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JOURNEYING WITHIN THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF KARIN ROSENTHAL LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

From 2009 Press Release: Karin Rosenthal has photographed nudes in the landscape since 1975, finding resonances between body and nature first in traditional black and white images and now in digital color photography. In this

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talk, she drew from a variety of series to convey the evolution and range of her motivations, ideas and explorations. Primarily using light and reflection, Rosenthal has created abstractions and illusions that challenge us to see beyond the predictable in one click.

Karin Rosenthal, a 1967 graduate of Wellesley College, has also studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology (1965) and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School (1970-1972). She was a Visiting Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University. Exposed early to the joys and challenges of seeing life through a lens, Rosenthal is the third generation of her family to enjoy photography. A free-lance photographer since 1973, Rosenthal's commercial work has included portrait, public relations, dance, and art reproduction photography. Since 1990, Rosenthal has devoted almost all of her time to fine art photography and to explorations of the nude and the landscape. She has taught at the Art Institute of Boston and the Newton Arts Center, and currently teaches a Figure and Landscape workshop for the Cape Cod Photo Workshops.

Rosenthal's photographs are in several permanent collections, including the Boston MFA, Brooklyn Museum, Boston Public Library, International Center of Photography, Polaroid, and the Fogg, Rose, and Santa Barbara Art Museums.

Subject list

Karin Rosenthal	Duality, paradoxes in photography
Nature and body photographs	Light/shadows in water in photography

Transcript

Linda Marshall 00:15

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the Cape Ann Museum. My name is Linda Marshall, I'm the Director of Programs. And thank you for joining us this afternoon. Some of you may have found this slip of paper on your seat, seARTS, a local cultural organization, has received a grant to study the impact of cultural tourism on Cape Ann. And part of that involves asking visitors to various local institutions and programs and things to fill out evaluations. So, we would be ever so grateful if at the end of the program, you could just take a couple of minutes and fill that out. I put up a table outside of the door here, it has pencils and a little tray that you can put the evaluation in when you're all set. This summer, this is our second year of collaborating with the Rocky Neck Art Colony and seARTS on presenting this lecture. We're very happy to be able to do that. So, I

would immediately like to introduce Ruth Mordecai from Rocky Neck and she's going to tell you a lot more about today's program. Thank you.

Ruth Mordecai 01:24

Thank you, Linda, and thank you, Ronda Faloon, also, for continuing this into the second year. We're very excited about it. My principal reason for being up here is to introduce Karen Rosenthal. I do have a few thank yous that I want to make. One is to Gordon Goetemann, who was really the inspiration and founder. He is the inspiration and founder for the Rocky Neck Art Colony residency program. And this distinguished artist teacher special residency for one week, which is what we've invited Karen to be here for, is an outgrowth of that and it's a week of, of her being on site, and leading workshops, and having programs that artists here can take advantage of and learn from her and begin to communicate with each other and all those things.

Ruth Mordecai 02:31

I want to thank not only Gordon, but Ellen Kroger and Karen. Just have been all four of us have been intimately involved with this whole process and it's been very exciting and I really need to thank them. The Rocky Neck Art, the Rocky Neck is in part supported by the Mass Cultural Council and the John and Abigail Adams Fund. And let's see what else. Oh, after the talk today, because we are welcome to stay in the museum but they do have some need to close, not too too late, we will have a hors d'oeuvre and cheese and wine reception at the Rocky Neck residency studio. Karen will be there you can get a chance to ask her more questions. And that's at 51 a Rocky Neck Avenue which is just beyond where the rudder is on Rocky Neck Avenue.

Speaker 03:38

Just before...

Ruth Mordecai 03:41

Oh, I meant to say just after the studio.

Ruth Mordecai 03:46

As soon as, whenever this finishes, I would say between four thirty and six. At that time, you can also sign up, if there's anything that you look at the list of events that are happening this week. There will be time there where you could sign up if you haven't already. Now, Karen Rosenthal, a Wellesley College graduate study photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology and for Boston Museum School. Her nudes have been published and exhibited internationally and reside in numerous museum collections, including the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Public Library and Brooklyn Museum, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Fogg and Rose Art Museums, the International Center of Photography and Yale University Art Gallery.

Ruth Mordecai 04:34

In 1978, she received a traveling fellowship from Wellesley College to photograph in Greece. Since then, her nudes have been represented by galleries throughout the US with recent

showings of the Benham Gallery in Seattle, Verve Gallery in Santa Fe, and the Yale University Art Gallery. A book entitled "Karen Rosenthal 20 Years of Photographs" was published in conjunction with a major exhibition of her work at the Danforth Museum of Art in 2000. Rosenthal has received a Left Foundation grant and an Ultimate Eye Foundation grant for figurative photography. She has served actively on the planning committee for New England women and photography and has taught numerous workshops. She is currently a visiting scholar at Brandeis University's Women's Study Research Center. I am very, very honored to introduce Karen.

Karin Rosenthal 05:43

Thank you, Linda, and thank you, Bruce. And it's really a pleasure to be here in this fine museum and to be starting a week as an artist in residence here. Looking forward to my little studio by the harbor, that's so exciting. I want to thank the Rocky Neck Art Colony, seARTS, and Cape Ann Museum for making this all possible. I have some photographs I brought. I don't know if you can hear me away from the microphone, they're here in black and white is lit a little better than the color. I've been working with the material of nudes in nature since 1975. And my work has evolved quite a bit. In fact, it's evolved to the point where some people say it looks like the work of two different artists, I beg to differ. I'm no better.

Karin Rosenthal 06:36

I've stayed with the same material, and very similar themes for all these years, but they've taken different incarnations and worked on them. And if you follow the flow of what I've done, which is what we're going to do today, I think you'll see that there's a perfect reason how I got from something that looks classical and simple that was done in black and white and film back, this is the print from 1980 that's kind of emblematic of that series. And this is a piece from two years ago, that was done digitally in color. And there are many series in between that you'll see that the ideas have been building one on another year after year and by the time you get to the end, it contains references to all of the things that went on before. So I'm going to take you on my journey.

