
PRESS RELEASE

KATE HELMS

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Climate Change Artist Kate Helms featured in the Exhibition *Edgewater* at Hodson Gallery at Hood College

FREDERICK, MD -- Kate Helms, a 5th-generation Floridian, environmental scientist and artist, is presenting her latest solo show, entitled *Edgewater*, at the Hodson Gallery at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. *Edgewater* expands significantly on Helms' previous solo show earlier this year at Shepherd University, and includes many new sculptures and installations not previously exhibited.

Helms is a climate change artist that utilizes targeted artistic interventions in hopes of influencing cultural attitudes about the environment- specifically, sea level rise. In Hodson Gallery, Helms presents synthetically crafted coral reef sculptures that bloom like aquatic floral arrangements. Like aqueous tumors, coral reef encrustations wrap themselves around carefully selected Victorian furniture specimens. In contrast to coral bleaching, these imagined ecosystems, made of clay, cardboard, fiberglass, and other materials, thrive. While gorgeous, the sculptures emote a conscious jolting message: Ocean waters are rising due to climate change, faster than most realize, eventually inundating many developed and inhabited coastal communities.

The use of Victorian furniture isn't arbitrary. Helms contrasts our historical and current, lavish era of coastal micromansions and flatscreens to a futuristic vision of past elegance inundated, recycled, reclaimed by nature's processes. Such is a reminder that humans were not aware that the opulence which accompanied industrialization and coastal development would warm the atmosphere, reduce the mass of polar ice and raise sea levels. Now, we are aware, but continue to increase greenhouse gases that have average temperatures ticking higher and higher each year. As sea ice continues to melt at unprecedented rates, Helms harkens back to a previous era to shine an uncomfortable light on our own.

"I hope to inspire wonder, but also angst," says Helms. "To create a sublime epiphany that as the waters rise, our status as an apex species, particularly in coastal environments, becomes uncertain." Helms often refers to her works as a tidewater elegy, meaning that they are a mournful echo and a harbinger of what is to become, if society doesn't change its course.

The show also includes surreal collages, in which mangroves grow feet to claim territory newly inundated, and sponges grow mouths to devour new habitats. It is accompanied by the workstation of a climate-obsessed madman, who obsessively corrects bathymetric (water depth) maps to reflect the future climate change, painstakingly whitening out the areas that will succumb to the rising waters.

Helms' artistic practice is deeply rooted in her experience with often-bizarre aspects of Florida history, culture, and ecology, as well as her concurrent - and often illuminating - career in the environmental sciences. Her perceptions draw on extensive field level experience in interior watershed documentation in Florida and coastal mitigation in Louisiana. While simultaneously working as a biologist, environmental scientist, and other roles, she has exhibited at the Appleton, Boca Raton and Alexandria Museums of Art, as well as at galleries both domestic and abroad. She currently works as a stormwater professional at a governmental agency in Northern Virginia, where she oversees pollution prevention efforts.