

We Spirited Creatures

The Ceramic Gallery, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 29 October 2011 to January 29 2012



Curated by Stuart Evans: Sound art by Anna Evans: Words by Elin ap Hywel



This exhibition represents our most recent 'artist intervention' in relation to the Ceramic Collection in Aberystwyth. The strategy is one that is used increasingly in museums and galleries to cast a fresh light over collections and disrupt conventional classifications and styles of display.

In *We Spirited Creatures* three artists from different disciplines meet to construct an intriguing and thought provoking experience for visitors to the Ceramic Gallery. Artist and curator, Stuart Evans, has brought together a creative collision of different museum spheres – popular culture and high culture; stuffed animals and studio pottery; contemporary ceramics and old 'stuff'. Specially developed for the exhibition *The Creation* is an evolving sound piece by Anna Evans. Along with Elin ap Hywel's evocative poems and words inscribed on the cases, texts and sounds build on the layers of meaning. The show opens out the audience experience and takes viewers beyond the common expectations of why works might be seen in the Ceramic Gallery. These include assumptions about ceramics as objects of value for collectors and connoisseurs; ceramics as aesthetic object or sculptural form; and ceramics as contemporary practice. We are committed to all these agendas, but a show such as this presents ceramic objects in the wider context of material culture, memory and heritage.

The juxtapositions in the exhibition may have tenuous or bizarre links but the displays use the power of objects to carry messages and evoke emotions, linking the past and the present in ways that go beyond rational thought and museum convention.

I would like to thank Stuart Evans who has been the inspiration and driving force behind *We Spirited Creatures* and also the artist and educator, Anna Evans and the writer, Elin ap Hywel who have undertaken new work for the show. We are also especially grateful to Ceredigion Museum who have so generously lent many of the objects in the show.

Moira Vincentelli, Curator of the Ceramic Collection and Archive
November 2011

Humans and animals live together on a small planet. Our relationship is one of shared needs and mutual coexistence, and yet our life together is often far from peaceful. From poodles in frocks to beasts of burden, from noble steeds to the dove of peace, we give them love and shelter, destroy their habitats, worship them, eat them, make representations of them and buy and sell them, among thousands of other interactions.

Juxtaposing works from the Ceramic Collection with artefacts and representations from the world of humans, this exhibition suggests dialogues between different animals and between animals and humans as a step towards exploring the question: what is the real relationship between our world and the world of animals?

Elin ap Hywel, November 2011



Thanks to: the staff at the School of Art, Neil Holland, the staff at Ceredigion Museum, the staff of Biological Sciences at Aberystwyth University, Richard Urbanski, Lily Urbanska, Glen Ibbotson, Julian Meredith, Tony White, Meri Wells, Dr John Gee, Dr I-Chant Chang, Jenny Williamson, Ashley Ferguson, Rorik Smith, Gwennllian Ashley.

Sliding Scale

An ox's hide, his sinewy strength: eightpence.
The hide of a hart: eightpence.
The hide of a cow, her sweet milkiness: sevenpence.
A doeskin: also sevenpence.

The hide of a sheep, a goat, a roe-deer; a penny each.
A fox's hide: eightpence.
An otter's hide, his deep memory of the still pools: eightpence.
A wolfskin: eightpence.
A marten's pelt, her fine, bright fur, twenty-four pence.

The king's gatekeeper spreads out the skins
of animals slaughtered in the palace.
He is entitled to a penny for each one.

For insulting him: six cows,
A hundred and twenty silver pennies.
Their eyes their maws their teeth their claws.

Poems: Elin ap Iywal



Photographs: Richard Urbanski, Moira Vincentelli, Stuart Evans

Circling

Big Ben once lost five minutes when a flock of starlings roosted on its minute hand.

What if the starlings spinning,
A living whirlpool over the prom
In ever-decreasing circles

Were a time machine, churning our minutes?
What would happen to our days?

And what if the beat of their wings,
The absolute focus of the birds on their goal

Were a spell, a gift of the minutes
Missing from all our lives,
Those five little minutes we're always promising
Our partners, our children, our friends —

And what if those minutes became a dream of flying,
A feathery belonging,
A strength of purpose,
A slow drift towards our selves?

Metamorphosis

Uncle Trevor was the only insect
in a family of sheepdogs.

Faced with their frantic barking about the price of lambs,
Countryfile and the Royal Welsh,
Trevor retreated:
straightened his specs,
blew his nose carefully,
turned his feelers
towards his figures.

While the pack lay, felled by Christmas
on the rug in front of the fireplace,
full of Christmas cake and 'Christmas cheer',

Trevor, in file with his fellow workers
was marching swiftly onwards
towards their nest, the Bank.

'Woof!' yapped the cheeky whelps,
knowing instinctively that Trevor was Different:
but Uncle Trevor didn't woof back.

When The Bitch died,
white-jowled, rheummy,
after all that snarling and bringing-them-to-heel,
something odd happened:

The insect bought a one-way ticket to Frisco,
strapped on his high-heeled silver dancing shoes,
opened his super soaraway spandex wings,
and flew.

Owl Report

'I will not slay thee. I will do to thee that which is worse ...
I will let thee go in the form of a bird.'
Gwydion's words to Blodeuwedd in the Third Branch of the Mabinogion

I'm glad to report that by now
things are starting to make some sense;
I'm beginning to get used to
birdishness.

