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217 Oak Ridge Circle
Staunton, VA 24401-3511, U.S.A.
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BOOK INFORMATION SHEET (3.26.25)

Author (as it should appear on the book): Michael Kolster

Title: *Mongrels of Our Making*

Subtitle: *The Plastiglomerates of Hawai‘i*

Contributors: with an introduction by Russ Rymer

Partner: Published in association with the Center for the Study of Place

Book pages: 216

Number and type of illustrations: 134 photographs by the author (118 color and 16 black-and-white), 8 maps and diagrams (6 color and 2 black-and-white), and 2 historic photographs (1 color and 1 black-and-white) = 144 illustrations

Trim size: 9.0 x 11.0 inches upright/portrait

List price: \$50.00

Discount: Trade

ISBN (book): 978-1-960521-09-5

ISBNs (electronic): N.A.

Edition: Hardcover

E-book? TBD

Interactive e-book? N.A.

Jacket: Belly band or jacket

Edition size: 800

Publication date: November 2025

Advances due: October 2025

To warehouse: November 2025

Printed in: Italy or Singapore

Distributor: Casemate/IPM

Bookstore categories (list three): Environment/Hawai‘i/Photography

Audience: Anyone interested in and concerned about the impact of plastic on the environment; anyone interested in Hawai‘i; anyone interested in photography and its relationship to understanding place.

Selling points (list three): Hawai‘i is regarded as a natural paradise, but the beaches on the Big Island attract plastic from all over the Pacific. This is the first book (1) to share the story of how and why this happens, (2) to display in photographs how and why this happens, and (3) the role of stereoscopy in understanding our place in the world.

Tagline: See how plastics that wash ashore Hawai‘i’s beaches are being transformed into modern-day fossils!

Description of the work:

Hawai‘i’s “Big Island” is a place created by fire, being formed entirely from volcanic activity. Currently, it is home to four active volcanoes. The Big Island is also, due to its position relative to the North Pacific trash gyre, home to large amounts of plastic debris that ocean currents deposit on its shores, particularly on its remote southeastern areas such as Kamilo Beach. Much effort has been made to remove this debris, with a fair amount of success, but the flow of trash onto the beaches continues unabated, and keeping these beaches clean a never-ending task. Does clearing the beaches of plastic waste, only to bury it elsewhere, actually help? As plastic washes up on an island so recently formed from volcanic activity, we are reminded that everything there, including all forms and traces of life, must have come from somewhere else.

Photographer Michael Kolster became interested in the issue of plastic debris on Kamilo Beach through a paper from the Geological Society of America whose authors claimed that the plastic debris, when melted or otherwise combined with rocks on the beach, would probably enter the fossil record to become a horizon marker for the Anthropocene. Dubbed “plastiglomerates” by geologists, these hybrid “stones” are the product of humans burning plastic, whether intentionally or accidentally, that then melts and become fused with the naturally-occurring rocks that were created by volcanoes. These fusions of human and geological activity form a fossil-like record of present-day human activity that is likely to persist for thousands of millennia due to their prevalence, location, and composition.

Wanting to see these plastiglomerates for himself, Kolster traveled to Hawai‘i, where he photographed Kamilo Beach and its plastiglomerates. He also collected examples of plastiglomerates that he took back to his studio in Maine. Kolster’s photographs of the plastiglomerates, both in Hawai‘i and collected at home, show both the harsh reality and surprising beauty of plastic trash from the beaches of a Pacific paradise. While this trash can be viewed as both an eyesore and an insult to our ideas of what a tropical paradise like Hawai‘i should be, Kolster also shows how seeing plastic on the beach is equivalent to looking in the mirror: We need to look closer at our reflection before impulsively wiping it clean, only to have to do it over and over day after day, week after week, endlessly.

Blurbs:

“Without dismissing the environmental impact of plastic, Michael Kolster reveals through his evocative photographs a radical mode of perceiving synthetic substances, and by extension all supposedly artificial human objects, as organic parts of nature. His understated, granular images of “plastiglomerates” (fused masses of plastic debris and lava rock found on a nearly inaccessible beach in Hawai‘i), some photographed in situ and others individually against white backgrounds, possess an unearthly beauty that both evokes and transcends the vast scale of geological time. Kolster’s absorbing commentary adds another layer to a somehow profoundly

unsettling book.”

—Jeffrey L. Meikle, author of *Americana Plastic: A Cultural History*

About the Author:

Michael Kolster is currently professor of art at Bowdoin College, where he has taught since 2000. In 2013, he was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography. His work has been exhibited widely and is included in the permanent collections of numerous museums in the U.S and Europe, including the American University of Paris, Brown University, Center for Creative Photography, George Eastman House of Film and Photography, High Museum of Art, Huntington Library, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Princeton University Art Museum, Smith College Museum of Art, and Williams College Museum of Art. His previous books, all published with George F. Thompson Publishing, are *Take Me to the River: Photographs of Atlantic Rivers* (2016), *L.A. River* (2019), and *Paris Park Photographs* (2022).

About the Contributor:

Russ Rymer has taught creative nonfiction at Harvard University, MIT, Bowdoin College, and Smith College, and has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and Radcliffe Institute. His writing has appeared in *Harper's*, *National Geographic*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*, among numerous other publications, and he is the author of *Paris Twilight: A Novel* (Houghton Mifflin, 2013), *American Beach: A Saga of Race, Wealth, and Memory* (HarperCollins, 1998) and *Genie: A Scientific Tragedy* (HarperCollins, 1993), which won a Whiting Award, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, was translated into six languages and transformed into a NOVA television series.