Karin Rosenthal 07:32

To do that we have to go back very far. I started, well, I asked for a camera when I was six, and got a little box camera, took it to school and took a picture of the school principal. Can you hear me okay? No problem. School principal, the first-grade teacher, and my best friend. But believe it or not, that wasn't the beginning. I had already been hanging out in a darkroom that was in the basement of our house with my grandmother and my mother. And this was very unusual in my day to have two female mentors like that and a darkroom. And so I was introduced to photography almost from birth and I came from a rather unusual family.

Karin Rosenthal 08:18

And when we went to the National Park, we look kind of like this, except my mother would have a camera, stereo camera in her hand, most likely. This was taken by my grandmother who was self-taught in Germany and she taught my mother who was trained as a painter in Germany,

also, and my dad was an ophthalmologist, who loved optical gadgets, so the basement was also taken up with him fiddling with all of that, and he did some very unusual medical photography. My father was talking to my brother who happens to be here in the audience. We've both changed a bit. And quite coincidentally, Steve, who became an architectural photographer, is going to be having a show at the same museum this fall and doing a book signing as well. So pay attention, that's coming up. You can see that we both were influenced by our, our childhoods and our introduction, early introduction to photography, it stayed with us for a while.

Karin Rosenthal 09:23

I went to college, I was pre-med, believe it or not and I majored in biology, minored in history of art. I was at Wellesley. I also ran the Film Society at school and got very interested in film as well as photography that I'd been doing all through my school years. And after college, I dropped the pre-med and went into photography and film. I got a job with a film company doing stills for their little educational films. This was a contract from the NCAA, where we went to. We went out to Bloomington, Indiana, and I photographed Olympic swimmers and was down at the underwater window. And I saw a swimmer come through when the pool had been quite still and noticed what was happening with the reflection. And I didn't catch it the first time around, but I set it up and had him come through again. And I landed the shot, which was very exciting, but very different from anything I'd ever photographed before. Now, in retrospect, it's highly significant. But at the time, I just, apart from everything. The editors loved it, hung it this way by, next to their workstations, looking like a frog laying out for dissection. And so there was a lot of reflection and amazingly way back then.

Karin Rosenthal 10:51

Mostly what interested me was photographing people in urban spaces. And I went to the museum school a few years after college to take my interest in art further. And I was interested in how crowds were really made up of distinct individuals and so the backlighting here really defines one person, even extra another person, and how people get lost in crowds. And I did a whole series of pictures of people going through subway and walking through time and space. Lost, lost in your thoughts as they are here.

Karin Rosenthal 11:32

And then, when I started freelancing, I helped myself get started by having a part time job working with developmentally disabled men at the Frontal School. And after about a year of working there, I had a little bit of film left in my camera, I took it to school, took this picture, and was surprised at how strong a portrait it was. So I did a whole series of portraits there, and they were really like children unmasked. So these are some of my early pictures. So you can see there was a strong sense of people, no sense of water.

Karin Rosenthal 12:10

Except occasionally, like in this picture. I shot this when I was still at the museum school. And as with the swimmer, it stood apart from everything, it was a wow, I love it. An illusion, by putting

the dock so that covered the horizon. Now it's of course, very meaningful. What was really intriguing me was the bathtub. I snapped this. I like the way that the plane of the body, cut the volume of...I mean, the plane of the water, cut the volume of the body and took on the character of whatever was reflected in it, here the window. And I was intrigued to shoot more pictures in the bathtub and one very rainy, dismal weekend at a country house that I rented with a bunch of friends, I had a chance because everybody was so bored. So, so we brought the lights up and, you know, I had a really good model and I started shooting and it just wasn't working out. I went downstairs and somebody asked me how it went and I couldn't get around to figure your way around. And, and she said, you know, it stopped raining and the lake that was just down the path from our house is still. Why don't you shoot there? And I said, Well, I really want to shoot the bathtub. She said if you want a model, I'll model for you. And fortunately, I made the right decision. I said sure. And I went down there, albeit reluctantly, and she was floating in the water.

Karin Rosenthal 13:48

And this is what I saw. She was divided in three parts, each one interesting, embedded in the clouds and it was absolutely mesmerizing. And I have to say I didn't go back to the bathroom. I wanted a higher vantage point, so I got up in the dock and still wanted to be higher, so I took the Rolleiflex that I was shooting within and hoisted it over my head. And so as I was looking through the viewfinder, she was flying even as she was floating in the water and that really interested me because it was a different evocation just because of the orientation. When she was floating, she looked almost death like. When she was turned around and flying, she looked liberated and free and they're really opposites. It's almost life and death and it took me two years to resolve the printing of this image where I faded. It's the same negative printed twice and kind of faded into one into the other. But this I regard as really the beginning of my nudes in water and of all the work really that was to follow and set in motion the themes and basic idea of what I loved was the sense of paradox, the sense of duality, life and death, the thickness that the water appeared to have, so it seemed almost like a primordial soup, you know, the cauldron of creation. And you'll hear me coming back to these themes over and over again, because they show up in many series that go on from here. So this is really the beginning of everything and shot in 1975 and resolved as an image in 1977.

Karin Rosenthal 15:30

When the light wasn't doing what I wanted, I would use a technique called print solarization, that I won't go in detail, but it puts this white boundary around things that also allowed me to kind of paint in a tonality here, it's really a fusion of positive and negative. And it allowed me also to go underneath the water and bring up some detail there, which was really interesting to me, because it made the underwater portion as important as the above water portion. So, which is really the way I think about things that I think of the above water being conscious reality, the underwater being unconscious reality, you know, all of that murky unknown, somewhat disturbing stuff that lurks under the water. So, you know, this makes a fusion of the two wholeness that I think is truer than one or the other.

Karin Rosenthal 16:28

This was another early image that really set in motion the way I thought about light. It's backlit, and the backlighting creates a highly mottled skin here, but then drops into shade and the shade reflects, so you get this kind of reincarnation of the image as an abstraction and the body becomes part of that abstraction. So, it isn't heavily handedly a nude. And there were a lot of images, there were a lot of ideas that were flowing very rapidly around that time, but I wasn't, I didn't have the time to pull them all together and it was somewhat frustrating because I knew there was an awful lot that was sitting in this body of work that I wanted to express and I just needed an opportunity to do it. So I applied for grant from Wellesley and a traveling fellowship that took me to Greece for a year.

