

# GARDEN

## Yola Monakhov Stockton

### *Notes from the Bottom*

September 13 - November 2, 2019

Garden is pleased to present *Notes from the Bottom*, an exhibition by Buffalo, New York-based artist Yola Monakhov Stockton. In this new body of work, Monakhov Stockton collaborated with ecologists studying the flora and fauna at the floor of the Great Lakes. While with the scientists aboard the EPA research vessel *Lake Guardian*, she turned her cameras towards the biological samples collected from below, as well as the equipment used to both gather them and to record findings. In particular, the team studied the freshwater quagga mussel (*Dreissena bugensis*), native to the Caspian and Black Seas, which has quickly proliferated throughout the region since its introduction by transoceanic vessels in 1989, completely transforming the ecosystems of the lake beds. Employing varied imaging technologies and approaches, Monakhov Stockton here reflects on the relationship between artist and specialist, the nature of documentary, the definition of invasiveness, and the migratory journeys of all things.

Monakhov Stockton arrived in Buffalo, NY in 2016 and shortly thereafter met Lyuba Burlakova and Alexander Karatayev, married biologists who run the Great Lakes Center. Wondering how two scientists originally from the former Soviet Union found themselves in Buffalo, Monakhov Stockton realized that they had followed the path of the quagga mussel. This interspecies and interdisciplinary constellation shares a common journey: the quagga mussels on the hulls and ballast tanks of cargo ships, the scientists following the quagga through research, and Monakhov Stockton in her search for photographic subject matter about the environment at hand. In 2018, Burlakova and Karatayev invited Monakhov Stockton to join them aboard the *Lake Guardian* - the vessel had never previously hosted an artist, or indeed, anyone who is not a scientist, and so she joined in the official capacity of a researcher participating in the sampling.

*Notes from the Bottom* features seven black and white photographs, images that Monakhov Stockton made while on board. She both photographed the activities of the scientists using a medium-format panoramic film camera and created still lifes of scientific equipment and collected samples using a 4x5 view camera in her mobile studio on the ship. Projected on a wall on the gallery's exterior is a video work that combines clips from years of Lake Ontario Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative scientist Knut Mehler's research videography of the lakebed prior to and during Monakhov Stockton's time on the *Lake Guardian*. Echoing the colorful Victoriana of the gallery's neighborhood, *Benthic Wallpaper*, 2019, enlarges, reflects, and repeats scanned slides of aquatic worms and other Great Lakes benthic samples borrowed from researcher Susan Daniel, covering the north wall of the space. This year, Monakhov Stockton helped scientist Karatayev scan a box of turn-of-the-century glass plates made by his grandfather. Capturing friends and family posed next to bodies of water following the pictorial conventions of the era, the darkroom-printed photograph in the exhibition links the aquatic journey of the quagga mussel to that of the modern immigrant. It is not only species, water, ships, and people who migrate, but along with them, images.

While much has been made about the malicious invasiveness of the mussels, Monakhov Stockton found the Great Lakes Center scientists' attitudes towards the quagga to be surprisingly agnostic, seeing themselves as monitors and observers of the lakes. The quagga, although often maligned, are well adapted to flourish in the lakescape of global capitalism, populated by canal systems and intercontinental cargo ships.

In *Notes from the Bottom*, Monakhov Stockton navigates the space between observer and contaminator, immigrant and invader, and recorder and creator. Perhaps what makes the mussels appear so sinister is that they reflect histories of humanity - the tenacious quagga are themselves an index of commercialism, imperialism, and colonialism's global reach.

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**Yola Monakhov Stockton** (b. Moscow) lives in Buffalo, NY, and is an artist who works in photography, artist books, and documentary practice. Born in Moscow and raised in New York City, she completed an MA in Italian Literature and an MFA in Visual Arts, both from Columbia University, and worked as a photojournalist in the Middle East, Central Asia, and former Soviet Union before turning to art. Her work has been shown in exhibitions at the Alice Austen House Museum; George Eastman Museum; LightField Festival at the Hudson Opera House; Photography Biennale of Tianshui, China; Rick Wester Fine Art; and Sasha Wolf Gallery. Publications include *Harper's*, *Marie Claire*, *The New York Times*, and *The New Yorker*. Her first monograph, *The Nature of Imitation*, was published by Schilt (Amsterdam) in 2015, and her work appears in *A Matter of Memory: Photography as Object in the Digital Age*, by Lisa Hostetler. She was Harnish Visiting Artist at Smith College in Massachusetts, and currently directs the photography program at SUNY Buffalo State.