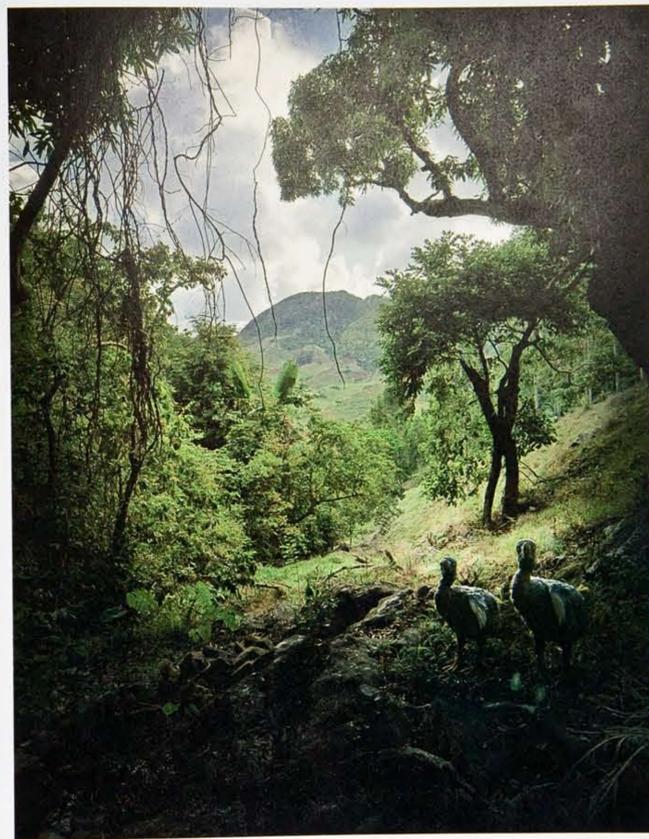
harri kallio

When European explorers discovered the island of Mauritius in 1507, they also encountered the dodo for the first time. A large, flightless bird that nested on the ground, the dodo became an easy quarry for the Dutch settlers who began colonizing Mauritius in 1598. Excessive hunting, deforestation, and the introduction of foreign species rapidly diminished the island's dodo population. Within a few decades the bird was extinct; the last recorded sighting of a dodo in the wild is dated to 1662.

Finnish artist Harri Kallio has made this famously ill-fated animal the subject of a recent series of color photographs. After extensive research in libraries and museums, Kallio surmised the dodo's appearance from fossilized remains, eyewitness descriptions, and various paintings and drawings. He then painstakingly crafted two movable, lifesize models of the extinct birds that represent both sexes. Kallio ultimately flew to Mauritius, where he photographed his reconstructed dodos in various natural settings on the island. Digital post-production allowed Kallio to turn back the hands of time and multiply his two models into a large flock.

Kallio's photographs imagine the dodos in a prelapsarian paradise, alive and flourishing in their native habitat. In some pictures they waddle through a sun-dappled jungle. In others they cluster on coastal rocks, squawking and beating their slight, ineffectual wings. They appear quite content and we find ourselves wishing them well, even when detecting a note of artifice in some of these images, a preternatural stillness that suggests we are looking at mere puppets. Indeed, this willingness to suspend disbelief should remind us that Kallio's project is as much a meditation on photography as a tribute to an extinct animal. Though we know the dodo disappeared centuries before its invention, Kallio enlists the persuasive powers of photography to retrieve a past that is irretrievably gone. By exploiting our faith in the photograph as document, he engenders surprising feelings of loss for a bird we have never known.

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Domain du Chasseur #6, Mauritius, 2001

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Lion Mountain #5, Mauritius, 2004

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Lion Mountain #5, Mauritius, 2004