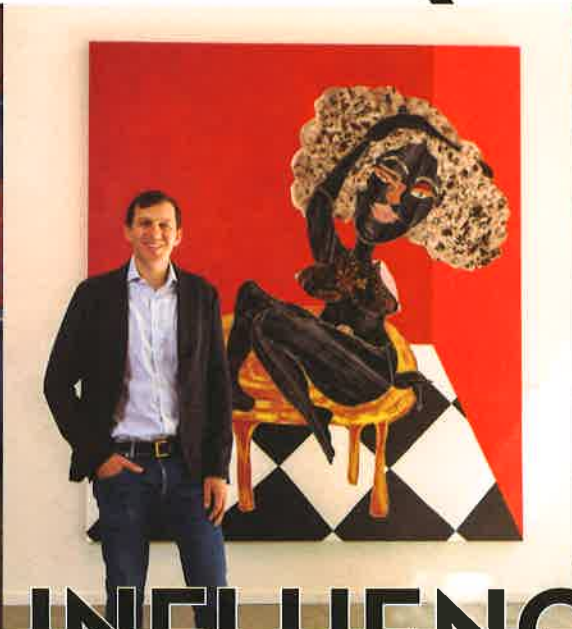


# PATRON

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## ART INFLUENCERS



Elizabeth Turk in the studio. Courtesy of the artist and Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. Photograph by Eric Stoner. © Elizabeth Turk



# The Sounds of Silence

ELIZABETH TURK'S *THE TIPPING POINT* EXAMINES  
ENDANGERED AND EXTINCT BIRD SPECIES.

BY DANIELLE AVRAM

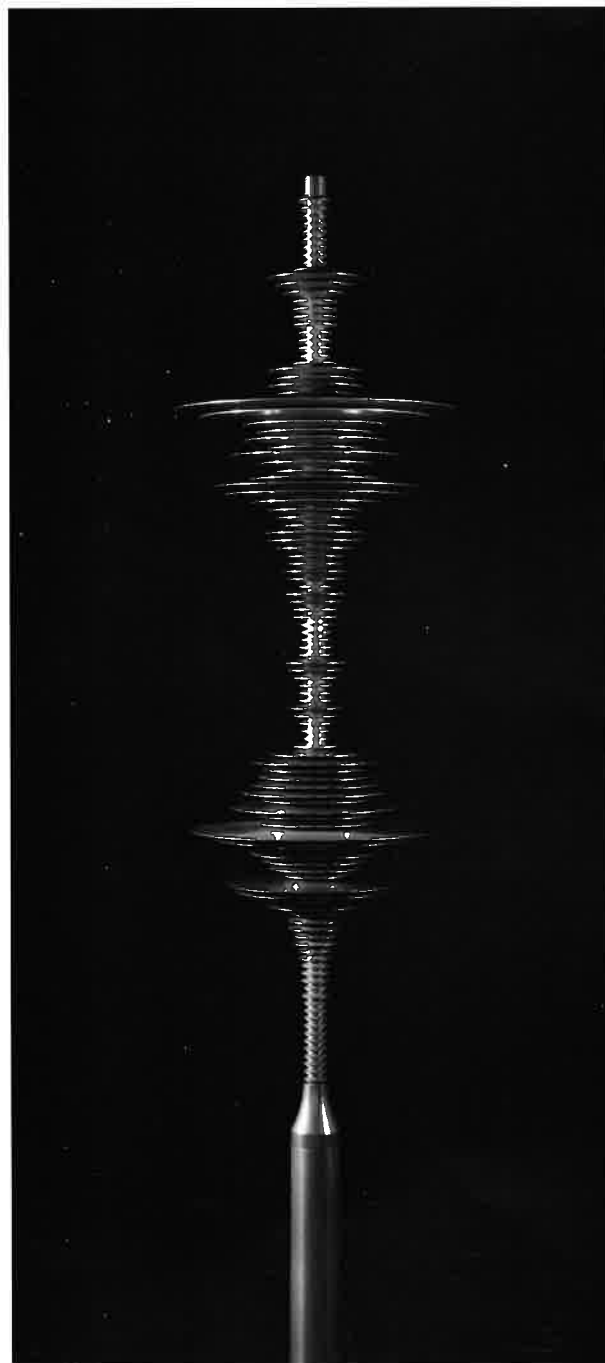
For the next year the front grounds of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art will be filled with the calls of endangered and extinct bird species. But rather than have their ears filled with avian chirps and tweets, visitors can expect quite the opposite: silence.

