



From William Turner to John Martin, the awe inspiring potential of nature has never been far from many artists' minds. Manchester and Salford based artist **Rachel Goodyear** is another who has discovered and pursued an interest in human relationships with nature, and what they might say about human nature itself.

Despite being lured in by the wonder of animal kind, and the environment around us, Rachel's work is far from an exercise in documenting how the world continues to develop around us, studies into the vagaries of light or bombastic, apocalyptic visions. As incredible as this world might be, the worlds that she creates for herself and her viewers, commonly through her gift for drawing, contain narratives that are beautifully unsettling in a different way. With a landmark show at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, her unnatural/natural visions of man and beast now sit literally side-by-side with the great outdoors.

Catching up with her in her Salford studio whilst preparations for the exhibition were still underway, she starts where her relationship with Yorkshire Sculpture Park began, saying: "This show came about from the Northern Art Prize. Peter Murray, the Executive Director of the park, was one of the judges on the panel. That was when the idea first came about, so I started having

conversations with Claire Lilley, Head of Programme, about my work, and about the Bothy Gallery. We got together and they took me to the gallery and I fell in love with it. It's a really beautiful space. One of those where you just say 'this is where I want to be'."

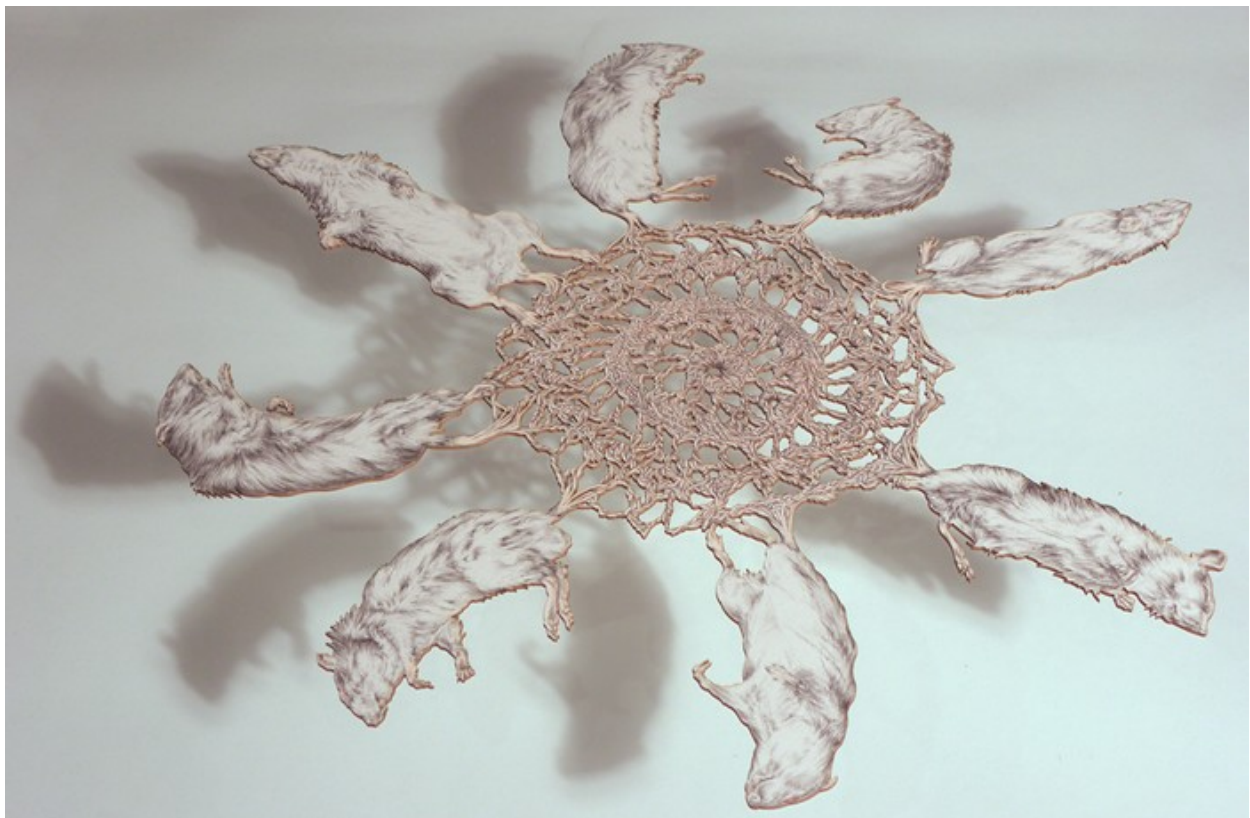
These conversations were taking place as Rachel was packing her bags for a self-directed residency in Banff, Canada. Whilst considering the possibilities for the show, she found herself in unfamiliar territory, the remoteness providing rich pickings for the artist. She recalls: "Banff was such a new environment like nothing I've ever known. Everything was huge and I knew there were animals in there that I knew I wouldn't stand a chance in if I ever came face to face. So, there was an element of hiding, but also really yearning to be involved with it."