Karin Rosenthal 17:25

Fortunately, I got it. And the grant was to photograph portraits in the winter, because it was too cold to do the nudes, and do the nudes in the summertime. And since I began my journey in mid-September, it was really a time to start thinking about the portraits and the nudes were going to wait till the next spring. So, I went to the south side of Crete, which was fairly warm and got a little house, one of those, you know, and one of those quintessential Greek villages that climbs up the hillside. And the mountains were just amazing. They were, they dropped into the sea sort of looking like birds and animals landing in the water. And all winter long was as I was outside and I spent more time walking around outdoors and I ever had, I was observing that play of light against the water's edge and it's a lucky thing I was, you'll see why.

Karin Rosenthal 18:22

Mostly, I'd go up in the mountains and photograph an older lifestyle that probably doesn't exist anymore. These are some portraits that I did. And finally, it was springtime, a most glorious springtime with poppies. And I decided to move to the island of Mytilini, a painter friend had told me it had two internal bays that were most like lakes of any place in Greece and as well as the ocean and I really didn't know which would work better in terms of stillness and for my work. So, I went there and I found a couple of houses, one by the bay and one by the sea. And I went back to Athens to get my 100 pounds of stuff and came back on a boat. And as I was on the boat returning, I met a German brother and sister.

Karin Rosenthal 19:19

She owned this house on the same island and invited me to come stay with them until I got settled. And it wasn't directly on the water, it was about two and a half miles up the road from the water. It turned out that I had difficulty with the two houses I thought I did and I ended up house sitting her house because she was a schoolteacher headed back to Germany. And she said you you're welcome to live here and moreover you can put your dark room here. This room was boarded up it was already light tight. There was nothing in the room, it had a concrete floor and maybe a couple of trunks, like being used as tables. And it was all set to go except that it didn't have electricity. But I also, along with her house, got her friends and one of them was the only electrician on the island. And he not only set up electricity in this room for me, he fixed up an old

sundown motorcycle, so I could get to the water in the morning really quickly. That involved a little practicing on a football field, not football, they didn't play football, on the soccer field. So, I went to Athens, I bought a lot of East European equipment, a lot of it secondhand, very inexpensive stuff. And, you know, came back on the boat and had the taxi driver pack it up into this area. And you know, this is the shepherds district of town, probably the poorest part of town and the widows were out watching this great spectacle and set up my darkroom there. And the wonderful irony is that I was never better set up for feedback using film than I was in this third world country in Shepard's District.

Karin Rosenthal 21:13

I was up against the attitudes in Greece and attitudes about nudity, which were pretty strong and that played a role in not getting those two houses before. I thought because I had a little piece of paper that was translated into Greek that came from Wellesley all properly spelled out, you know, that that would be sufficient to explain what I was up to, but the attitudes in Greece were more powerful. So I would I would go to a remote day to photograph and try to stay out of people's way.

Karin Rosenthal 21:47

And this is one of the few early shots over the first six to eight weeks that really succeeded. I call it a Colossus. I was always interested in Greek mythology. But a lot of the images weren't happening and this, of course, was frustrating for me because my water pictures had always happened, something, some magic had always come into them. And here I was with this precious time on this grant and things weren't coming together. And this woman, in fact, said before she left, you know, maybe you don't want to be doing water anymore. I said, oh no, no, I know there's something there, I just didn't know what the problem was.

Karin Rosenthal 22:29

Well, it got to the point where she was leaving the next day and there was a Dutch couple that we were friends with. And they all wanted to model together. In fact, we went out the day before and tried to shoot in that way. But the weather pattern was very windy and there was no way I could shoot. So we cancelled that day and this was my last chance. So, we went to the bay, I knew it wasn't going to work because it was just the same wind and I looked across the water not wanting to give up and saw some rock strewn about making some shallows in the water and wondered if I set the models up in a of ring of heads, which was an idea as I had had before, you know, maybe a tiny little pool would be still enough that I could shoot something. It must have changed, it must have, the wind must have calmed down as I was working, I wasn't really thinking about it. I just kept backing up and backing up and then I was climbing up some rocks that were behind me. As I looked down, the reflection of the sun was bouncing in the water. Somewhere, you know, you're dancing around, and I knew it was gonna flare and ruin the picture. And so I at this point was working with a Hasselblad where what you see in the viewfinder is what you get on film. And I wondered if I could just move the image in such a way that the light, the reflection of the sun fell behind the rock, whether that would save the image.

And when this developed up, as the contact sheet was coming up in the developer, I realized that I not only solved the problem of this particular image, but I had solved the problem with my work because there was a power that was given to the small rock it looked like monolith in 2001. And that aura was really interesting, there was attention in the image and those were the things that were missing. One thing about the creative process is, you're kind of groping along and you don't really know what the question is until you find the answer. So this was really more unique, I found it and I realized my problem all along was the day was shielding me from the light and the one image I'd shown you before that was successful was because I pulled her out to the edge of the bay and she was she was getting lit there.

Karin Rosenthal 23:41

So then I knew exactly what to do. I didn't usually have three models, I only had one. So I moved in close to the close to the figure and put the reflection of the sun behind the body and it brings up that three-dimensional model light dropping into the flatness just as that happened in that earlier solarization. And quite unconsciously, the water's edge that I had been observing all winter long fell into my images. What you've absorbed and what you love becomes a part of you and, and then it expresses itself. I think I was the last to realize, and I didn't realize until I was flying over the island of Santorini at the end of my trip and the whiteness sort of up against the edge of the island, I looked down, reminded me of something like my images, and, and I said, oh my goodness, that's what I've been doing.

