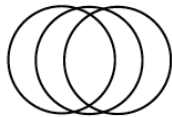


DARK WATERS

Kristine Potter

Jan 20-Mar 19, 2022



Institute of
Contemporary
Art / Chattanooga

The ICA presents the US and Southeastern debut of Kristine Potter's series, *Dark Waters*, made between 2015-present, and bringing together 19 of Potter's gelatin silver photographs in our main gallery, along with her eponymous video work *Dark Waters* (2019) in the second gallery.

Potter's images are classified into what she identifies as three components: large format 'waterscapes', studio portraits of women heroines, and 'situations'—images that storytell people in the peripheries affected by the energies of a place. The short film *Dark Waters* features five male American songwriters performing infamous murder ballads 'live' on an isolated stage and for an imagined audience. The video brings to life and sound the histories, words and complex stories alluded to in Potter's photographs while simultaneously nodding to the complicated history of the folk tradition and genre.

While Potter's earlier photographic series *The Grey Line* and *Manifest* explore the perspective of the feminized gaze unpacking masculine stereotypes—the American soldier or challenging the mythology of man in the American west and its photographic representations—*Dark Waters* hits a slightly different note: she takes on casual misogyny through the complex and violent histories echoing in the southern landscape as connected to the folk murder ballad tradition.

The origin of the series dates to Potter's early fascination with a waterway named Murder Creek that ran through the forests near her hometown in Georgia: pondering the origin of its name and the energy that flowed along its banks was of persistent imaginative concern. In 2017, Potter officially moved to Nashville from Brooklyn, returning full time to the Southeast, and began researching the history of murder ballads in the Great American Songbook.



Over the past six years of *Dark Waters*' organic development, Potter traveled by car around the greater Southeast—including Kentucky, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida and Tennessee—identifying, visiting, and shooting locales: specifically forested or isolated bodies of water. Potter was less interested in documenting or referencing specific histories than in pointing to the sheer prevalence of landscapes with violent namesakes in this part of the country and she was more drawn to capturing a sense of place by injecting landscapes with the potential energies and histories they can embody. By using murder ballads as a framework for the series, *Dark Waters* calls attention to how the landscapes of the Southeast have been marked and scared by violence more broadly, historical but also mythologized.

From her artistic lens as a woman, this violence and power construct felt intuitively very real at times when shooting on location solo in the woods. Conversely, Potter's portraits of women

heroines were made in a studio setting, removed from any site specificity, to allow for artistic redemption and reclamation of power. In this vacuum, her heroines seemingly reappear from the waters where they were drowned, reanimated and triumphant over their fate. Potter says of the series, “we can no longer tell whether it is our cultural ideas that make us see the landscape in a certain way, or whether the history of a place (felt or learned) creates a context for how we express ideas about it.”

In this work, Potter perhaps asks us and herself why we are captivated by stories of gendered violence, both dramatized and true. In dealing specifically with the musical tradition and the stories of these women who’ve been killed and sung about, Potter feels that *Dark Waters* is a “redemptive” expression.





What is the resonance, or echo of, the murder ballad convention in the present day? What attracts us to “dead-girl songs,” or in larger contemporary pop culture, the “dead girl trope,” and what does this say about our values? If we detour too quickly under mere interest in historic folk-traditions, we lose sight of very real links to contemporary statistics of gendered violence and abuse, class and racial privilege widespread in society today. Perhaps this unspoken connection is the true ‘dark water’ that Potter’s new work swirls within: her series is an evocative visual way to indirectly speak about darkness, discomfort and violence in today’s moment.

Images, in order of text appearance:

Deep River (where Naomi was drowned), 2019, 40 x 50 inches

Knoxville Girl, 2016, 40 x 32 inches

The Fight, 2019, 32 x 40 inches

All exhibition images: Kristine Potter (American, b. 1977), from the series *Dark Waters*, 2015-present, edition 1 of 7, gelatin silver prints, courtesy and copyright the artist.

Works in the exhibition

The Two Fisherman, 2015

32 x 40 inches



A Good Man Is Hard To Find, 2016

32 x 48 inches



Bank of the Ohio, 2016

25 x 20 inches



Disappointment Creek, 2016

40 x 50 inches



Knoxville Girl, 2016

40 x 32 inches



Troublesome Creek, 2016

20 x 25 inches



Delia, 2017

40 x 32 inches

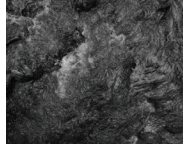


Impasse at Sodom's Creek, 2017

20 x 25 inches



Over the Bridge 1, 2017
40 x 50 inches



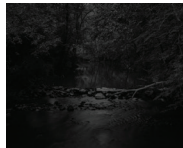
The Medium, 2017
*presented as projection



Babe, 2019
20 x 25 inches



Dark Water, 2019
40 x 50 inches



Dark Waters, 2019
23 minutes, 4 seconds
*HD Video



Deep River (where Naomi was drowned), 2019
40 x 50 inches



The Fight, 2019
32 x 40 inches



The Inquiry, 2019
20 x 25 inches



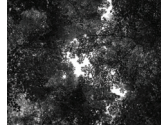
The Misfit, 2019
25 x 20 inches



My Girl, 2020
40 x 32 inches



From the Forest Floor, 2021
32 x 40 inches



Florilla, 2021
40 x 32 inches



Rose, 2021
40 x 32 inches



Kristine Potter (American, b. 1977) is an artist based in Nashville, Tennessee, whose work explores masculine archetypes, the American landscape, and cultural tendencies toward mythologizing the past. Her first monograph *Manifest* was published by TBW Books in 2018. Potter was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship (2018) and was awarded the Grand Prix Image Vevey (2019-2020). Potter's work is in numerous public and private collections including The Georgia Museum of Art, 601 Artspace, Swiss Camera Museum, and Foundation Vevey. She holds a BFA in Photography and BA in Art History from the University of Georgia (2001) and an MFA in Photography from Yale University (2005). Potter is currently an Assistant Professor of Photography at Middle Tennessee State University.

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