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KARLEE RAWKINS DARK WOOD LAND

15 March - 2 April 2011

Looking at Karlee Rawkins' paintings and drawings is an enchanting experience. With free and sensuous lines the artist captures the spontaneous and unfettered postures innate to each of her subjects. Boar, bear, otter, falcon and deer are presented with quirky observations that reveal an intimate quality unique to each. Fur and pelt are suggested through soft patterning or knitted lines and layers of bright colour and loose filigree enhance the individual quality of tusk and wing. All the while Rawkins' mark making recalls something of the childhood freedom of drawing from imagination, mixing sweet adoration with the joy of colouring outside the lines. But if we look into her subjects eyes, so dreamy and still, what was playful slowly becomes distant, and 'dreamy' turns into a misty vale of disconnect. We, the viewer, realise we inhabit a separate reality to these creatures.

Inspired by the Hunting Tapestries in the Victoria & Albert Museum collection, seen while Rawkins undertook a residency at Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris, her paintings and drawings allude to a series of contradictions in our relationship with the animal kingdom. With a cast of hunters, horses, dogs, birds, trees and flowering plants amassed in shallow perspective, these tapestries both revere and rebuff the form of animals in a state of flee or fight. To hunt creatures such as deer and bears (which were extinct in England by the 11th century) was the past-time of the elite ruling classes during the Middle Ages. Caught up in a world not yet touched by empirical judgment, religious values and virtues were very much part of the Medieval view and, fuelled by fables of fantastical creatures, hunting became an act by which to assert ideas of Christian salvation and to reinforce man's dominance over nature.

Rawkins plucks these creatures out of their battle scenes and gives them an opportunity to appear on their own terms. By removing the traditional scenery her paintings present an alternative relationship between animal and man. Compounded by her use of non-naturalistic colour and patterning, a slippage into a realm of metaphor is created, as her animals coalesce with imagined ecological elements. Sprouting leaves from their antlers and bodies they become part tree and take on the mantle of mythic characters more akin to those revered within Indigenous cultures. No longer prey, they are now allegorical symbols of nature in harmony. This mixing of Medieval and Indigenous views allows a fresh engagement with the subject, free of hierarchies. Looking into those eyes again we see the proud and delicate truth of the animal and begin to imagine their natural dominion. The creatures Rawkins depicts gently challenge us to acknowledge our disconnection within a chain of being.

By creating a new and personal vision of the animal kingdom, not as our servant or plaything, but as a totemic cue, the artist states that her paintings might "allow us some recognition of ourselves as existing beyond our bodies and to view our lifetime as something larger". Rawkins' essentially jubilant works offer up a vision of connectedness in a manner that is at once whimsical and consoling.

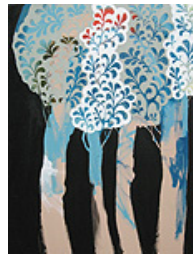
Phe Luxford



Hawking 2011
122 x 91cm
acrylic and pencil on
canvas



Little Blue Crane 2011
122 x 91cm
acrylic and pencil
on canvas



Molly's Birthday 2011
122 x 91cm
acrylic and pencil
on canvas



A Few Pearls 2010
acrylic and pencil on canvas
137 x 121cm



Portrait Of An Otter 2010
acrylic and pencil on canvas
137 x 121cm



Rocky Ground 2010
acrylic and pencil on canvas
137 x 121cm



Thyme 2011
acrylic and pencil on canvas
137 x 152cm



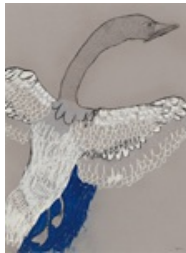
Something In The Way 2011
acrylic and pencil on canvas
152 x 137cm



Running Bare 2011
acrylic and pencil on canvas
167 x 213cm



Hunting Dog
107 x 51cm
charcoal & pencil
on paper



Swan Dive
73.5 x 54cm
pastel, charcoal &
pencil on paper



Falcon
58.5 x 107cm
charcoal &
pencil on paper



Decoy
55 x 75cm
pastel, charcoal &
pencil on paper