Karin Rosenthal 25:47

So I was busy trapping that light. Sometimes it was a hazy kind of lightness, I could trap into something as small as a hand. And it was great to have a way to control the Greek sunlight. So here's another island image and this one I just call Santorini, this was made a couple years later. I went back two summers to continue working. And this has a lot of the essence of the island of Santorini, with its dark beauty and it has some dark history too, it has a very mixed history. That is a whole other story. Sometimes, when I was working with my little dark video, I would see things happen in the corner of a contact sheet and I noticed that I could put white lines around the forms, I very quickly added that to my visual vocabulary. And what I was doing was making direct solarization. So observed natural solarizations instead of using the chemical technique. And I continued with the notion of unconscious and conscious worlds, two coexisting realities, often in two different tonalities like this.

Karin Rosenthal 27:04

But after going back two summers, I needed to move, I needed to get settled and I bought a house and it was just really hard to get back to Greece. And so somewhat circumstantially, the nudes in water stopped. And I got a grant from Polaroid to experiment with some of their materials, I got some positive negative film because I was interested in taking the four by five negative and blowing it up to a print that could be 16 by 20. And this is one of the few series where I have multiple exposures, I really pride myself on shooting straight and pushing your scene as hard as you can push it, but this this was a little different. This series was inspired by a

friend of mine who is a sculptor who could carve in wood and he could combine parts of the body in any way he wanted to and create an abstract form. And I just wondered how far you could push film to do the same thing. And so I did these multiple exposures that were done on a piece of black cloth on the corner of my bed and shot with a four by five, the only way I like to shoot for a 4 by 5, on a tripod, in mobile, and just clicked away as the person, as it moved the person through the cloth. And then to try to take it further, I solarized in the negative and that instead of creating a white line, like you get the positive creates a black line. So you get...I was I was trying to recombine the forms and fuse one layer to another layer. So these were called fusion forms and I did a bunch of those.

Karin Rosenthal 28:42

Then I borrowed an 8 by 10 camera and got some Polaroid 8 by 10 material and started to deal with the issue of color and nude for the first time. I was really a little apprehensive about working with color with the figure because it's so blatant and obvious and my work is really metaphoric. And I didn't want to just hit you over the head with flesh color. So, I wondered what I could do that would change that and I continued with some multiple exposures, but as I shot each layer, I shot one with daylight one with the strobe light and one with tungsten light. And that gave a cool to warm shift that I thought was interesting and shifted reality.

Karin Rosenthal 29:31

Then I was out in, about four years later, I was out in New Mexico. I rented a house in Georgia O'Keeffe territory and it was a room with stucco walls that I like to shoot in that had a brick floor and a skylight. And she was going to straddle, this was the model's idea, it's very hard to get a model to do this unless she wants to, the model straddled benches and I waited for the patch of light to hit the bricks, so that it bounced up a brick colored light onto the underside of the body. Meanwhile, the light coming in the window is much bluer relative to that. And so the same thing as with the solarization, the natural solarization here was a direct observation of an opportunity to just see the light waves coming in, but I had already figured it out in a Polaroid picture.

Karin Rosenthal 30:26

So, I did a lot of interior nudes. And then later I was to go to Cape Cod and I'll tell you more about that, but I continued doing some abstract color nudes out there. This was inspired by the fact that I had two models with such different flesh tones and then there was the sand making a third tonality and I was thinking of those bottled sands that you could see the colors and that's what inspired this image. I also worked in black and white infrared, a lot of people were experimenting with material around that time. It's a film that is kind of granular and it sees more of the red end of the spectrum, changes things a little bit. And I wanted to see how I could use it, a lot of people used it in a very high contrast way. And I wanted to use it in a more delicate way. So I just tried a couple of rolls. And what intrigued me was the way the skin and the sand resonated with each other and I played with that a fair amount.

Karin Rosenthal 31:31

But then it got to the point where, as with the nudes in water, the body became the land and the dunes served as inspiration and I go out there when the clouds were doing something really interesting. This was a day when it was just the most amazing cloud, but it was starting to disperse. And you know, we just couldn't get out to the dunes fast enough, so I put my model in a different spot very close to the trail and it wasn't quite working out because ideally, I wanted to drop the background out. So, I kept digging a hole in the sand the way a dog would, you know, and I kept checking, have we gotten low enough, have we gotten low enough, you know. And then I saw this happen through the viewfinder that the dunes were meeting up with the pubic hair, making one continuity, and I realized that this was much better than anything else I could do. So that's how, accident works really well.

Karin Rosenthal 32:28

But I did go back to the Cape, I did start going to the Cape in 1988 and I went there until 2003 to continue the nudes in water because they had really stopped kind of arbitrarily. A friend of mine suggested that the kettle palms in the National Seashore would make wonderful places to work. They were warm and sandy bottomed and she said people say that the Cape has Greek life. Well, I fell for that long enough to rent a house. Of course, it's New England and, you know, as Mark Twain says, if you don't like the weather in New England, wait a moment. And it's always changing, always different and I kept searching for that Greek light, but it rarely happened. But I brought that vocabulary of working that I had before, you know, here's the aura, and here's that dash of light, white light. But it looked different things were flatter and they changed. Not necessarily better or worse, just different. And here I put the aura again behind the figures. But, it would tend to, you would tend to see an aura here, when a storm is breaking up, where in Greece, it was often if it was just very hazy sunshine. So, these were some of the ones I did early on. This was you know, one of those classic New England days, the sun was in, the sun was out, which can drive you nuts if you're shooting film because you have to take new exposure, meter readings, you have to change the settings on your camera and for me, it also meant you had to change your concept. So, I was going back and forth, back and forth getting quite annoyed when I think I finally won the tug of war with the sun and landed this. This was one of my earlier male nudes.

Karin Rosenthal 34:18

Sometimes if the light wasn't doing anything interesting, I could just put the person under the water and it didn't matter what the light was doing. This was a wonderful accident I went to my camera case to get a piece of equipment. I had set the model legs straight out, but when I came back she relaxed into this pose and I saw what was happening with the light and kept her there. She didn't really understand why, but I did and I took this this picture and I love the paradox that this image that one body can have two different colors of skin. I got to know the ponds really well you know it didn't have rocks to deal with, I had a lot of flora and every pond was unique. And every year was different, because the levels would, you know, go up and down. And there was only one year I got to shoot at this pond, but I did get a good picture there.

