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Mark Fairnington
Collected and Possessed

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Contents

Project overview

Context & Questions

Insights

Methods

Dissemination

Project Overview

Project Overview

Solo exhibition at the Horniman Museum, 28 November 2015 - 24 January 2016.

The exhibition was funded by a crowd funding campaign run by the Art Fund.

This was an exhibition devised and curated by Mark Fairnington who designed the exhibition space and selected the work. It was significant as a curatorial research project that brought together paintings made by the artist over the last 15 years including large-scale mounted insects the size of humans, birds of paradise specimens, panoramic views of specimens in the Natural History Museum stores, and paintings of life-sized prize winning bulls.

Most of the objects and specimens in the Horniman Museum collection, like those in many of the great Museum collections, are not on display to the public. They are kept in storage, boxed and wrapped, contained securely in buildings sited away from the Museum itself and this exhibition was about exploring these hidden spaces. Some of those paintings were shown alongside the

specimens, objects and images from the collections that inspired them. The collections included the Horniman, the Natural History Museum and the Wellcome Collection. The paintings all represent the objects in the different collections, as they are in situ, contained but not curated. The specimens and objects from the collections were presented alongside the artworks, as things to be seen in their own right.

The show gave visitors a view of museum storage depots as strange, intriguing and unusual places full of truly peculiar, disturbing, breath taking and genuinely surreal images. Taxidermy specimens are kept on shelves wrapped in transparent plastic sheets, a bird skeleton stands perched in its own wooden box, a small pet dog lies in a nest of tissue paper inside a cardboard box. At the Wellcome wax heads sit next to anatomical models, real skulls and medieval sculptures. There are rooms of prosthetic limbs and shelves with plaster death masks of executed criminals. Juxtapositions occur that are disturbing, unexpected and profoundly moving.

The exhibition attracted 18,000 visitors.

Output

Collected and Possessed

Journal articles

Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice

edited by Christian Mieves and Irene Brown,
Routledge, Advances in Art and Visual
Studies, ISBN 978 1 138 85581 6

Speculative Taxidermy, Natural History,
Animal Surfaces and Art in the Anthropocene,
Giovanni Aloï, Columbia University Press,
ISBN: 9780231180702

Conference papers

- 2016, The Artist in a Collected World, 28 October, Chelsea College of Arts, speakers included Andrew Grassie, Claire Gulliver, Uta Koglesberger, Jo Melvin, James Peto, Ilaria Puri Purini, George Shaw, Ben Tufnell and Colin Wiggins. Convened by Mark Fairnington

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Artefacts

- 42 paintings oil on canvas and oil on wood ranging from miniatures to large-scale works on canvas exhibited at The Horniman Museum and Gardens,

London, crowd-funded by The Art Fund, Art Happens scheme. The exhibition was curated and designed by Mark Fairnington in collaboration with curators at the Horniman.

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- Image Catalogue of all the works (pdf)
- Source photographs for the paintings (embedded)
- Images of the model boxes used to design the show (embedded)
- Images of installing the exhibition (embedded)
- Installation shots (embedded)
- Art happens Horniman Marketing and PR Campaign.
- Art Happens Horniman Poster.pdf
- Collected and Possessed Flyer.pdf
- e-flyer.jpg
- Installation Plan.pdf

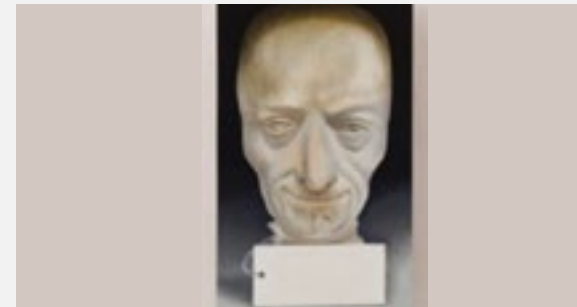
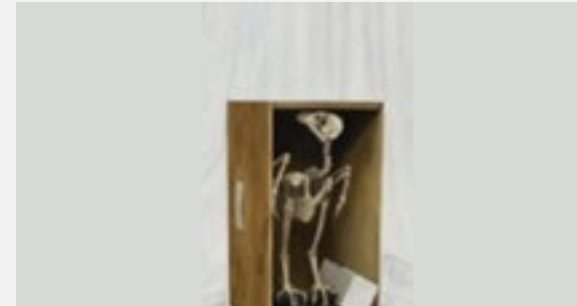