It is these 'push and pull' relationships that can be seen to drive her work, usually inviting the viewer to explore the divide (or not) between love and hate, fear and excitement and repulsion and yearning. Her drawings have often placed potentially vulnerable figures in situations loaded with possibilities of danger or desire, many represented in a technically flawless style.

She reflects on her subject matter, saying: "Because I use figures and animals, and I have quite a descriptive style, trying to get the figures technically correct, it actually invites whoever is looking at it to create a story of their own. I use certain types of animals that already have quite a bit of mythology around them already. They might have connotations with a particular type of fear or suspicion. I try to stay away from fairy tale stuff, and look more at mythology and cautionary tales. Fairy tales may have started that way, but many have been watered down, and lean more towards childhood. I do try to play around with those boundaries of whether it is a grotesque figure or a friendly figure, giving it a precarious tipping point."

Part of the show at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and a result of her visit to Banff, is a cluster of twelve drawings that illustrate Rachel's practice perfectly. She explains: "The twelve drawings are classed as one piece, all a foot square. Everything that's going on in it is about figures trying to survive in this strange and wild environment that is only suggested. So you have the bears that have come out of hibernation too early, so they're not properly formed, the wolves that are drooling with this desire that they can't satisfy, and the coyote that is trapped. There's this bleakness that makes them really exposed."

Perhaps the most notable element of her drawings, once you get past the accurate and instantly alluring style of drawing, is the absence of background and colour. Indeed, all of the drawings dotted around her studio and found online or in galleries have a completely white background. The figures isolated in an expanse of white. This is part of Rachel's plan it seems, saying: "They don't have any big poetic background to them, so they're very much to the point, with not much description of what has happened before, or what will happen afterwards. They're quite brutal in that respect. If there's no background, it's just another thing that you can imagine: what kind of background should they have?"



Those who already know Rachel's work, or will choose to find out more, will notice that there is a returning feature when it comes to colour: the regular, disciplined use of red. It's everywhere, but in such small doses, and so well used. Although used sparingly, it can't help but become something of a signature of the artist. When the point is raised, Rachel says: "I don't use that much colour in my work, but I have always used red. It is so loaded with connotations. In the drawing, *Wiggler*, she has got this red cloth over her face. If it was a white cloth it would have such a different feel to it. But, red has connotations with passion and anger, it's the colour of blood and menstruation, it's the colour of fear and desire. It's a hot colour. If you use a red cloth, rather than a white cloth, it has slightly more sensuality to it. You will sometimes see different colours like a blue, but I do choose colour really carefully."

Yorkshire Sculpture Park, set as it is in sprawling parkland near Wakefield, seems to be a perfect fit with Rachel's interests. She admits to, on occasions, using the freedom of the park to explore in the darkness when everyone had gone home, the torchlight reflecting green off the sheep's eyes. She says: "It is an amazing opportunity, to have had a place to go to with a focus, but I have worked the same way as I always have done, which is getting out of the city, getting information from elsewhere and bringing it back to the studio. I tend not to walk around with a sketchbook, but a notebook. I tend to go out and muse, I'll take notes or might doodle something, then come back to the studio and then start to draw. The outdoors is as much of an interest as it always has been, the idea of bringing people and the nature together, and perhaps using nature as a metaphor for fears or desires. There's a sense of a slight feral-ness, but also an imagining of characters trying to exist in an environment they're not really used to, where they don't belong. I have been looking a lot at trickster mythology too, like those opportunists who slip through holes into places where they shouldn't be."

As conversation continues with Rachel her views on what a drawing should be becomes clearer, exploring the concept of the piece not just as a carrier of content, but as a physical form in its totality. The show at Yorkshire Sculpture Park is allowing her, not for the first time, to explore her work as a 3D object. The small sculptures she has prepared for the exhibition continue her exploration into how a drawing behaves as the subject itself, as well as asking the viewer to consider the subject contained within the drawing.

Off-white, curled discs of porcelain are placed on a table, each with small drawings of her out of place figures on them. She introduces them by saying: "I still see the sculptures as drawings that have slipped into the space. I wanted to give the sense that they're like a jellyfish out of water, so they can't actually hold their own weight. It goes back to the idea of being caught in a place where you shouldn't really be. They have this embarrassed shame to them. Thinking about what would happen if one of my drawings did slip into the real world, I don't think they'd behave very well. They struggle enough in their own world."