Karin Rosenthal 35:17

Then I discovered blackwater, which is not that there's an inky substance in the water, it's really a relative valuation of light. If there's no light, if you have a steep sided pond, that has no light on it and the light is falling out, is falling into the water, and you put the person in the water in the light and expose for that, then the background drops out and reflects itself dropped out and the shadows also drop out and reflect themselves that way. So, you have this kind of surreal image where it looks almost like it's shot in the studio against a black backdrop, but then there's this inexplicable sense of water that you don't know where it comes from. So, I did a lot of black water images. And I had an opportunity to work with a couple, straddling my age. In fact, I work with people of all different ages and anybody who was willing, I wasn't particularly picky about things. But I found that people were talking about my work as that I was photographing beautiful young women. And when you when you work in the genre of nude photography, of course, you pick up all the loaded sensibilities in the culture and people project whatever they want to project, onto the images. And that wasn't the way I thought about my work and never was the way I thought about my work and I wanted to make it quite clear, that wasn't the way I thought about my work.

Karin Rosenthal 36:54

So, when I had an opportunity to work with this couple, I, you know, I went for it. And the first shoot was actually quite difficult. I thought, maybe I bit off more than I can handle here because his body was so different. It was, you know, was much hairier, he was much bulkier than most of our models, I had photographed men before. But I was really struggling through this shoot and almost quit, which is something that I never did, because, you know, having models was always an opportunity for me. But I was ready to give up and then I had one more thought, I put her under the water and set him next to her like this. And don't worry, she is breathing, her head is out of the water on the side. And I looked through my camera and I was seeing Jung's concept of animus and anima. And I don't know if you're familiar with that, I think you know the lay concept, which is that a man has a female unconscious, and to be a whole person, he incorporates that part of himself and vice versa for a woman. So in my iconography, she's, you know, a female unconscious, bounded by his reflection contained within it. So this is man and anima. And the next year, I pulled off one woman and animus, so that my struggles led to a whole new avenue again. And the really interesting thing is that I worked with this couple for eight or nine years, I never had a problem again. It was just like working with anybody else. And in fact, they became the cover of my book. So I did a lot of couples over the years.

Karin Rosenthal 38:39

And then a friend was over for dinner, who's gay and he said, how come only straight couples? I said, I don't know, I hadn't really thought about it. He said, Well, I'd love to model, and so he started coming down and bringing friends and sending other people. So, I started photographing two men together. And this was shot on a day, you know, just after a hurricane had been through, a storm, and the weather was getting very overcast and we went out and was still drizzling. We went into town did some errands, last droplet finally chilled and we headed to the

pond. And it was very, you know, still very heavily overcast and there wasn't much light, but it was just the magnificent eggshell quality to it. And I've pumped this up a little bit in the print interpretation, but I knew when I shot it that I had something that was very exciting. And here's another male.

Karin Rosenthal 39:40

And then around 2001, I got very interested in photographing generations. I'm aging, I'm thinking a lot more about age. And so I was looking for fathers and sons and mothers and daughters who would model together and I'd find one and not the other and fortunately had a friend who's a painter who was eager to model and he had a son who was a water rat who was thrilled. And they were very close so that they didn't mind doing this and I like this image because it shows their connection, even as it has landscape references within it and it also shows the age differential. This was done in 2002. So, to go back a little bit, I was working on the nudes in water all the way from 1988 to 2003. But in 1991, I also rented a house on Lake Powell and decided to challenge myself to work in color because southwest is always about color. For me, I just love the colors in the southwest. I didn't know where to start. I was, you know, I was always a little apprehensive working in color. All I think to do was to take a book of slick rock pictures that I had at home and flip through it and see if anything resonated, if anything spoke to me because I'm a great believer in the Geiger Counter Theory of finding material, if it speaks to you, if it's sticky and it's meaningful.

Karin Rosenthal 41:16

What intrigued me was lit up sandstone reflecting in a puddle and I called out at southwest, a colleague, a guy who'd become a bit of a buddy, who ran the motel and asked him where I might find that. He put me in touch with a photographer who knew Lake Powell really well who sent me to this very puddle. And so I was loading film into my camera, I was getting my meter readings, I was getting my equipment set up, finding the right lens, and when I looked through the lens, looked through the camera for the first time, there was my model in entirety in this pool. I was really stunned because it was quite, again, accidental. All I did was move her hands a slight bit to move them into the area you saw, I didn't even step to the side and I took this picture. And it never occurred to me to work with reflections, but it was amazing that you could get a whole figure in a small area like this. I was planning to move her down next to the puddle and play the flesh off against the lit-up sandstone, but this was more intriguing and so I stayed with the idea of reflections.

Karin Rosenthal 42:30

When the contact sheet arrived, the image was turned around this way and I did a double take, as if I had never seen the image before. And, as if it weren't mine, it looked so different turned around and it makes the body seem actual and here she almost looks like an angel because she connects with the natural element behind her. And I had a long debate with myself about whether I would let myself present it this way. You know, it's a bit a bit tricky, a bit turned around and I didn't like that. But I decided that if I stayed with a series and I kept working on it in

such a way that the images didn't look turned around and kind of found their own spaces that it was okay, so through the 90s I went back to the southwest and worked on this series. This is an image I shot in 92 in Zion and then in 1993, I was in Abiquiú, near Georgia O'Keeffe territory.

Karin Rosenthal 43:28

And I poured a puddle in the shade and you only see reflections in the shade, so, you know, we were starting to shoot, but then the sun came whipping around the corner and was intruding on the shot. I was reaching for my cable release, I have a camera on a tripod, and I can see my hand's shadow right in the image. And you can see right here, I didn't have time to think I just shot four pictures in rapid succession, so this was number one. And this was before and not only did the reflection get erased for the most part, but the edge of the puddle got erased and that really intrigued me. It seemed as if the body were coming straight out of primordial ooze, so I decided to make use of that and after that I started combining shade and sun. Here, I dragged a piece of driftwood down and it made a, cast a shadow and then I added my shadow to it to make enough area to see the body reflected and then let it, you know, go into the sunshine. Here, the edges is erased again. And you get, you know, the same thing that's been going on in the other images, life and death. You know, kind of a fossilized image here. And this is the way the image was shot. So, I'd say this is the image now that looks upside down, and that they found their own spaces. So, I felt I had really succeeded in my mission. They also have an unusual palette of combined, combining sunlight and much bluer shade white light in them.