Minotaur, 2012, oil on panel, 60cm diameter. Meardy Tally, 2009, oil on canvas, 235x367cm. Specimen 11, 2001, oil on canvas, 224 x 189 cm. Nest, oil on panel, 65x69cm, 2012.

The Ambassadors, 2007, oil on canvas, 204x256cm. Specimen 12 (Fall) 95x67cm, 2010. Specimen 13 (Fall) 95x60cm, 2010. The Night Watch, oil on canvas, 214x351cm, 2007.

Monkey Badger, oil on canvas, 100x170cm, 2012. Zebra Box (2009) Oil on canvas, 100 x 276cm. The Sleep of Reason, oil on panel, 144x126cm, 2012. Box Bird, oil on panel, 65x42cm, 2012.

Paradisaea raggiana and Paradisaea augusti-victoria, oil on canvas, 2005, 231x104cm. The New Paradise, oil on canvas, 160x250cms, 2006. The Brotherhood, oil on canvas, 165x241cm, 2011.



12-Wired Bird of Paradise (2009) Oil on panel, 50 x 54. Paradisea Apoda (2005, 214 x 163) and Wilson's Bird of Paradise, (2006 147x157), Oil on canvas. Possessed, oil on canvas, each 250x120, 2012.

Turbo Tommy, 2009, oil on canvas, 235x330. Gazelle, oil on panel, 53x50, 2008. Greenland Falcon (2009) Oil on panel, 80 x 60. The Beast, 2011, oil on panel, 60cm diameter, 2011.

Box Bird, oil on wooden panel, 13x42, 2014. Heads, 2014, oil on wooden panel, 120x190. Mask, oil on wooden panel, 14x8, 2014. Pillow, oil on wooden panel, 13x40, 2014.

Prophet, oil on wooden panel, 9x14, 2014. Shelf, oil on wooden panel, 18x40, 2014. Skull's Teeth, oil on wooden panel, 11x8, 2014. The Aside, oil on wooden panel, 15x13, 2014.

