

BEHOLD

THE PHOTO BLOG

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Combining 19th-Century Portraits With Birds for a Magical Effect

By *David Rosenberg*



Left: Aviary (female passenger pigeon, extinct), 2013. Right: Aviary (red-headed woodpecker, endangered), 2013.

Sara Angelucci

Sara Angelucci had been collecting vintage photographs for many years and wasn't quite sure what to do with them. Although she found many of the fiber-based photographs to be beautiful, she also found them to be heartbreaking—she was the keeper of a memory of someone perhaps long forgotten. “They seemed so lost and misplaced, and no one cared about them anyone,” she said about the photographs. “It was heartbreaking to see these lost personages.”

As it happens with many artists, the road traveled from beginning to completion of any project takes many different twists and turns. During an artist retreat on Canada's Toronto Island, where she went with the intention to do a lot of reading and meditating, Angelucci brought the photographs with her.

She happened upon a short passage about how in ancient times to try to "capture" a specific memory was equated to trying to capture a bird in an aviary full of birds. She realized she had found a connection for her photographs. "I started to think of this equation of fleeting thoughts and existences to memories," she said. "One day I looked at one of them of this Victorian woman ... wearing a frilly dress, and I thought of her as a bird—it's as simple as that."

She called a museum in Toronto with a large ornithology collection and asked them if she could photograph their collection of extinct and endangered birds. They agreed, and Angelucci began photographing around 40 birds from 360-degree angles. She then Photoshopped them in many pieces to have them fit over the vintage portraits of people.



Left: Aviary (barn owl, endangered), 2013. Right: Aviary (Eskimo curlew, extinct), 2013.

Sara Angelucci



Left: Aviary (loggerhead shrike, endangered), 2013. Right: Aviary (heath hen, extirpated), 2013.

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“At first I thought, ‘Wow, I need to find a bird that this person could be,’ and then once I met the bird, it was the other way around: I need to find a person this bird could be,” she said.

The result became the series “**Aviary**” that touches on recreated memories with a nod to 19th-century advancements in science and photography, including *cartes-de-visite* portraits, the scientific collection of specimens found in nature, and the idea of **spirit photography** (where visions of deceased people were said to appear in photographs).

Angelucci said in her early work she was driven by a desire to connect with her family’s immigrant heritage and ideas wrapped up in identity. “Now I’m using other types of vernacular images and exploring those histories and allowing myself to kind of invent history and align those histories with other things; it has opened up my thinking around the notion of interpretation much more broadly,” she said.



Left: Aviary (sage thrasher, endangered), 2013. Right: Aviary (male passenger pigeon, extinct), 2013.

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Left: Aviary (spotted owl, endangered), 2013. Right: Aviary (short-eared owl, endangered), 2013.

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