Karin Rosenthal 45:14

The landscape, and this is wait, hold on, the screen plays into my work all the time. And one of my favorite places was out at Lake Powell, well, near Lake Powell. In Page, Arizona, there's a place called Antelope Canyon, which I went back to several times. So, I was shooting there one day and the next day drove four hours and was shooting some of those puddle pictures. And after we finished, it was late in the afternoon, nobody was around, we were just sort of sitting there tired. And I looked at the model and it was as if I were back in that slot canyon the day before. So, I call this nude "nude as a slot canyon" because I don't know if I would have seen this if I hadn't been shooting pictures that are, shooting the day before. And I certainly would have never set it up, you know, shooting from behind your back, lit from the front.

Speaker 46:08

Karin, can you just go back, so we can see it again?

Karin Rosenthal 46:11

Oh, the combination?

Speaker 46:12

Yeah, yeah.

Karin Rosenthal 46:13

The last slot canyon, where you have light, spotlighting in. By 2003, my nudes in water were changing a lot. This was after 9/11, it was after we invaded Iraq, the world had changed. I was very opposed to the war and the destruction that was going on and there were some significant losses in my life, too. And I didn't have the same sense of reality, I guess the world didn't have the same, you know, certainly Americans have changed their perceptions of things. And I was much more into the fragility of life, the connectedness of our existence to nature, and the breaking down, you know, maybe the death side of things. And so, my images really did change that view. This was another one I did in 2003. And then I took these images even further. They were getting even more abstract than this. And I thought I was getting something I was looking through the viewfinder, of course, I'm seeing the color of shooting out to black and white film. And when I came home after a month of shooting and processed the film, I realized that things weren't translating very well from color to black and white, and a lot of the black and white just didn't work and I was going What was I thinking? I was clearly seeking something else, I was starting to see in color in a way, I wanted more material and I'd always said to myself that if I got to the point where the nudes in water where doors didn't open anymore, that I would leave them and move on to something else. And I felt it was time to move on both from the Cape and from the nudes in water.

Karin Rosenthal 48:01

A friend suggested that I get a digital camera to preview with, he thought I could shoot with a Hasselblad preview with digital camera, whatever I'm shooting, downloaded into a laptop to convert to black and white see if it really was working with black and white, so I wouldn't, you know, find out weeks later on it was processing the film that things weren't happening. I thought that made a lot of sense, so I bought my first digital camera in 2004. And I went out on the water with one of my students, who's an oceanographer at Woods Hole. We were searching for some sites and if I was so fascinated with a piece of seaweed because it looked very, very human. It was branching the way arteries and veins branch and I kept being drawn to that. So I was starting to get interested in seaweed. I also came up Halibut Point and took this picture on a day that was kind of like some of the last days we've had this week, you know, very hazy bright days and found that I could get a similar quality of light going on with tide pools.

Karin Rosenthal 49:07

So, I rented a house on Vinalhaven, an island off the coast of Maine, which isn't that dissimilar to this area because it's a quarrying island. A lot of rocks, a lot of lobster fishing going on and a lot of interesting seaweed. And I spent the first week just scouting around, getting to know the island and then on the second week shooting with model. This is one of the very first shots I did and I shot I went hiked into this area with my Hasselblad and with my digital camera, expecting to preview a lot of shooting. And it turned out right away that there were apples and oranges that the Hasselblad was seeing squares and the digital camera were seeing rectangle but the digital camera had a capability to get even closer just because of the lens I had than the Hasselblad could, even with a macro lens and an extension ring on it so. So, I was intrigued with the digital camera, I couldn't get this image in my Hasselblad. And then the other neat thing was

that I could see it right away. Not only see it when I shot it, but then take it back to my laptop download it and play with it, look at it. And I did one more shoot with my Hasselblad and after that it got put away and still sits in my studio to this day, if anybody wants to buy a Hasselblad. This image was made this way, it was shot upside down to this, but this is just to show you the pose. She was just leaning over the tide pool. She's standing there, she's bent over with her arm bent and her hand coming up to her head. Can you see it?

Karin Rosenthal 50:58

Upside down, right?

Karin Rosenthal 50:59

Well, this is this is her right side. Here's her leg, okay, there's actually an arm down here. Here's her elbow, her arms bending back and her head is joined with the muscles shown. What's interesting is that her whole body joins into these forms that are in the tide pool. But I like the image rotated this way, I'd already had that conversation with myself about turning things. So, I like the way, you know, created hot dog shapes and boomerang shapes and it reminded me of the work of Jean Hart. Certainly art history and having a background in art history keeps coming to bear in my work throughout, through everything I do. But I call this one Hart. This was another early image that I did. I do a show of new work in my house every year and in December. And so it was quite a shock for people to come and not see any more black and white nudes, but to see these color images and some people have these long faces and then started accusing me of things, of layering multiple images into one image.

Karin Rosenthal 52:13

And, you know, they just wouldn't believe me that it really was what I saw because it was just an image turned upside down, here she is reflected in it in a pool. As a friend of mine, who said it's killed by association, you start working with Photoshop and they accuse you of things. And I find that it's retroactive too, because nobody ever did before about my nudes in water but now they're starting to think that those were somehow manipulated in Photoshop too, you know, everything is suspect. But I still continue in this pursuit of direct seeing. And you know what interests me is the fact that it has an authenticity it has a continuity, you know, because it isn't manufactured it is what I saw. You know, you see the continuity under the water, of the same material. This happens because the person is lying there, it's overcast, the sky is making a projection of her body onto the surface of the water, but there's no light on her, on her body. So, it makes a transparency to what the water is and that's how you get a person made up of the stuff of tide pools.