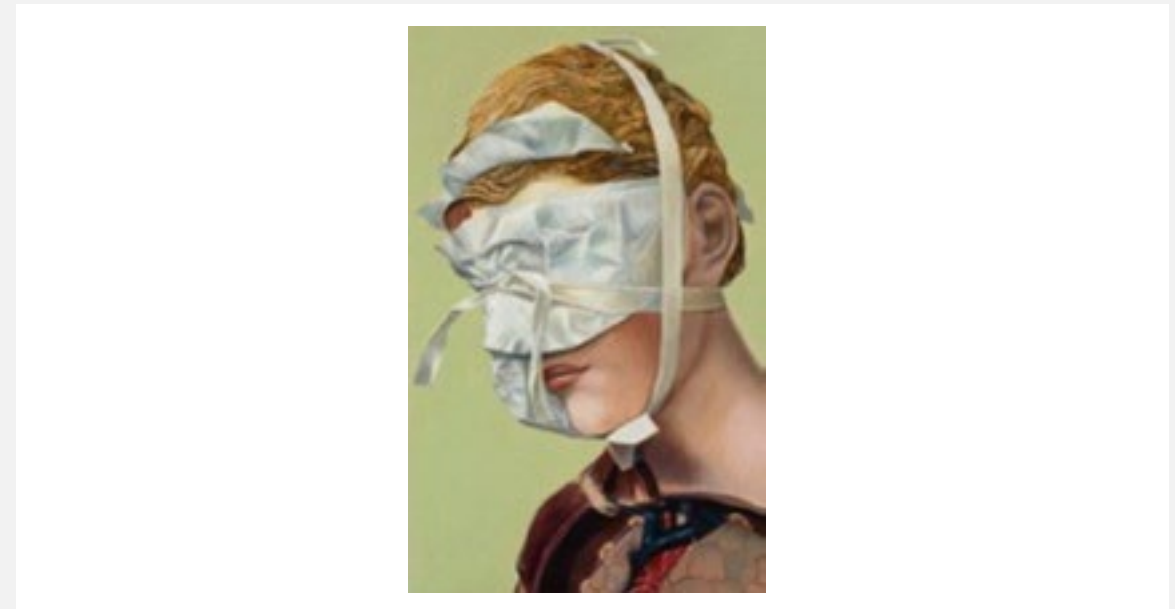


The Awakening, oil on wooden panel,
19x24cm, 2014.

The Forgettory, oil on wooden panel,
16x12cm, 2014.

Puppetman, 2015, oil on wooden panel,
13x40cm.

Wide-eye, oil on wooden panel, 9x7cm,
2014.



Face Monkey, oil on panel, 27x27cm, 2012.
Prodigy, oil on panel, 50cm diameter, 2008.

Itself, oil on panel, 50cm diameter, 2011.
In-memory, oil on panel, 12x19cm, 2015.



Superb Bird of Paradise (2006) Oil on panel,
50 x 54cm.



Okapi, oil on panel, 28cm diameter 2015.

Context & Questions

Context

Fairnington is a painter and his activities are located in the field of enquiry that is Art and Science interdisciplinary practice but, more specifically, his work has resulted from research projects with museums and museum collections, sustaining a visual examination of the idea and image of the specimen. His research has consistently connected with disciplines outside the field of painting. The impact of his practice as a painter is grounded in interdisciplinary research with some of the UK's most important public institutions. He has worked with the Imperial War Museum, Oxford University Museum, Natural History Museum, Horniman Museum, Wellcome Collection and most recently the Museum of London. This work has explored how institutions and the public use collections and how meaning is constructed within them. It has examined in particular the legacy of Empire in relation to our understanding of and relationship to the natural world. Collaborative research projects with scientists have included *Membracidae*, with Dr George McGavin from Oxford University, funded by the Wellcome

Trust. An exhibition of Fairnington's work, *Fabulous Beasts*, was mounted at the Natural History Museum, London in 2004, the outcome of a two-year residency.

The significance of Fairnington's work, particularly in the field of natural history imaging, is evidenced by its inclusion in the books *Art and Ecology Now*, Andrew Brown, Thames and Hudson, *Art and Animals*, Giovanni Aloï, I.B.Taurus, *Insect Poetics*, edited by Eric Brown, University of Minnesota, *Art and Science*, Sian Ede, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and *Realism in 20th Century Painting*, Brendan Prendeville, Thames & Hudson. The recently published *Speculative Taxidermy, Natural History, Animal Surfaces and Art in the Anthropocene*, Columbia University Press by Giovanni Aloï discusses my work in the chapter *A Natural History Panopticon*.

The emergence of the artwork as a challenge to the authority of the museum was exemplified by Marcel Broadthaeers installation entitled *Museum of Modern Art; The Department of Eagles*. Launched in

Brussels in 1968 it parodied the very concept of the museum. The work of American artist Fred Wilson demonstrates a critical engagement with collections, in which the function of the museum as an arbiter of knowledge is challenged. Mark Dion has engaged in a sustained examination of the history of representations of the natural world in museum collections and displays. Dion appropriates scientific procedures to question the relationship between scientific objectivity and our subjective experience of the world.

Contemporary painters that the work in this exhibition relates to includes Alexis Rockman and Walton Ford, Ged Quinn.

