

read the culture // live the culture

ART // REVIEW // UNNATURAL-NATURAL HISTORY



(Work by Luis Sanchez)

“What-is-this?” he said at last.

“This is a child!” Haigh replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her... “We only found it today. It’s as large as life, and twice as natural!”

“I always thought they were fabulous monsters” said the Unicorn. (Lewis Carroll, Alice through the Looking Glass)

I’ve often noted Bristol’s fascination with fabulous monsters, whether they’re entirely fantastic inventions or curious hybrids. In 2010, Bristol’s unique pop-up gallery Antlers ran a marathon of exhibitions exploring transmogrifications, beginning with the adequately named ‘Grotesques’. Earlier this year, View Art Gallery housed a small exhibition called ‘Amalgamation’, in which artists such as Diggy, Cedric Laqueieze and Adele Underwood demonstrated their capacity for inventing and fusing forms. This time around, the RWA exhibits ‘Unnatural-Natural History’ curated by Coates & Scarry, who have indebted Bristol with a blockbuster exhibition featuring an eclectic mix of international artists but in keeping with Bristol’s art scene.

There are two ways of looking at this exhibition: as a reflection of our reality – a magnified rendering of natural history or as fanciful allohistory. Despite these jarring perspectives, 'Unnatural-Natural History' begs to be considered simultaneously as both, possibly because this dualism between reality and fiction is at the locus of the exhibition. In comparison to past exhibitions, the art now on display is fantastical not only for featuring fabulous monsters but by making uncertain the perimeters of the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural'.

Take Karen Akester's three Pinnochio busts: as representations of a fictional character the sculptures' doll-like appearances reflect the character we were once familiar with but have since left behind. These sculptures integrate with the exhibition's borrowings of fabulous monsters from fairytales and folk stories, however they are also revealing of human anxieties. Pinnochio's desire to appear like everybody else (inhibited by mischievous lying given to his own fictional nature) reflects a natural predisposition to Otherness. The sculptures are pubescent as they are monstrous, puberty being a period when one becomes truly sensitive to difference. This focus on appearance is second nature to an exhibition that concerns itself with exotic surfaces, textures and forms.



(Works by Karen Akester)



(Works by Karen Akester)



(Works by Karen Akester)

This is also explored in Erik Marc Sandberg's 'Girl with Stripes and Leopard Dress', which in my opinion is the most FAB-U-LOUS monster of the exhibition. Sandberg is famous for his unusual yet striking portraits of hairy children and this woven beauty is comparably awkward. If Otherness is superficially perceived by either deficiency or excess, Sandberg plays up on the latter with the

inclusion of patterns and acid bursts of colour. What is interesting is that the painting's excess doesn't come from any unnaturalness but, on the contrary, from a contemporary conception of 'beauty'. On second glance, the painting's attention to the dress, hairstyle, jewellery and pose looks altogether like an image from a fashion magazine. Sandberg makes fun of 'beauty' and fashion by suggesting vanity to be an Other much like Pinocchio's ever-growing nose.

Besides fabulous monsters is the exhibition's interest in artificial constructions. The exhibition is a unique opportunity to see new work by David La Chapelle, which is a divergence from his illustrious fashion photography. In 'Vanitas', Chapelle juxtaposes nature (plants, fruit) with the artificial (what looks like a ceramic horse and mobile phones) in order to illustrate nature's transience. Together with Jessica Joslin, Pitch Tangpun, Angela Lizon, Pure Evil and Troy Abbott, the exhibition seems like something out of Phillip K Dick's 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep'. Abbott in 'Love Song' substitutes real parrots for their moving images so the cage they are kept in becomes an emblem of nostalgia rather than having any practical purpose. Lizon continues this sense of nostalgia with her paintings of ceramic animals titled 'Mantelpiece Installation'. The lack of human presence in these artworks makes them seem dystopian; in contrast, Tangpun's carousel portraits feature human faces printed onto the background, perhaps of the children that enjoyed this ride. This addition instils the portrait of an otherwise artificial object with emotion and elevates its emotional value to that of a natural being.