"I am addressing what a drawing actually is, and the world you create on paper," she continues, "You are creating this imaginary world, but then dealing with a drawing in itself in our physical world. So it's the relationship between those worlds, where drawings sit and how they relate to these sculptural forms. The sculptures have these clustered qualities, much the same as my drawings, which I install in clusters too. I did sculpture when I was at college, but it has been the best part of ten years since I had sculpture in a show. But, now I am working with porcelain, which is a whole new material for me. I had in my mind that I would do them in porcelain, and they reacted in my hands in a way that I didn't ever imagine. It was totally unexpected, and quite a challenge."



Rachel rightly points out that, although gaining due attention for her adeptness with a pencil, she is no stranger to working outside the perhaps more comfortable realms of drawing. Indeed, *Rat King* is one standout piece which featured as part of her Northern Art Prize show in 2009, comprising a laser cut gathering of prostrate rats, seemingly joined by their intertwined tails in a circular formation. It is her latest show, however, that she sees the most significant departure from what people might have expected from her before. The themes of discomfort and disorientation persist, but with the use of the moving image she is bringing her subjects more literally to life.

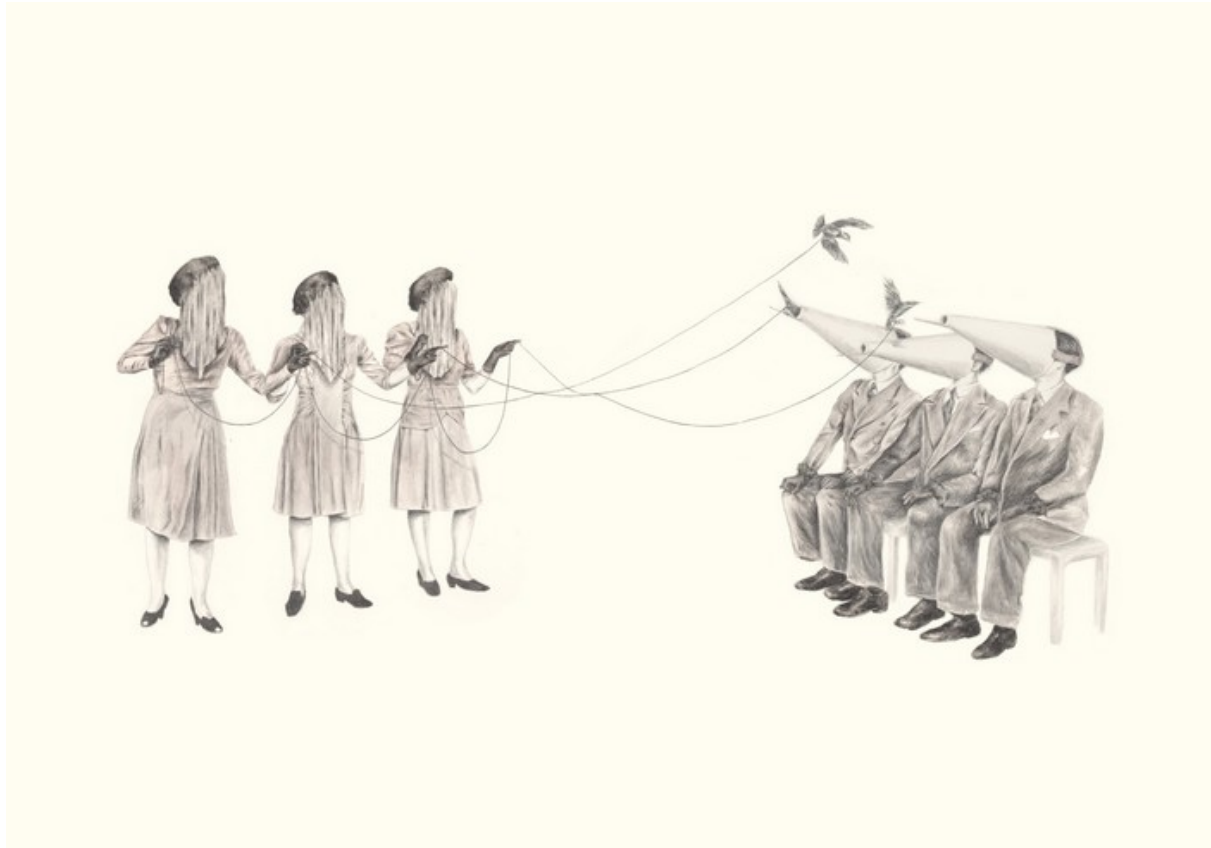


Dancing Devils is one such piece that can be seen for the first time, and Rachel is obviously excited by the direction it is taking her as she keenly points out the mock up standing in her studio. She says: "It's a drawing sandwiched between glass, then a tiny projector behind it, which projects these dancing devils, in an endless loop to no music. It's an image I have worked with before in my first animation, currently on display at Manchester Art Gallery, but I wanted to combine animation with just a straight drawing."