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The Artist in a Collected World was a symposium Fairnington convened for the Graduate School Events Programme, on 28 October 2016. The symposium brought together artists, curators and museum professionals to explore the different ways in which visual artists have worked with national collections. It looked at why this kind of activity has grown in the past decade, what artists and museums have gained from the process and what role it might play in the future of our institutions. Speakers included George Shaw, National Gallery Artist in Residence; James Peto, Head of Public Programmes, The Wellcome Collection; Ilaria Puri Purini, Programmes Manager, Contemporary Art Society and the artist Andrew Grassie, in-conversation with Ben Tufnell.

Questions

Museums are continually exploring different and innovative ways that they can make their collections known to the public, this project asks should artists be part of this process?

By foregrounding painting's value as a discipline that can be socially engaged, does its viability as a research methodology generate and disseminate new knowledge?

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Does *Collected and Possessed* subvert and challenge the curatorial conventions adopted by the museum's permanent displays, while being responsive to the unique qualities and idiosyncrasies of the collection?

Does the exhibition represent those parts of the collection that are not normally made visible to the visiting public, to allow connections to be made with objects in the Natural History Museum and Wellcome Collection?

Insights

Insights

Collected and Possessed was a very new departure for the Horniman Museum which does not traditionally exhibit contemporary art and it included specimens from their stores alongside the paintings. It demonstrated the viability of using the lower ground space during the months when it was normally closed.

Collected and Possessed enabled Fairnington to bring together works from a series of projects with different major museums that had been made over a period of 15 years and was a vehicle to demonstrate that Painting has a genuine role in the investigation and critical examination of Museums, their collections and the curatorial practices that determine the way that they are displayed.

Through Fairnington's work, connections were made between the three collections, the Horniman, the Natural History Museum and the Wellcome and in doing so it re-contextualised the Horniman collection for its visitors.

One insight was that the exhibition worked with the permanent collection and was sympathetic to the character of the museum while disrupting the visitor's received understanding.

A significant aspect of the exhibition was that the objects from the collection and Fairnington's paintings were given equal weighting; they became ready-made art objects.

Taking the taxidermy animals out of storage but leaving them in the plastic wrappings that were to preserve them gave them very different readings in that the desire to care for and conserve is underpinned by an implied cruelty and the urge to possess.

Methods

Methods

The project came out of the research that Fairnington had been doing at the Horniman for a number of years. Working with the natural history collection curator Jo Hatton, Fairnington would visit the museum's storage facility in Greenwich to photograph specimens as they are in storage. These photographs were used to make series of paintings.

The Museum invited Fairnington to propose an exhibition for a large space in the centre of the building that was used for touring shows. Traditionally unused during the winter months the Horniman wanted to see if it could work as a venue for contemporary art exhibitions. The museum wanted to put on an exhibition that was aimed more towards an adult audience.

The Art Fund had asked the Horniman to propose five possible projects for crowdfunding and *Collected and Possessed* was selected as the most likely to succeed. Fairnington worked closely with the team of people at the museum on the crowdfunding

and they raised the money to put on the exhibition.

The curatorial nature of the project had a number of elements. Fairnington wanted to bring together, for the first time work that he had made from different projects with different museums, covering about 15 years. The museums were the Oxford Museum of Natural History, the Natural History Museum, the Horniman and the Wellcome Collection.

There were some restrictions that determined the choice of paintings, the Horniman could not accept pieces from private collections and could not transport works from abroad.

The space for the show could be configured in any way that Fairnington wanted with movable walls. He made a model box in his studio and tried different versions of the exhibition using scaled down images of the paintings.

The final layout for the show had to be approved by the Horniman exhibition team

and this led to some alterations.

Once it was finalised the Horniman designer created the Installation Plan to be used by the installation team.

Fairnington visited the Horniman storage facility and selected the objects that would be in the show.

Fairnington wrote the texts for the accompanying publication and the exhibition boards.