*The Tipping Point: Echoes of Extinction* is a series of large-scale vertical sculptures created by California-based artist Elizabeth Turk. Modeled after audio files of bird songs, Turk's totemic structures visualize the sound waves made by different birds, emphasizing the absence of these creatures through the manner in which most people would have encountered them: their vocals.

Absence plays a large role in Turk's practice. Best known for her delicate, lattice-like sculptures, which she handcrafts out of marble blocks weighing hundreds, or even thousands, of pounds, Turk is fascinated by the interconnectedness of opposing realities. A weighty substance can be made to look weightless, the introduction of negative space reveals a positive form, the presence of one thing symbolizes the absence of another. Her works reside in the tension of power dynamics and the manner in which environments and their denizens are forever locked in a push-and-pull relationship.

"All my work is grounded in the physical world because we live inside those precepts, like gravity," states Turk. "Working with natural materials pulls me into a deeper understanding of our environment's mechanics and interconnectedness. Carving stone developed [in me] an intuitive habit of seeing negative space as a positive form in order to push material to inherent limits."

Like most Californians, Turk's life has been impacted by the cascade of devastating wildfires the state has experienced in recent years, a series of cataclysmic events heralded by human greed and a profound ignorance regarding the natural world. On hikes through once-verdant areas reduced to desolate ash-riddled landscapes, the artist took notice of the overwhelming silence. The songs of bird populations already dramatically altered by decades and centuries of human growth were now muted by fire.



Elizabeth Turk (b. 1961), *Bush Wren*, 2022, anodized aluminum. Courtesy of the artist and Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. Photograph by Eric Stoner. © Elizabeth Turk

“When I hike in the ash of burned areas after California fires, the absence of familiar sounds is overwhelming: leaves rustling, distant birdsong—silenced,” says Turk. “Losing a third of the bird population in less than a lifetime is a confluence of too much change, human and natural. The emptiness remaining feels vast because I remember what was before.”

Amidst the fires, Turk began researching bird songs, eventually collaborating with the Macaulay Library at the Ornithology Lab of Cornell University, which houses media for over 10,000 species of birds. In 2018 she began the process of transforming the sound waves into sculptures, using a variety of materials and methods such as 3D printing, waterjet cutting, lathe, and CNC milling. The sculptures on view at the Amon Carter are made of powder-coated aluminum and represent a selection of five bird species that currently inhabit the state of Texas or were previously found here, such as the bald eagle, bush wren, ivory-billed woodpecker, Carolina parakeet, and brown pelican. While bald eagle and brown pelican populations have come back from the brink of extinction due to the banning of DDT and other protective measures, the last ivory-billed woodpecker sighting was almost 20 years ago, and the Carolina parakeet went extinct in the 1920s. Considered an agricultural pest by farmers, and its colorful plumage prized by milliners, the parakeet was killed in droves by commercial industries.