Karin Rosenthal 53:25

We're going to be doing some of the shooting in a couple days, on Wednesday. So, I got interested in all the materials, the rock, the seaweed, and I love making heads out of the material, in very diverse material I find here. I was really paying homage to a photographer whose work I love. This is a piece by Ruth Ann Thompson. She took a piece of paper that, a

photograph that had a picture of a nautilus shell and cut this profile out of it and she would cut figures that reminded her of antiquity, you know, Hera and Nefertiti, then she'd take that piece of paper, stick it in some sand and re photograph it with little pinhole camera. And, again, things embed in you that you love and I'd always loved her work, so I was making these heads. This one was done up in Prince Edward Island and the color is because the north side of the island is made of red shale and it also has a lot of storms that pound against it, wash right down the shale, wash it out to sea and it washes back in with the rich filled granular pieces sitting on top of seaweed, the seaweed is alive it just has a coating. And you can see the same light, you saw it in Hart comes back and forth as the as the overcast is breaking up and the sun is starting to break out and I'll never miss an opportunity to use that. So here it is. And that picture I showed you earlier, the seaweed comes to bear here. This really looks like interior of the body cavity and there were other images that looked even more like arteries and veins that I did. So everything affects everything else.

Karin Rosenthal 55:23

These are a few other images, I did this just amazing variety of rock and material area. And I got to know the tide pools quite well. I can return to many of them. Sometimes they change, sometimes they don't. One thing I learned is that if there's light on the body, it doesn't make a transparency through the surface of the tide pool, but when there's shade it does. So you can make these mixes of sort of life and death or this stuff. I mean, tides are great because they're the places where things generate and the places where things break down. It's a perfect place for me to bring my themes and work with them. Here's a case where the body was partially lit and partially in shade. So, she gets made up of the stone that she's reflected into and she looks so substantial in the bottom half of the picture, but then she seems to almost turn into a flimsy paper up here. And the other thing that's interesting is that the seaweed changes the edge a little bit and, in that disturbance, it recreates the body into kind of a fungus or something. This is like some fungus or lichen that grows on rock, this big, undulating ground stuff. And it reminds me of that so it's interesting ,this starts happening over and over again how you tweak the script of the human test a little bit and you end up with something else in nature and really underlying the interconnectedness of all things.

Karin Rosenthal 57:05

My mother took this picture of me at Cape Hedge Beach. The boat is not significant. What is significant, that's a prop, I think, she handed me, what is significant is the tide pool and me being fascinated with the tide pool. A friend of mine, who taught at the museum school, told someone if you're looking for material to work with, if you've run out of material and you don't know what to do, think of what you did when you were a child and nobody told you what, you know, what to do. There was nothing I loved more than climbing over the rocks at Cape Hedge and checking out any and every tide pool, both ends of the beach and torturing a few starfish, too. Not much has changed. Here I am staring at this tide pool, you know, beautiful place, beautiful day, beautiful model and I'm looking at the tide pool. And this is what I'm seeing. She's, just so happens I had two models and my friend snuck this picture of me and I happen to remember

what I was shooting right then. So, makes a good demonstration of the difference. This tidal basin is one of the most serene and magnificent places I've ever been to, it's so quiet and it's just me and the seals and the seagulls and the model and I love being there. This is kind of high tide, I first got in there by hiking, and then but if you can get there at mid tide there are a whole bunch of islands that form out here and so I later was able to find a way to do that.

Karin Rosenthal 58:51

This should be familiar to you because this was the invitation image. When there was no light and this this was shot on an overcast awful day, so cold and it had been raining and we went out just suffered an hour in the cold air. But there was this magnificent small tide pool with a little bit of quartz in it and my model was a dancer and even when she sat still, she had dance embedded in her this looks like it's full of movement, but she really is just sitting. It was a small pool so probably shot with a wide-angle lens to pick up her whole figure and it's turned upside down so you get a bit of distortion that goes on. I shot the middle image because she said take a picture of my arch, everybody says I have an amazing arch. Yeah.

Karin Rosenthal 59:44

So, these are the kinds of images I can shoot with the overcast which are different than the things I shoot with sun. And the next year I went back and I had another dancer from that same company and I had him do some things with movement, of which this was my favorite. In 2006, something else happened. I rented a house on the title basin, got a little plastic blow up kayak boat that was big enough for me, a model, and my equipment, so that I could get out to those little islands that would form at mid tide. So, the first time I went out, we went out and it was kind of high tide, we had to wait a while till the islands formed. And then we headed back, it was getting late, we had company coming, so we didn't have a lot of time. We found this glorious tide pool and everything was great, except that the wind was howling. And, of course, you're not going to get a reflection when it's so windy. I decided to just let the wind take the reflection, for a number of reasons. I was getting really tired of making these obvious poses of the model and I always wanted to photograph flesh. But I was also having some problems with the focusing in my digital camera, I had set something and I didn't realize what to change, didn't figure it out. And I was trying to focus manually to focus on what was under the water.

Karin Rosenthal 1:01:13

For this image, in the shells breaking the surface, I could just use autofocus, so this was a relief in a lot of ways and I just let it happen. And I liked the result so much that I continue to do things that were more like flesh paintings. So, this was one that was done with the tide coming in. Here, the water was absolutely still, you can see it's a highly macro shot with the body reflection picking up on edges of shells that are coming out of water. This image I called "Essence" and for me it's a metaphor for the beginning of life, that the reflection body almost appears gaseous, here, coalescing into little droplets of protoplasm. That's the way I read this image, it's highly close up, has a short depth of field and probably the water was moving in a little bit here, I think the tide is starting to come in a little bit when this was shot.

Karin Rosenthal 1:02:15

This is the image I chose to use for my invitation for my show, the work, and I wanted people to know that I was still working with the figures. The first time I showed anything this abstract and so I called it "Reflective Nude at the Basin," thinking that would be enough. Well, the phone started to ring. Where's the nudes? So I have to explain, you know, it's just the reflection of flesh, you know, up close and well people persisted in wondering where the nude was, and they persisted so long and so well that they found it, much to my surprise. This is a highly foreshortened figure, knee, to hip, to shoulder, to arm. I worked on this image for weeks and never realized it. The way I thought about it was that, you know, that this was a kind of life globule, that's what I thought, that I was putting life back into some of these dead mussel shells. But, that really intrigued me, once I realized that it's possible to have an abstraction and have the whole figure, so the next summer I went in search of it.

