

cynthia byrnes
contemporary art

Elena Lyakir
Artist Statement

In the autumn of 2008 I encountered large flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds in eastern Long Island. Watching the birds feed and fly in unison, I was mesmerized. I saw a visceral connection to how birds, I had so often observed during my childhood in Ukraine, can appear as symbols of transition, freedom and hope; simultaneous feelings of beauty and a sense of nostalgia, the poetic language from which I had no defenses.

Thus began my obsession with the subject. Since then I have traveled to India, Vietnam, China, and Iceland, across Europe, Canada and Mexico, and the Caribbean islands in search of migrating birds.

Birds are a challenge to photograph. Fast and fleeting, they are often difficult to find and easy to lose sight of. I, however, enjoy the process tremendously. The quiet time I spend alone waiting, listening, and observing is not only an exercise of patience and awareness, but also an opportunity for introspection.

For me, the Aves series has become an ongoing exploration of how we relate to the visual experience emotionally. Images represent reality in symbols. Like memories and dreams, they reveal themselves in the physical world, asserting meaning into the mental activities of life. Using birds as my subject, I attempt to engage the viewer through self-reflection by evoking memory and facilitating the sensation of feeling. I relish the moments in which the visual experience becomes an emotional one.

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