

Art review: Marcus Coates at Kate MacGarry

Chantal Joffe's elegant but edgy portraits and Marcus Coates's madcap animal sculptures are fierce yet joyous

The Sunday Times, April 28 2019

Waldemar Januszczak



Marcus Coates's *Extinct Animals* (2018)

Photo: Angus Mill. Courtesy of the Artist And Kate Macgarry, London

At Kate MacGarry gallery, the endlessly inventive Marcus Coates treats us to another of his madcap defences of the natural world. As slippery as a snake, as impish as a hare, as nimble as a gibbon, Coates has always been on the side of the animals in the wars of ecology. But he seems also to be particularly sensitive to the influence of the moon, and it is this touch of lunacy that makes him so entertaining.

His best-known works, his performances, involve the putting on of absurd animal costumes and lots of crazy yelping, as if he were getting in intimate touch with the animal within. His gallery shows, however, are less actively ridiculous. Indeed, they tend towards the calm and the minimal, and impress not with their nuttiness, but with their artistic precision.

The new show is a clear example. All the pieces have as their underlying subject the destruction of the natural world that we chest-thumping gorillas are so noisily engineering. But the points are made with haiku-sized poetry and an art that is usually delicate and white.



Marcus Coates's *Common Starling* (2019)

Photo: Angus Mill

In a series of new sculptures, the artist's hands, cast in plaster, twist themselves into the silhouettes of various extinct animals. A squat shape created with fists and fingers is the golden toad, which became extinct in Costa Rica in the 1980s. The long-necked bird is the moa, hunted to extinction in 15th-century New Zealand. The lumpy thing with the horn, that's the western black rhino, the most recent loss, poached into nothingness in 2011. Thus, that old fireside pastime of creating magical likenesses with your fingers becomes a vehicle for fierce artistic accusation.

Arrivals/Departures is a word piece originally installed at the railway station in Utrecht. Instead of train times, the digital calendar informed passengers of the animal activity going on around them on that particular day of the year. The day I visited, dingy skipper butterflies were expected to fly and coots were expected to nest. Utrecht's busy commuters were sneakily imprinted with the lost realities of the natural world.

Bravo Marcus Coates. Will some big museum in Britain please give this man the significant retrospective he deserves?

Marcus Coates, Kate MacGarry, London E2, until May 18