Karin Rosenthal 1:03:23

And sometimes it was pretty obvious it was happening, like in this image, we saw multiple pieces of the body all from different perspectives. This is one click, you know, distorts a little bit depending on what it's, depending on what it's reflected in. And if you look at it long enough, you can tweeze out the pose, she's bent at the waist, with her arm going over her knee, touching her foot. What's intriguing about this is here she is bent at the waist, but she looks more like a conch shell than a human. So, it has that that tweaking of the script again. A lot of the time though, I wasn't able to see in the lens what was going on and I also came back feeling kind of discouraged that I hadn't found the figure that much. But then I was looking at this, in 8 by 10, proof that I have, I've been looking at it for weeks and then one day I saw something. Saw four repeating white dots and turned the image upside down and was absolutely startled because here she is the four dots were light on her chin, light on her cheeks, and light on her forehead. And then you see her breast and her ribcage, but then you get this highly distorted, fetal bean shape and this image is made up of 30 simultaneous reflections of her, which blew my mind. And I have, it is a bigger print. So you can see it pretty well in the print, if you if you look for it.

Karin Rosenthal 1:05:01

This was another image that I didn't think was anything more than just an interesting reflection, but then when I was working on it, you know, here's the figure, here is the figure even smaller. And she shows up numerous times, you know, tiny, and we're talking, you know, the seaweed, this is the stuff you put in between your thumb and your first finger and pop, you know. But she shows up over and over again, and then she starts to like dance and morph and change until she becomes seaweed. So, it has a kind of Escher, like metamorphosis in it, which blows my mind, too. Well, I think you can tell we're coming to the end of the talk, because this is the image I showed you at the beginning. My working title for this piece is "Near is Far Out," because it has a very trippy sense to it. It's a macro shot, you're looking at a broken shell with some barnacles on it. And there's a snail so you can see I'm very close up, it's one click, it's like f 16 and a 50th of a second. And it's the way you would shoot any snapshot, there's nothing tricky in the shooting,

it's really, you know, the seeing and setting up a rather unique kind of situation. So, it has the abstract flesh and it has the coalesced bodies. But it also has this sense of, even though it's close up looking, like it's cosmic and a sense of entropy as if everything is expanding from the center. So in these little bodies, I wondered how it could be flipped this way and flipped that way, flipped this way.

Karin Rosenthal 1:06:47

So I asked a collector of mine when he was over, who is a physicist, you know, how can this be, how can one person reflected show up this way, and he sent me this. This is from a physics textbook, I never took physics. But if you photograph inside a spoon, you get an image reflected one way, if you photograph on the backside of the spoon, you get an image reflected the other way, it turns out, so that's what's happening here. You have a lot of these stretch, silly putty kinds of spaces that are made by the pieces of shell pulling up through the water and pulling on the surface tension and so you get all different kinds of things going on. And then you get that tweaking again. Your, her arm becomes a dolphin. And here she's like a mollusk, you know, so within, you know, this abstraction, you have all of these different things happening and it's very exciting to me the way all of this goes on. My journey continues with this tide pool series. It's taken different directions the last couple of years and you're all welcome to come to my December show and see what I've done this year and over some of the other years, because my house is full of these photographs. Anyway, I hope you understand how we got from the belly landscape to yours from around here, body reflection and see how things fit together. Thank you.

Karin Rosenthal 1:08:25

So, are there any questions that I can answer?

Karin Rosenthal 1:08:52

Which one?

Speaker 1:08:53

...the last few.

Karin Rosenthal 1:08:56

Well, these are in the final phase, where I go out in the boat, into the tidal basin. That's actually my favorite place to be. When the sun isn't shining and the winds are blowing...

Speaker 1:09:12

You truly don't do anything to...

Karin Rosenthal 1:09:16

These are straight shots. You know, I might take one little snail out or, but nothing significant, nothing that's significant about the scenery I change.

Speaker 1:09:31

Where's your winter show going to be?

Karin Rosenthal 1:09:33

Oh, it's always in my house in Watertown.

Speaker 1:09:35

Okay.

Karin Rosenthal 1:09:39

Anybody else?

Speaker 1:09:42

It's really exciting, your work is just breathtaking.

Karin Rosenthal 1:09:49

You see the transitions?

Speaker 1:09:50

Oh, yeah.

Karin Rosenthal 1:09:51

You see how sandstone becomes flesh. Someone pointed that out to me. Some of these images, I feel like I'm looking through a microscope for the first time, when I was a biology major and I looked through and saw this other reality and it blew my mind. You know, I think this is very much the same kind of thing.

Speaker 1:10:13

Do you get your models to travel with you?

Karin Rosenthal 1:10:16

Whenever possible I try to bring the models because when people are living in these spaces, they always have very complicated lives. I read houses and arrangements for models.

Speaker 1:10:27

Sounds like a pretty nice time.

Karin Rosenthal 1:10:33

As we have a whole island to ourselves. Small island off of Vinalhaven, this model is walking around, you know, and she can't believe it.

Speaker 1:10:42

Have some of them taken an interest in photography, too, do you suppose?

Karin Rosenthal 1:10:45

Yeah, some of them do I've had a student and his girlfriend come up both, who are photographers.

Speaker 1:10:49

Oh, thanks.

Speaker 1:10:51

And model for me, so you get the inside scoop.

Speaker 1:10:56

But focally, to shooting now with this digital close again.

Karin Rosenthal 1:11:02

I just I've been working mostly, like this past summer, mostly with a couple of macro lenses, 24 and 25. That has a macro. Right now, I'm shooting with a Canon YD mark two. Been through four different cameras because digital changes so rapidly. So I hope some of you will come back.

Speaker 1:11:31

Yes.

Karin Rosenthal 1:11:32

I can put out a pad of paper if any of you want to sign up with your name, address, and email address. That would be great.