

Portland Press Herald

A favorite pond and the dating pool are subjects of photo show on water

Photographer Kate Greene takes a deep dive with 'So Much Water So Close to Home' at Grant Wahlquist Gallery in Portland.

BY **BOB KEYES** STAFF WRITER



Share     



Kate Greene's "Comins Pond No. 1," taken with infrared technology and on view at Grant Wahlquist Gallery in Portland. *Courtesy of Grant Wahlquist Gallery*

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

When Kate Greene is disturbed by something, she grapples with it with the tools she is adept at handling. In her case, those tools include her cameras.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Kate Greene, "So Much Water So Close to Home"

WHERE: Grant Wahlquist Gallery, 30 City Center, Portland

WHEN: Opens Friday, Sept. 11 on view through Oct. 31; 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday and by appointment

INFO: grantwahlquist.com or 207-245-5732

In a new exhibition that opens Friday at Grant Wahlquist Gallery in Portland, Greene grapples with the intersection of desire and danger. The 11 photographs that make up "So Much Water So Close to Home" evoke unease, uncertainty and trepidation, all emotions that are present in the Raymond Carver short story from which the exhibition takes its name. And all are emotions that many people are juggling while navigating the uncertain, unstable and dangerous environment of the coronavirus pandemic.

A number of compositions in the show involve manipulated images from a photo archive that Greene has amassed of men holding recently-caught fish. While perusing dating apps, she was surprised – and disturbed – at the number of men who offered up a fish in their profile photo. Others images were captured at Comins Pond in central Massachusetts, near where Greene grew up and where 16-year-old Molly Bish was likely abducted in 2000. The other images in the exhibition are studio studies and still lifes of ropes, water, mesh screening, fish – and an eye with a degenerative condition.

All the work is linked by Greene's ability to create images that often suggest more than what they depict or what we immediately see, said Wahlquist. "While each photograph in the show is ravishing on its own terms – Kate is a master of texture and light – as an ensemble they do not so much suggest a narrative as create an environment in which forms and subjects (water especially) transform and gain new charge as the viewer circulates among them," he wrote in an email.

Greene is an occasional Mainer. She has been a visiting assistant professor at Maine College of Art and kept a studio in the State Theatre building in Portland, though she has given up the studio and is no longer at MECA. She rode out the early stages of the pandemic in Massachusetts, and now plans to travel the country in an Airstream trailer that she and her partner plan to pick up in Arizona. Her goal is to spend time in the dark-sky communities across the country, as she investigates a new body of work.

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

After a stable life in Portland, she is choosing something more nomadic for the near future.

“I am seeing this as an opportunity to focus on my practice and invest in it in a new way,” she said in a phone interview. “We’re going to be living in an Airstream. It’s an investigation and exercise in minimalism and living really close to the bone for awhile, for a lack of a better term. We will be living close to the land.”



“Dead Fish No. 8” by Kate Greene.
Courtesy of Grant Wahlquist Gallery

The idea for the men-and-fish series evolved from her investigation of dating apps. Over the course of two years, she collected more than 500 images of men posing with fish. The final images are a mixture of collage and black-and-white photos that she manipulates in water.

Men posing with fish on dating apps is a photographic trope, or joke. “But I didn’t find it funny. I found it disturbing and unsettling,” she said. “I began questioning this presentation in this context and almost read it as these men presenting themselves as predators. That was just perception.”

It made her feel a bit like one of the fish in the sea, not wanting to be caught.

Greene is calling her Comins Pond series “Sight Unseen.” She made these images using infrared technology, creating an aura of what Wahlquist describes as the pond’s “unseen history.” She began photographing the pond as a undergrad at Mass Art in Boston, and has returned to it again and again over the years.

Going forward, she is uncertain how her work will evolve. After working in a 400-square-foot studio in Portland for the past four years, she will be on the road as a nomadic artist working in whatever environment she encounters during her travels. Like much of the world, everything is shifting at moment. “Now my studio is wherever I am. I am going through a big life transition and shift, and I will be thinking about what does it mean to create a studio space in the field. I am interested to see how it will shift my practice and the way that I work.”