

## **CUBICLE SERIES | 3 – 15 AUGUST 2020**

### **NICOLA BAILEY | AND THE ANIMAL RESPONDED**

My work reflects on the gendered roles of women, and often hints at the domestic restraints of my past. Currently I have been focusing on Companion Species, exploring the complex relations of dependency and interdependence. The entangled histories of interspecies relationships provide many possibilities for my work, most importantly the flattening of hierarchies between species. These ideas expand on the concept of decentring in an anthropocentric world, and open us up to the responsive capacity of all life on earth.

Focusing on my own four-legged companions, I understand that humans are also changed and formed through these relationships. When my beloved companion Bella passed away, I reflected on our last moments together. These were profound. They were filled with reciprocal perception and feeling. The aim of this body of work is to communicate the dual impact relationships like this leave on both companions, whatever species they might be.

The sculptures have been created in two parts, so that when the animal is lifted off its base there remains a memory in the indentation where it lay, representing interspecies connectivity as well as the very personal process of loss.

### **LIBERTY BATTSON | UNPRECEDENTED LINES**

To accurately represent data, facts and truth in art is a somewhat hopeless quest, for representation always involves a certain measure of abstraction. As luck would have it, Battson is consumed with the perplexing and formal qualities that abstraction offers and this particular body of work explores her slow, sweet surrender to abstraction itself.

In a pursuit of letting go of the systems and statistics that have previously exemplified her practice, *Unprecedented Lines* takes refuge in spontaneous colour and composition. The collaged quads are a celebration of abstraction as well as an ode to the disillusioned and absurd art of Dada that was born out of a pressing time. Randomly sequenced colours and swatches from Lamborghini to Hyundai serve as a glossy escape from a data overload, seeking comfort from the gloom of the Worldometer. Given the absence of formulated data and deliberate lines, the background adopts a creative role in representation. The space in between shapes gives form to lines and grids, figures and illusions, distance and weight.

“There is no data, there are no lines. Only nines, shines, unprecedented times.”

### **KATHERINE BULL | DRAWING BREATH**

*Drawing Breath* is dedicated to my grandmother Esmé Bull (1922-2020) – the work on view is a residue of remembering, finding connections and celebrating life in the face of loss.

In my experience of losing my grandmother to the Corona virus, I found solace through a retreat into my studio and the process of drawing, painting and collage. The pain of loss offers a unique opportunity in which the veil lifts and I could feel a clarity of her presence beyond life while at the same time feeling intensely aware of the separation and physical presence of being left behind.

The artworks in this exhibition were selected and created in memory of my close relationship with her – a grandmother who planted the seeds for my love of art, history and the earth – through many hours spent with her in galleries, museums, archives and in her garden as a child. And as an adult she remains inspiring to me in her unfailing love, support, positivity and zest for life and staying up to date with the world well into her 90s.

The work also reflects my response to finding ways to continue working and stay connected through my experience of isolation, separation and anxiety during the lockdown.

As a commemorative act, I will be visiting the gallery to meditate and draw breath in the space for the duration of the exhibition.

**ELIZE VOSSGÄTTER | NATURAL ORDER**

This stilling of life, which we have been experiencing for the past few months, has forced us to distil our own existence into a tincture. Do we like the essence of what is left? Are we ready to dilute it again? Does this vial of our existence have any significance? *Natural Order*, observes the paradigm shift that we are experiencing as humans in this time. At the time I began working on this series, I was focusing more on the climate crisis of 2019 and our imbalanced relationship to nature - *Natural Order* refers to this imbalance and looks at how the natural world re-establishes its own balance despite human intervention.

These paintings his exhibition read very interestingly in this Covid landscape. The eponymous *Natural Order* shows an individual whose identity is overruled by some sort of organic element – a rock, bacteria, a blemish. The human is flattened and reintegrating into the repetitive pattern of its background. The painting engulfs the viewer. The composition is starkly central and simple. The surface is constructed by layering tinted beeswax using a mixture of organic and synthetic pigments, creating a strangely evocative, mercurial surface. The repetitive pattern is then excavated using heat and sharp tools. The very thin surface becomes a heavy relief.

I believe that an isolated individual is utterly indeterminate until their place in the natural world has been identified – and I believe that as a human race we have moved very far away from where we should be. The age of the ego is over, we are only significant in that we belong to a greater ecosystem. *Natural Order* refers to this shifting of balance that the natural world provides: it is the pathos of man dominated, shifting, transforming.

**GAVIN YOUNGE | MEN OF THE NUMBER... and DAIMYO PROCESSION**

The prison gangs of South Africa have their origin in the all-male mine compounds of the nineteenth century, the *amaleita* youth gangs in the former province of Natal, the segregated South African prisons, and the Pass Laws. Today, their ‘chappies’ (tattoos) mark them as ‘men of the number’; members of the 28 gang. Depending on their rank, their bodies are tattooed with between 3 and 8 stars. These stars mark them as either ‘Officers’ (the bloodline: the fighters who take blood) or ‘Privates’ (the sections, the so-called ‘wives’ or catamites of the Officers). Within these two broad rankings, the 28s have devised a complicated hierarchy borrowed from colonial administration and the mine compounds of the Free State and Witwatersrand.

Where do these numbers come from, and what do they mean? Jonny Steinberg has traced their origin back to a turf war between two miscreants: Nongoloza (born Mzuzephi Mathebula in 1867) and Kilikijan. His book *The Number* sets out the story through interviews with Magadien Wentzel, a repentant thief who was in and out of prison almost his entire life. Nongoloza joined a group of highwaymen, and together they preyed on the wagons supplying the sprawling, tented town of Johannesburg in the early 1900s. He was captured in 1908 and imprisoned in Volksrust and then Pretoria Central Prison. There he began consolidating his empire with quasi-military precision, rising to god-like status in the underworld. His lieutenant, Kilikijan, was appointed leader of another prison gang – the 27s. The 28s’ origin mythology was carved on a rock outside the cave in which they resided. According to Steinberg, these laws were transferred to the skin of an ox.

Vanessa Cowling and I photographed several gang members in a studio at Michaelis. I was simultaneously charmed and chilled by the images and messages tattooed on their bodies. Following legend, I subsequently stencilled these images onto animal hides obtained from a Cape Town tannery.

In August 1995 I was introduced to the mayor of Hiroshima, Takashi Hiraoka, and have nurtured a deep interest in Japanese culture since that time. This series of scarab beetles is inspired by “a fantasy scene of insects, lizards, and frogs in the guise of a daimyo procession” on one of Yabu Meizan’s earthenware vases.<sup>1</sup> The tradition of caricaturing human activities by substituting insects has a very long history in Japan, the most famous example being the Chōju giga (humorous pictures of birds and beasts), a set of 13th-century picture scrolls.<sup>2</sup>

A ‘daimyo procession’ is thus a set of ancient warriors serving an absent royalty.

In his speech at the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Mayor Hiraoka said the occasion was not to “blame or review the past but rather to issue a dire forecast for the future”. We have that future.

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<sup>1</sup> . J. Earle, *Splendours of Imperial Japan: Arts of the Meiji period from the Khalili Collection*, London 2002, cat. 101, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> O. Impey & M. Fairley (eds), *Meiji No Takara: Treasures of Imperial Japan*, Ceramics Vol II, London 1995, cat. 86.