



MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE



SEP 8 CONSTANCE THALKEN: HEART OF A BIRD | WHITESPACE GALLERY

REVIEWS



Mixture of Frailties, 1992 © Constance Thalken, Courtesy Whitespace Gallery

Written by Rishima Mosali

Photo Editing by Zoe Zekos

Humans and the natural world have long been entangled in a relationship defined as much by violence as by reverence. It's marked by wonder in one instance and fear in the next, taking and reshaping to serve human ends. This tension lies at the centre of *Heart of a Bird*, Constance Thalken's solo exhibition featuring a series of black-and-white photographs. On view through September 12th at Whitespace Gallery, the project began in 1988 and took shape over five years with Thalken traveling across remote landscapes and marshlands belonging to the southeastern United States. From the fishing communities along the Gulf Coast of Texas into Florida, Thalken made the journey in a VW camper van, which allowed her to remain immersed in her surrounding environment where human presence is typically subordinate to the power of nature. Thus, photographing whatever she encountered along the way rather than what would be deemed picturesque. The result, composes a body of work built from close, quiet observations that dissolve the boundaries between human and animal in places where nature exists as more than just a backdrop.



Untitled, (boy over shoulder), 1993 © Constance Thalken,
Courtesy Whitespace Gallery



Untitled, (girl in alligator pool), 1993 © Constance Thalken,
Courtesy Whitespace Gallery

Thalken's aim is to emphasize the likeness between humans and animals. Instincts like fear, a will to survive and the possession of a body eventually too frail to hold the force of life inside it. Her work captures lives shaped by the natural world. What people take from it, what they fear within it and what they turn it into spectacle. Across the exhibition, animals, children, and landscapes coexist in remote worlds still governed by ancient rhythms. Feats of masculinity are set against landscapes alongside photographs of giggling children and bound alligators, holding the primal nature and vulnerability of the natural world against the civilization that surrounds them.

This tension plays out most directly in the photographs of the annual Louisiana alligator harvest. Alligators have remained biologically unchanged for millions of years, ancient enough to predate the coastline that they now inhabit. Yet, within the space of a season, they are hunted, regulated, mythologised and sold. The alligators represent stability, a primordial creature that has held fast, acting as a measure of the society that was built around it. In her work "Cold Storage" (1991), Thalken moves close enough to capture the rough texture of the alligator's hide, quite literally binding together the fascination with creatures rarely seen at such proximity and the unease of seeing their mouth bound shut.



Cold Storage, 1991 © Constance Thalken, Courtesy Whitespace Gallery



Untitled, (poker), 1988 © Constance Thalken, Courtesy Whitespace Gallery

The same interplay between human and natural world surfaces throughout the rest of the show. Fishing nets appear tangled with branches, alligators lie stagnant as they're loaded into a truck, a baby is dunked into water and barefooted boys climb hills. Some pictures read quiet and vulnerable, others read unpredictable and violent. Each work still returns to the messy complicated negotiations between people and nature.



John and Sasha, 1992 © Constance Thalken, Courtesy
Whitespace Gallery



Untitled, (boy with crab), 1988 © Constance Thalken, Courtesy
Whitespace Gallery

Constance Thalken is an Atlanta-based photographer, with an MFA in Photography from Yale University. Her practice extends beyond photographs to include video and sound, with her work often circling the themes of death and the complexities of loss. *Heart of a Bird* will also be released as her first monograph, published by Stanley/Barker of London in 2026, bringing her decades-old body of work to a wider audience.



Too Full for Sorrow, 1992 © Constance Thalken, Courtesy Whitespace Gallery