Two students from the Wimbledon BA Painting Pathway on placements, came to the studio and helped to pack over 40 pieces of work. The students also came to the museum for the installation to help stretch up the largest paintings. Once the work had been transported Fairnington helped with the installation, condition reports, lighting etc.



Installation shots.



Source photographs for some of the paintings and the visit to the Horniman Study Collections Centre.





Images of the model boxes used to design the show – Solo Exhibition Horniman Museum, London (UK) 28 November 2015 – 24 January 2016.



Installing the exhibition – Solo Exhibition
Horniman Museum, London (UK) 28
November 2015 – 24 January 2016.

Dissemination

Dissemination

2016, The Artist in a Collected World, Symposium, 28 October, Chelsea College of Arts, speakers included Andrew Grassie, Claire Gulliver, Uta Koglesberger, Jo Melvin, James Peto, Ilaria Puri Purini, George Shaw, Ben Tufnell and Wiggins. Convened by Mark Fairnington.

[Art Fund Events and Publications](#)

[Art Fund, Art Happens Film](#)

[Art Fund Q&A questions for Mark Fairnington](#)

Horniman Press and Publicity

<http://www.visitlondon.com/things-to-do/event/43118767-collected-and-possessed-at-the-horniman-museum-and-gardens>

<http://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2015/04/forest-hill-museum-launches-crowdfunding-campaign-for-new-exhibition>

<http://wsimag.com/art/18251-collected-and-possessed>

<http://www.timeout.com/london/things-to->

[do/collected-and-possessed](#)

http://www.newsshopper.co.uk/news/12933969.Crowdfunding_brings_art_exhibition_to_Horniman_in_Forest_Hill

http://nifty.events/e/5958/Collected_and_Possessed_at_the_Horniman_Museum_and_Gardens

<http://www.theabsorbe.com/the-weird-wonderful-londons-most-arbitrary-exhibitions/>

<http://www.artlyst.com/articles/london-art-exhibitions-january-2016-recommended-by-paul-carey-kent>

<https://ucalibraryblog.wordpress.com/2016/01/12/collected-and-possessed/>

<http://www.jacksonsart.com/blog/2016/01/06/top-10-exhibitions-recommend-january/>

<http://www.wharf.co.uk/whats-on/event/collected-and-possessed/>

<https://milliesartanddesign.wordpress.com/tag/art/>

Monographs

2015, Mark Fairnington, A London Assembly, Delahunty, text by Andrew Lambirth, 978-0-9932862-0-9

2012, Unnatural History, published by Galerie Peter Zimmermann, monograph with texts by Martin Stather, Darian Leader, Mary Madden, ISBN: 978-3-9808352-9-9

2011, Flora, published by Oliver Sears Gallery, text by Adrian Rifkin, ISBN 978-0-9565485-1-2

2005, Mark Fairnington, Galerie Peter Zimmermann, ISBN 3-9808352-5-1

2002, Dead or Alive, Mark Fairnington, Natural History Paintings, Black Dog Publishing, ISBN: 0 901033 63 5

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[http://www.horniman.ac.uk/visit/exhibitions/
collected-and-possessed#image-0](http://www.horniman.ac.uk/visit/exhibitions/collected-and-possessed#image-0)

[http://www.horniman.ac.uk/get_involved/
blog/about-the-art-mark-fairnington-
collected-and-possessed](http://www.horniman.ac.uk/get_involved/blog/about-the-art-mark-fairnington-collected-and-possessed)

[http://www.artfund.org/get-involved/art-
happens/mark-fairnington-the-hornimans-
hidden-world/weve-made-it](http://www.artfund.org/get-involved/art-happens/mark-fairnington-the-hornimans-hidden-world/weve-made-it)

[http://wsimag.com/art/18251-collected-
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[http://www.culture24.org.uk/art542152-
curator-choice-horniman-jo-hatton-
collected](http://www.culture24.org.uk/art542152-curator-choice-horniman-jo-hatton-collected)

[https://www.instagram.com/p/
BA2ReeWoiXS/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BA2ReeWoiXS/)

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