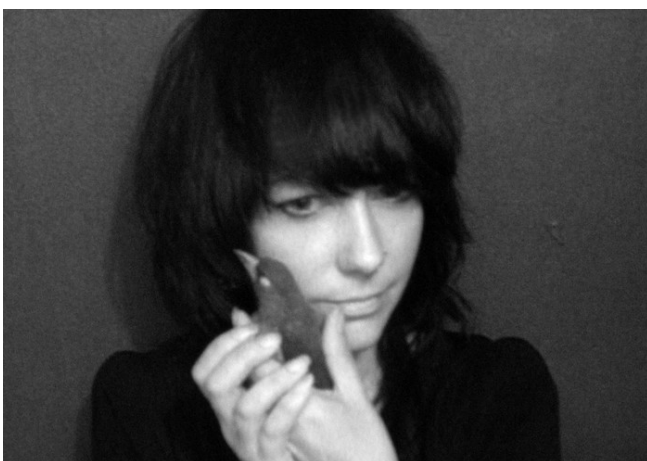
A screen-based animation can also be seen in the show and further explores the human psyche, testing the viewer, finding out what emotions can be provoked by the presence of a motionless character, stirred only by the faintest of breezes. As the indescribable figure stands and waits, trepidation and suspense will pulse into heart of the viewer. Rachel discusses the piece by saying: "You're not waiting for a punch line; it's more about being in a room with this weird character. I had this idea of a very still character, with interventions made only by very natural causes, like the wind through the leaves or these fungal growths. That was inspired by walking round Yorkshire Sculpture Park, spending time with these really grand sculptures. What I am doing is creating this very, very large world in this very small form. It fed into the idea of a static animation, something you feel should move, but it's more about the presence of it. I like the expectation. It's like the relationship of how you view a drawing. It's motionless, but you anticipate movement."

The artist speaks with conviction about her work, and is clear about her own visions and the reactions that she wants to provoke in her audiences. Although some might be repulsed or frightened, there are many who also want to own her work, and Rachel isn't in necessarily in the market for controversy. On the topic of the intended reaction, she explains: "I never make anything to shock. I don't want to challenge people in an aggressive way, but to challenge myself and to invite people to get engaged with it. I do like to leave people with a bit of a nasty taste in their mouth, but I have tried to be really playful too. There's a lot more going on under the surface, with even more layers to some of the new works."

To illustrate the point Rachel produces a new work titled *Alternative Ways of Finding a Mate* where unidentifiable people are positioned with cone-shaped masks on their faces, with only small circular openings at their narrowest end. The openings are just small enough to allow birds to fly into, each connected by tangled string to the fingers of each prospective partner, therefore uniting the bird's owner and the blind receiver at the discretion of the avian matchmakers. It's a vision that she admits could only come in the most bizarre of dreams, but contains a darkly humorous comment on the modern desire to "do away with all that chatting up nonsense."



Before leaving her to continue the deadline-chasing preparations, Rachel looks briefly to the future, giving a glimpse of what ambitions she harbours, shows on the horizon and how far she'll push herself to pursue new challenges, saying: "There are things I have discovered whilst developing this show that I'd really like to continue. I feel like I've only just started on those ideas. I always have ideas for the biggest, most ridiculously expensive installations that exist in my fantasy world. But, really I would just like to continue with the momentum of this show, with two more lined up next year at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London and International 3 in Manchester. There will always be other ideas developing, so I will work until I drop really."



Info: Rachel Goodyear completed BA (Hons) Fine Art at Leeds Metropolitan University in 2000, since when she has been practicing art in Manchester and Salford. She has exhibited regularly in the UK and abroad and is represented by The International 3, Manchester, and Pippy Houldsworth, London.

Rachel's exhibition at Yorkshire Sculpture Park runs between 1st October 2011 – 3rd January 2012. The exhibition features commissioned works alongside recent drawings, including a new series inspired by the physical and imagined landscape at the park resulting in small-scale sculpture.

Images from top: 1) Wiggler (detail), 2) Rat King, 3) Curling Up Into More Comfortable Positions, 4) Installation views from Yorkshire Sculpture Park (c) Jonty Wilde, 5) Alternative Ways of Finding a Mate.