



## Painting extinction

By Eric Freedman

The Chelsea neighborhood on the west side of Manhattan has changed considerably since I lived in New York City. Well-maintained brownstones. Cafes and bistros. Lots of bikes. Bumper stickers opposed to fracking and climate change. Recycling bins. Even a sign by a corner park about an upcoming post-Halloween pumpkin composting site.

Chic has replaced cheesy. Upscale has supplanted rundown.

So Chelsea wasn't an unlikely neighborhood for me to find extinction, or at least San Diego artist Laura Ball's homage in watercolor to species in jeopardy of extinction.

Her exhibition, "Endlings," takes up most of the display space at the Morgan Lehman gallery in a gallery-packed block of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. I learned about the exhibition several months before it opened when Ball emailed me for information after reading an Earth Island Journal story I'd written about endlings – the last known survivors of their species.



This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the demise of America's most iconic ending, the passenger pigeon Martha that died at the Cincinnati Zoo.

# MORGAN LEHMAN

535 West 22nd Street, New York, New York 10011

Ball's paintings are informed by the endangered and threatened species she sees at the San Diego Zoo where she's a frequent visitor. It's home to thousands of rare and endangered animals and houses a world-renowned research and breeding program for them.

"Endlings exist alone, left behind as a remnant of their disappeared forefathers," the gallery says in its exhibition handout. "While some endlings live out their last years in captivity, many more pass through life unseen and undocumented. Once gone from the world, they, and all like them, will exist only in dreams as subliminal expressions.



"Ball's watercolors act as a symbolic ark where the extinct animals can find refuge in the primordial jungle of the collective subconscious," the gallery says.

Yet hers is not grim art. There is no grief evident, no pain in her hummingbirds, flamingos, bison or rhinos. No suffering among her snakes, her eagles or her elephants. What her paintings do is represent the interdependency of species, regardless of habitat.



My favorite portrays an owl nesting in a rhino's tree-trunk leg. My second-favorite is a wreath of wildlife with a bison, a caribou and tortoise at the bottom of the circle.

Her exhibition ends Nov. 15.

***Eric Freedman is the director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism***

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*Image: Laura Ball*