



FOTOFEST2006

THE EARTH • ARTISTS RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE

FOTOFEST AT WILLIAMS TOWER GALLERY | Earth

THE DODO AND MAURITIUS ISLAND, IMAGINARY ENCOUNTERS

ARTIST: HARRI KALLIO

"Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it."
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

How can we visualize an animal we've never seen? Is it possible to breathe life back into a creature long gone from this world, to create a whole from bits and pieces of bone, long faded canvases, scraps of memories? With his project *The Dodo and Mauritius Island*, Harri Kallio aims to answer those questions and more.

Kallio's hybrid of art and science, as well as of photography and sculpture, speaks to the topic of the earth from the point of view of one of the first documented cases of animals hunted to extinction by our species—the dodo bird. The dodo, a distant cousin of the pigeon that was affected by an island-influenced gigantism, was openly mocked by early travelers to Mauritius for its ungainly appearance and lack of fear of human predators. In looking at Kallio's photographs, we see a kind and gentle creature, ironically full of the life that was snatched from it hundreds of years ago. Kallio's project examines our relationship to the earth with a humor and lightness that allows us access to the work, while at the same time opening our eyes to the loss we are complicit in. While his work allows us to see and care for this great creature, it also teaches us to mourn and, one hopes, to consider more carefully our role in species extinction, both now and in the future.

Kristiina Wilson

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I'm not the first one to find the dodo compelling—more books have been written about the dodo than any other extinct species. Between 1662 and 1693, this strange giant pigeon was exterminated by humans on Mauritius Island—the only place on earth where dodos ever existed. Although the dodo became extinct hundreds of years ago, it still lives on in the collective memory of the Western world, in mythology, and in stories such as *Alice in Wonderland*.

While considering the dodo, I became fascinated with the idea of actually building models of the bird and seeing how they would look in the real world. As I worked on Mauritius, I found myself laughing all the time at the bizarre project I was doing. I knew that whatever I did with the dodos would be fun, funny, and paradoxically full of life.

Imaginary Encounters is a reconstruction and photographic study of the long extinct dodo bird. Based on extensive research, I produced life-size sculptural reconstructions of the bird, as well as a visual photo-based study of the actual dodo remains. The project culminated in a photographic series of the reconstructed dodo, made using the models in their natural habitat of Mauritius Island. While I created my photographs in the very same locations where dodos once went about their daily activities, I became acutely aware that Mauritius Island is a very different place now that it must have been in the early seventeenth century. It was a daily struggle to find land still in its natural state—not developed with crops or housing, or marred by modern human life. The resulting series is an imaginary encounter between the viewer and the dodos on Mauritius Island.



HARRI KALLIO • RIVIERE DES ANGOUILLES #7, MAURITIUS, 2002 • DIGITAL CHROMOGENIC PRINT

My idea was not so much to create a scientific reconstruction of the birds as to somehow put the *Alice in Wonderland* dodo, a character faithful to its appearances in art history, into the landscape on Mauritius Island—to create a dodo that is part myth and part real. I also wanted to recreate the kind of moments that must have occurred when the settlers arrived and the birds encountered people for the first time. Caught up in the contradiction between the historical dodo character and the real living bird, I became curious about what it would be like to combine the two—and so I decided to find out.

Harri Kallio

Lewis Carroll and illustrated by John Tenniel, *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (1865; reprint, New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1946) p. 25

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HARRI KALLIO • BINARIS #5, MAURITIUS, 2004 • DIGITAL CHROMOGENIC PRINT



HARRI KALLIO • LE GRIS GRIS #2, MAURITIUS, 2001 • DIGITAL CHROMOGENIC PRINT

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