(Works by Jessica Joslin)



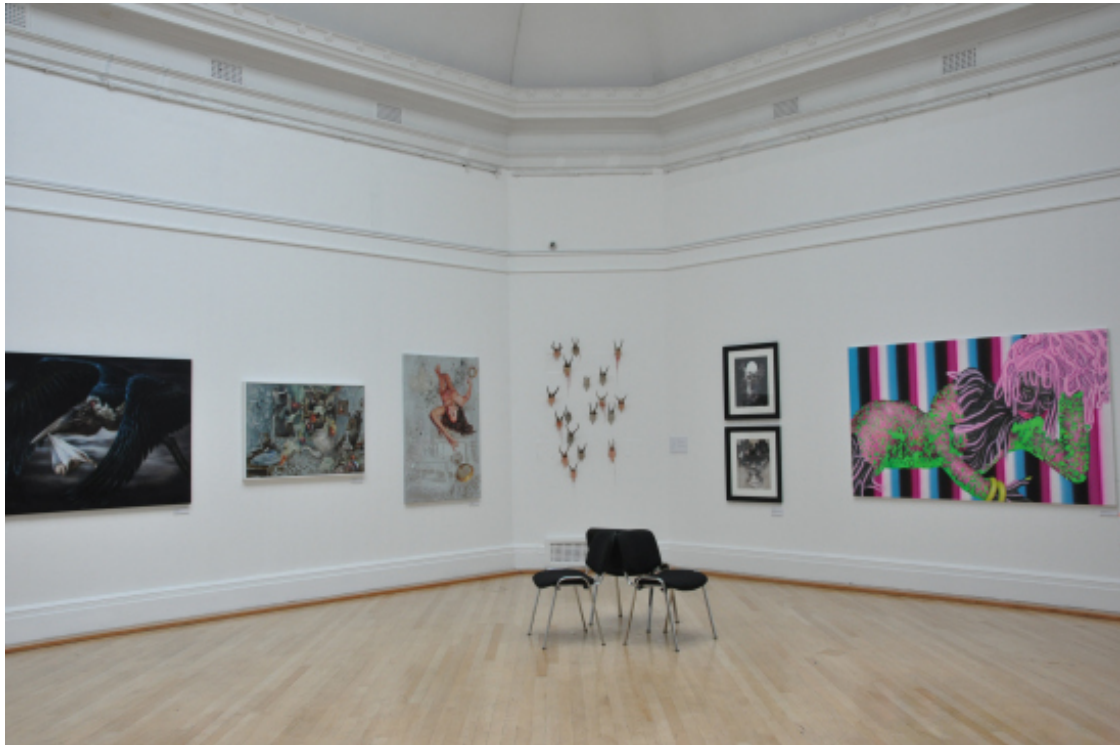
(Work by Troy Abbott)



(Work by Troy Abbott)

My favourites from the exhibition were works by Kate McGwire and Susie MacMurray. Both artists used disembodied materials such as feathers but instead of reassembling them into their original forms, chose to do something experimental. Still taking their inspiration from nature they created

beautiful seemingly natural forms. Effectively, these organic yet unnatural sculptures reflect the exhibition's purpose – fusion. 'Unnatural-Natural History' searches for wholeness within a modern, fragmented and self-scrutinizing world.



For a full list of artists and ticket prices, refer to <http://www.rwa.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2012/07/unnatural-natural-history/>. The exhibition runs until 23rd September 2012.

-Liza Premiyak

About these ads

This entry was posted on August 5, 2012 by [lizaprem](#) in [ARTS AND CULTURE](#), [BOOKS](#), [FEATURE OF THE WEEK](#), [GOING OUT](#), [LIFESTYLE](#) and tagged [alice](#), [alice in wonderlnd](#), [antlers](#), [blockbuster](#), [bristol](#), [charachters](#), [child](#), [Coates & Scarry](#), [Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep](#), [doll](#), [england](#), [Erik Marc Sandberg](#), [exhibition](#), [fairytales](#), [fictional](#), [folk stories](#), [Girl with Stripes and Leopard Dress](#), [Grotesques](#), [history](#), [Jessica Joslin](#), [Karen Akester](#), [Kate MccGwire](#), [lewis carroll](#), [Liza Premiyak](#), [looking glass](#), [luis sanchez](#), [monsters](#), [natural](#), [Phillip K Dick](#), [Pinnochio](#), [RWA](#), [south west](#), [Susie MacMurray](#), [Take Karen Akester](#), [three Pinnochio busts](#), [transmogrifications](#), [Troy Abbott](#), [UK](#),

[unicorn](#), [unnatural](#), [unnatural-natural history](#), [view art gallery](#), [www.rwa.org.uk](#).

[http://wp.me/p2t6g8-dZ](#)

[Previous post](#)

[Next post](#)

[Blog at WordPress.com](#). [The Suburbia Theme](#).

Follow

Follow “”

Powered by WordPress.com

Oh no! This domain
layoutmagazine.net expired **450**
days ago!

Please contact the owner of this website and ask them to
renew the domain. Don't worry, you'll still be able to view
the site at this web address:

[layoutmagazinedotnet.wordpress.com](#) .

