

Eco-art: At Maynard's Dunia Gallery, exhibit promotes environmental causes

By **Chris Bergeron / Daily News Staff**
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Look through Iain Kerr's lens to see the world through the eyes of an elephant seal pup basking on a beach in Patagonia.

The Scotland-born captain of the research vessel *Odyssey* takes memorable photographs of sea creatures to help preserve their ocean world for future generations.

A Galapagos tortoise stretches a knobby head from beneath a weathered shell. Humpback whales breach off the Alaskan coast. Perching on volcanic rock, a flightless cormorant squints with regal disdain.

Kerr is exhibiting 21 color photographs at Dunia in Maynard as part of the "earth-friendly" store's efforts to promote environmental awareness. The show, "Chronicles of the *Odyssey*," can be seen through Jan. 7.

"I'd like to think of my photos as art with a purpose. The ultimate goal is animal conservation," said the 49-year-old Acton resident. "It's harder for people to hurt or kill something they identify with."

Kerr's 15-by-11-inch photographs can be seen and purchased in the store at 43 Nason St. All proceeds from photo sales and a silent auction will benefit Ocean Alliance, a nonprofit organization that supports the *Odyssey's* research voyages.

In February, wife and husband co-owners Paige O'Brien and Didi Chadran opened Dunia, which means "world" in Indonesian. They sell "earth-friendly products" such as housewares, gift items and personal care items.

They try to ensure items they sell are "fair trade goods" bought from non-exploitive overseas organizations, don't involve cruelty to animals and use recycled materials.

"This (store) is our small way of trying to make the world a better place. It allows us to share messages of support for varied artists," said Chadran. "Iain's work reminds us that Earth, with all its beauty and drama, is a shared resource."

Slightly more than half of Kerr's photos feature remarkably detailed images of majestic whales charging through the seas or diving beneath the waves with just their large flukes exposed.

Kerr takes pictures with a Canon camera with a 300 mm zoom lens set at the widest possible aperture to let him capture exact images in low light.

"I'm interested in getting up close and personal with these extraordinary animals," Kerr said. "Living among them and making real contact with them has far exceeded my imagination. It transformed my attitude toward the wild world."

Customer Christina Pabst called Kerr's photos of whales "just spectacular."

"Whales are so elusive. These pictures make you feel like you're there near them. You can see how precious they are," said the Milwaukee, Wis., resident on a recent visit to the store.

Since 1987 Kerr has sailed around the world promoting the message sensible measures must be taken to protect the oceans from chemical pollution.

He is CEO of Ocean Alliance, a nonprofit established by biologist Dr. Roger Payne, "dedicated to the conservation of whales and their ocean environment through research and education."

In 1971 Payne founded the Whale Conservation Institute that evolved into Ocean Alliance, which maintains corporate offices in Lincoln. Payne is credited with discovering humpback whales emit repeated rhythmic notes often described as "songs" and blue and fin whales produce sounds that can be recognized by other whales thousands of miles away.

Born in Scotland and raised in England, Kerr learned to sail in his 20s, first as a hobby and then as a way to satisfy his wanderlust.

"By sailing, I could go to remote places without being confined to a hotel room," he said. "I was always looking for a new adventure."

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Since meeting Payne while hitchhiking through Argentina, Kerr has risen through the organization's ranks to vice president and co-captain of the Odyssey.

The 93-foot ketch has just returned from a five-year circumnavigation that began in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico, then through the Pacific to Galapagos, around Papua New Guinea and into the [Indian](#) Ocean. It continued through the Red Sea into the Mediterranean, across the Atlantic into the Caribbean and north to Boston.

The New Zealand-built motor-sailer carried nine to 11 crew members along with seven scientists and educators to study the effects of ocean pollution on whales and other aquatic life.

For parts of the voyage, Kerr was accompanied by his wife, Amy, and their 5-year-old daughter, Dylan.

Over the last few weeks, the Odyssey has been docked in Boston before leaving for Charleston, S.C., for extensive maintenance.

During its last voyage the vessel carried scientists who collected data from around the world to study the effects of chemical pollutants on the oceans and maritime life.

Kerr shares Payne's concerns that oceanic pollutants threaten whales and other sea creatures and can endanger the health of billions of humans who get their protein from sea food.

According to Kerr, scientific research conducted on the Odyssey suggests chemical pollutants enter the human food chain near the top because they are stored in the fat of whales and other sea creatures that become part of our diet.

"Whales are a great barometer of the health of our oceans. Billions of people rely on seafood as a primary source of protein. There could be an emerging health risk," he said.

Kerr expressed concerns many environmentally informed people do not recognize the imminent threat to the oceans because they adopt an "out of sight, out of mind" attitude.

"Over the last 50 years, we've lived through a chemical revolution. They're getting into the ocean through improper disposal, greed, accidents or ignorance. Every day at sea I saw garbage, waste, fishing nets. The oceans are becoming humanity's sewer. It's sad," he said.

Kerr hopes to find a local corporate sponsor to "keep the Odyssey at sea so our kids and our kids' kids can swim in a healthy ocean."

He urged people to purchase environmentally safe products and support maritime charities and legislation that work to protect the oceans.

"The ongoing pollution of our oceans is a tangible problem. Our generation has no excuse," Kerr said. "We can do something about this. We have a choice about the legacy we leave our children."

ESSENTIALS

Dunia is located at 43 Nason St. in downtown Maynard. It is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., except for Thursday when it stays open until 8 p.m.

Kerr will discuss his photos and the mission of Ocean Alliance at a reception at Dunia on Sunday, Nov. 20, from 2 to 5 p.m.

A "silent auction" of Kerr's photos will be held from Nov. 7 through 20. Pick up a form at the store to make a bid.

To learn more about Dunia, call 978-897-8850 or visit the Web site, www.Dunia-ecostore.com.

To learn about Ocean Alliance, visit the Web site, www.oceanalliance.org or www.pbs.org/odyssey.

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