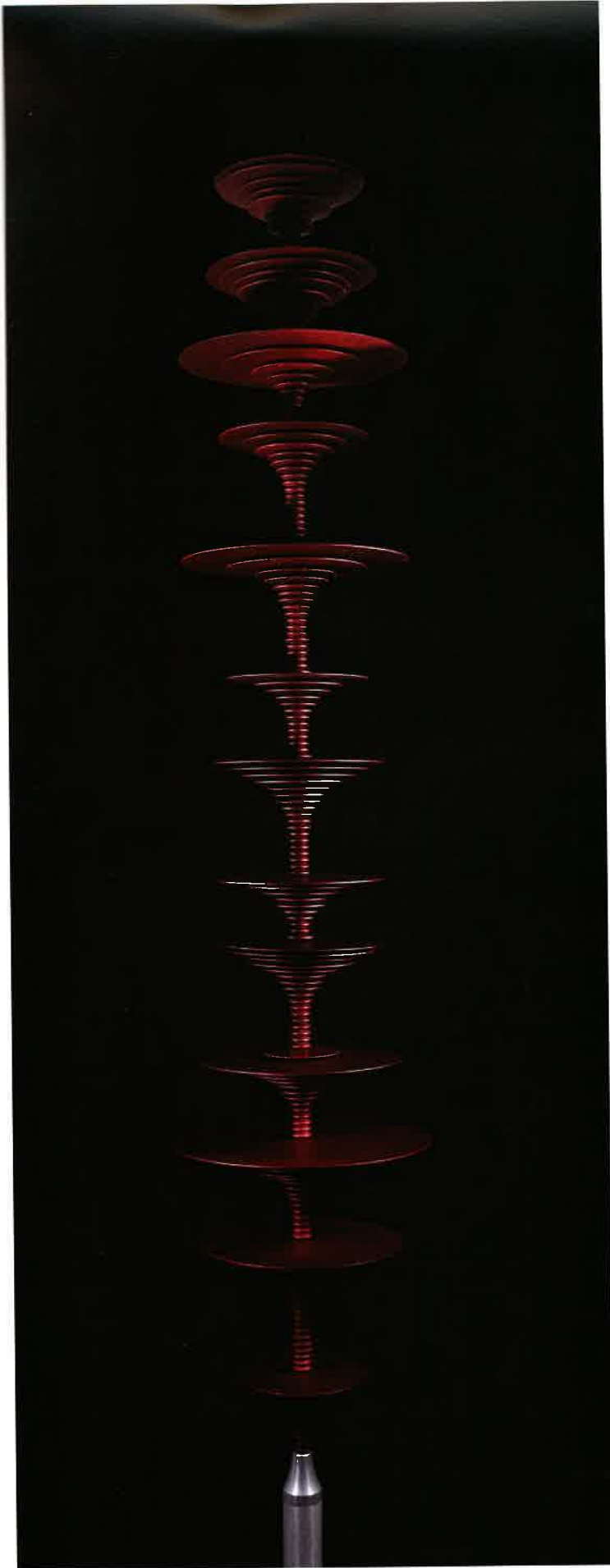
Turk’s sculptures are at once singular—spindly spires jutting from the ground into the sky, like a bird taking flight—and the embodiment of the collective populations, human and avian, at odds with one another. “The birds of *Echoes of Extinction* are beautiful symbols of what the statistics mean. As the number of sculptures grow, they exude a scary power because they mark what is disappearing,” says Turk. They are tombstones, effigies, and beacons melded together, emblems of the dour circumstances surrounding their origins, but shooting towards the heavens as symbols of hope and perseverance.

Turk remains optimistic about the future and the power of collective forces. In addition to her solo practice, she has created the nonprofit ET Projects, which specializes in experiential events that merge, art, science, and nature as a way to encourage communal productivity through imagination. “I am always surprised by the power of collective creativity and, yes, the optimism,” she explains. “After events by our nonprofit, ET Projects, when people of all ages and backgrounds lose self-consciousness to dream and perform together, I am inspired. Watching a thousand strangers creating their version of galaxies as one proves we can still come together for hopeful change.”