(I've been feeling now, for a century or two,
that flying is getting easier. Co-ordination
between the right wing and the left has improved
and landing has become much, much smoother.
Aerodynamic. Yes, that's the word.)

It's a big step, looking back.
Sometimes the past gets me by the gullet,
weighing down heavy,
a hard pellet, full of hair and bones,
especially on summer nights -
at that second, somewhere between twilight and dusk
when the world is a rush of wings in glory
and life as short as a mouse's memory,
a squeak between one darkness and the next.

It's at times like these I remember:
I never did like the way
those multi-coloured silk gowns
stuck to my sides in the heat
on those endless afternoons
when Llew used to put his hand on my knee.

Feathers are really much better for you.
They're dry and light, like leaves or flowers:
they don't show the blood as much.
It's much, much easier to keep them clean.

Artists:

Stuart Evans works at Ceredigion Museum as a display designer. He is also studying part time for an MA in Printmaking at the School of Art Aberystwyth University. Object interpretation is part of his daily work and over the past thirty years he has been interested in exploring this in his own art practice. He is familiar with the taxidermy collection at the museum and has created *We Spirited Creatures* as a response to his introduction to the University collection of contemporary figurative ceramics.

Anna Evans studied Fine Art and Education at Aberystwyth University, graduating with First Class honours in 2009. She is currently Assistant Curator at Ceredigion Museum. Her work explores the inter-relationship between 'human' communication and identity and her practice is conceptually led; materials, context and process in the work are defined by the specific questions being explored. The creation of dialogue is often central to her practice. *The Creation*, is an evolving sound piece created for *We Spirited Creatures* which presents human narratives of creation, with a particular emphasis on interpretations of the 'animal'.

Elin ap Iywel is a poet and translator. Her work has been described by Robert Minihinnick as poetry which 'finds the dreamlike in the domestic'. The poems in *We Spirited Creatures* look at the relationships between people and animals in the context of control, profit, learning, stereotyping and exchange of experience. She also chose the individual words which appear on and in the cases in the exhibition, and which invite the viewer to consider their various possible meanings for all kinds of creatures – including 'man'.



We Spirited Creatures & Contents:

- Ulla Viotti, *Trace of Life*, University Collection
- Stuart Evans, fossil from San Antonio Texas, loan
- Joanna Mallin-Davies, *The Chase*, University Collection
- Two crocodiles, taxidermy, on loan from Gwenllian Ashley
- Ladi Kwall, Gwari-style pot, University Collection
- John Wesley, Staffordshire flat back, Ceredigion Museum
- Angélica Vázquez Cruz, *Entre Cactus y Nahuales* (Amongst cactus & animal spirits) & *Virgin of Loneliness*, University Collection
- Geoffrey Fuller, *Adam and Eve*, University Collection
- Snake skin, Ceredigion Museum
- Small wooden animals from Noah's ark, Ceredigion Museum
- David Cleverley, *Adam Naming the Animals*, University Collection
- Toy lead elephant, Ceredigion Museum
- Stuart Evans, *We Spirited Creatures*, mixed media with plastic Mickey Mouse
- Udai Lal Kuhmar, *Durga*, University Collection
- Alan and Ruth-Barrett Danes, *Cabbage Kingdoms*, University Collection
- Geoff Bond, *Tondino*, University Collection
- Tawny owl, taxidermy, (with Monocle by Ashley Ferguson)
- Tony White, 18 raku eggs, loan
- Melanie Brown, *Family Portrait*, University Collection
- Meri Wells, *Wolf in Sunglasses*, loan
- Metal figure with wooden boots, Ceredigion Museum
- Fox head, taxidermy & hunting hat, Ceredigion Museum
- Meri Wells, *Two Pelts*, loan
- Stuart Evans, 5 Road Kill photographs in frames, loan
- Rorik Smith, three mole skins, loan
- Catrin Howell, *Twr Tywyll*, University Collection
- Emma Rogers, *Hare*, University Collection
- Julian Meredith, *Road Kill* print of barn owl, loan
- Natalie Dias, *Pan* University Collection
- Michael Flynn, *Fallen leaf*, University Collection
- Rams head, taxidermy, Ceredigion Museum
- Susan Halls, *Fish Dog* University Collection
- Dora Billington, *Owl*, University Collection
- Otter, taxidermy, Ceredigion Museum
- Stuart Evans, clock and key, loan
- Heron, taxidermy, Ceredigion Museum
- Frances Woodley, *Bird Head*, University Collection
- Gannet Skeleton, IBERS collection, Aberystwyth University
- Martin brothers, *Wally Bird*, University Collection
- Susan O'Byrne, *Chaffinches*, University Collection
- Fieldfare, Taxidermy, Ceredigion Museum
- Ashley Ferguson, *Lecterns*
- Wooden stairs and fairy, Ceredigion Museum
- Frances Woodley, *Monkey with Baboon Mask*, University Collection
- Monkey Skeleton, IBERS Collection, Aberystwyth University
- Glen Ibbitson, *Claw 3*, drawing, loan
- Taja, *Crab*, University Collection
- Bear hunt transfer print plate, Gwenllian Ashley, loan
- Claude Michel Clodion, *satyr, nymph and cherub*, University Collection
- Ruth Barrett-Danes, *Dancing Contest*, University Collection
- Fur stole and crocodile handbag, Ceredigion Museum
- Jenny Williamson, *Two Thrown Pots*, ostrich egg & sheep skull, loan