

# Linnea West



## Photography as Memorial: Karin Giusti at Smackmellon

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Entering Smack Mellon's gallery immediately creates a sense of place distinct from the bustling DUMBO neighborhood outside. Pillars lit from within illuminate the high-ceilinged room, reminding me of architectural spaces like cathedrals and the permanence of memorial columns. The columns are neither architectural features nor permanent: they are **an exhibition by Karen Giusti** featuring images photographed, spliced together as if a kaleidoscope, and printed on a polyester film. The colorful nature scenes—and the soundtrack of birds and other noises—counter any sense of mournfulness. The meditative atmosphere creates a peaceful space to consider the imagery more closely.

Looking more carefully at the photographs, one notices a highly specific sense of time and place grounded in the artist's experience. Seasonal changes appear in landscape: snow, autumn foliage, bright green leaves and grass as Giusti highlights the passage of time. The artist has stitched together images in Photoshop that show her photographic process. Standing in one place, the artist would take a photograph looking down at her feet, then one shot straight ahead, then one looking above that to the sky, going around in every direction to create an embodied sense of physical place. In wrapping the grid of images into a circular column, Giusti forces the viewer into the position of outside observer. The interior of the column but also the memory of the place and time itself remains inaccessible to us. The hint we are given of those memories is in the landscape and the title of the installation: *Honorem: Three Seasons at Black Forest Farm*.

Black Forest Farm is the remote farmhouse in upstate New York where the photographs were taken. Three seasons reflects the time period they were taken, during which the artist struggled with the loss of her partner. Honorem refers to her late partner Stephen G. Schwarz, a firefighter and 9/11 First Responder, who died in 2010 due to health complications from 9/11. While the precise location and time is a private memory of the artist, this public presentation transforms the images into a memorial not just for Schwarz but all first responders. Giusti hopes this latest installment of the work will create a wider recognition of the ongoing health repercussions of 9/11 for first responders and all those affected.

While the installation has a distinctly personal origin, it serves as a reminder that all public monuments are made up of such singular, private tragedies. Writing about Giusti's work in the wake of the attacks in Paris, it also reminds me of the many ways that terrorism, so spectacularly brought to the world's attention by 9/11 and continued in less spectacular but equally barbaric attacks across the world, has repercussions beyond immediate loss of life.

Karin Giusti's installation *Honorem: Three Seasons at Black Forest Farm* is up at Smack Mellon through December 13, 2015.