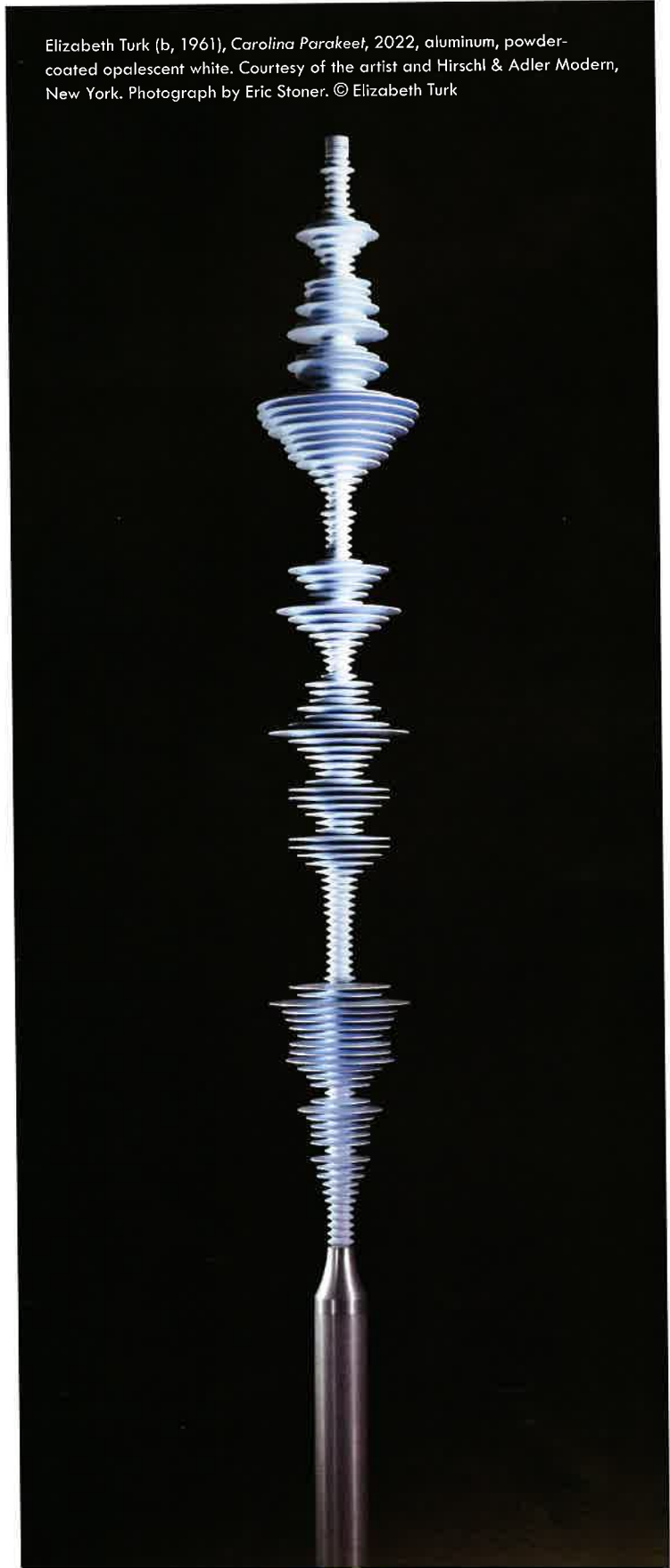
To this point, each sculpture in *Echoes of Extinction* features a QR code that leads to an audio recording of the bird’s distinctive call (or, for those species that went extinct prior to recording devices, an audio file of the most similar call). A sea of silence is therefore punctuated by the poignant cries of what we have lost, and what we stand to lose, if we don’t come together to protect the ground upon which we stand and the sky above. **P**

Elizabeth Turk (b. 1961), *Bald Eagle*, 2022, aluminum, powder-coated opalescent white. Courtesy of the artist and Hirsch & Adler Modern, New York. Photograph by Eric Stoner. © Elizabeth Turk





Elizabeth Turk (b, 1961), *Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, 2022, aluminum, powder-coated burgundy. Courtesy of the artist and Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. Photograph by Eric Stoner. © Elizabeth Turk



Elizabeth Turk (b, 1961), *Carolina Parakeet*, 2022, aluminum, powder-coated opalescent white. Courtesy of the artist and Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. Photograph by Eric Stoner. © Elizabeth Turk