

BOSTON — ART REVIEW

July 2023

Review by Hilary Irons



Installation view, "Kate Greene: Black Sun," Grant Wahlquist Gallery, June 2 through July 8, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Grant Wahlquist Gallery, Portland, Maine.

Photographer Kate Greene's new exhibit "Black Sun," at Grant Wahlquist Gallery in Portland, Maine, shimmers with an energy that aligns clarity and precision with violent disintegration and the siren call of oblivion. Three main bodies of work emerge in the exhibit, informing and complicating one another.

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY



Kate Greene, *Seascape study no. 2 (Grand Isle, La)*, 2023. Archival inkjet print. 32" x 26" (unframed). Ed. 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy of the artist and Grant Wahlquist Gallery, Portland, Maine.

Infrared photographs of the sea, taken from Grand Isle, on the Louisiana coast, depict an ocean surface that has become imminently threatening in our time due to rising waters. It is predicted to be the first inhabited American land completely lost to climate change. Greene's spectral photos of its waters subject viewers to an almost physical sense of tidal pull, due the inclusion of a mesmeric golden lens flare in the center of the compositions. *Seascape study no. 2 (Grand Isle, La)* positions this flare at the center of the sea's surface, rather than the stabilizing horizon, pulling us in like a preternatural undertow. The Louisiana waters where Kate Chopin set her 1899 masterpiece *The Awakening* welcome us with the same soothing promise of obliteration embraced by Chopin's protagonist.

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Kate Greene, *Forest study no. 2 (Freetown-Fall River, Ma)*, 2023. Archival inkjet print. 28" x 36" (unframed). Ed. 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy of the artist and Grant Wahlquist Gallery, Portland, Maine.

The pale glitter of the Grand Isle photos gives way to an equally seductive, equally infernal blackness in the next body of work—palimpsestic photographs of photographs of photographs, the first two layers of which have been soaked in water, becoming sculpturally distorted. Within this distortion, however, they retain an unnerving level of clarity. Imagery of a forest is apparent, the hand-tinted appearance of its smoky rainbow colors an artifact of the infrared process rather than a painterly judgment. The burnt, drowned, disrupted, darkly glamorous narratives built by these photographs have a palpably occult sensibility. This supernatural atmosphere is traceable to not only the ritualistic manner in which Greene soaked the photographs before rephotographing them, but also to the fact that the depicted forest—the Freetown-Fall River State Forest in Massachusetts—is said to be the “most haunted forest in the United States” and has been the site of documented turmoil from the colonization of the Wampanoag land onwards. *Forest study no. 2 (Freetown-Fall River, Ma)* invites the viewer into the same embracing freefall offered by the Grand Isle photos.

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Kate Greene, *Bell jar study no. 3*, 2023. Archival inkjet print. 20" x 16" (unframed). Ed. 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy of the artist and Grant Wahlquist Gallery, Portland, Maine.

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Most circuitous of all, Greene's set of bell jar photographs bring the human form into her compositions, distorting male arms and legs in a vacuum-like series of compositions that seem to point to the airless bell jar's as a point of no return. That the bell jar has been associated with a uniquely feminine quest for oblivion since Sylvia Plath's 1963 roman à clef is a necessary part of this work's interpretation. *Bell jar study no. 3* begins to incorporate the language of the state forest photographs, a soaked and distorted photograph becoming the subject of a repictured image of this heavy object.

With cinematic power and a percussive sense of psychic orchestration, Greene's photographs posit a landscape where annihilation functions as a doorway into understanding.

"Kate Greene: Black Sun" is on view at [Grant Wahlquist Gallery](#) (30 City Center, 2nd Floor, Portland, Maine) through July 8, 2023.

Hilary Irons is a Maine-based painter and curator. She is Gallery and Exhibitions Director at the University of New England, and is represented by Dowling Walsh Gallery. She received an MFA from the Yale School of Art in '08 and a BFA from Parsons School of Design in '02, and has attended residencies at the Albers Foundation, Skowhegan, MacDowell, the American Academy in Rome, the Pace House, Hewnoaks, the Canterbury Shaker Village, and the Surf Point Foundation. She has written for *The Chart*, *Art New England*, *Maine Magazine*, and other publications.