

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



CLAIRE MORGAN

*A tentative strategy for a renewal, or,
wanting to tell you everything and then changing my mind*

Press kit

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Artist's quotes

“Being alive can be beautiful and horrific. Every living thing is in this state of constant transition. I am intrigued by those simultaneous senses of spiritual communion and unpalatable intrusion that come about through awareness of our connectedness, and of our vulnerability.”

“My practice has been focused on how we humans understand and interact with the rest of the natural world, and our unwillingness to acknowledge our absolute lack of autonomy or control. I look at humans as animals, and the complexity of our intellectual dislocation from the landscape that sustains us. We behave as individual entities with fixed identities, but the reality is less clear. The “me” that I was a few days ago no longer exists.”

“In reality there is absolutely nothing chaotic about the processes of nature. We are surrounded by ceaseless rhythmic patterns of such precision and complexity that they are beyond our comprehension.”

“Histories are contrived to serve a particular purpose, and that applies just as much to personal histories. And sometimes it can feel safer, or more convenient, to keep clinging to that which harms you, than to be vulnerable in the face of the truth of things, and sometimes it can take a very long time to even be able to see what is true and what is not.”

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



Portrait of the artist Claire Morgan in her studio. Photo : Claire Morgan Studio
Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Paris, Köln, St. Moritz

Biography

Claire Morgan was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1980. She studied sculpture at Northumbria University in Newcastle, United Kingdom. Grace and beauty, but also absurdity and horror, are palpable throughout her oeuvre. Currently, Morgan is advancing further still in her research and relying on her personal experiences and memories to attain the collective unconscious: *“Being alive can be beautiful and horrific. Every living thing is in this state of constant transition. I am intrigued by those simultaneous senses of spiritual communion and unpalatable intrusion that come about through awareness of our connectedness, and of our vulnerability”*. Her work has been featured in many solo and group exhibitions such as *As I Live and Breathe* at the Horniman Museum in London in 2019, *Stop Me Feeling* at the Frist Art Museum in Nashville in 2017, *The Sound of Silence* at the Het Noordbrabants Museum in Den Bosch in 2016 and *The Gathering Dark* at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in Paris in 2015. Her major retrospective *Joy in the Pain* is currently being showcased at the Saarlandmuseum Moderne Galerie in Saarbrücken, Germany, until 6 February 2022. Her work belongs to major public and private collections such as those of the Centre Pompidou and the Fondation Guerlain in France and the ALTANA Kulturstiftung in Germany. In 2019, she was awarded the 12th *Prix de Dessin* by the Fondation d’art contemporain Florence & Daniel Guerlain. Claire Morgan is represented by Galerie Karsten Greve. She currently lives and works in Gateshead (UK).

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Mourning for real, 2021, Chaffinch skin, polyethylene and nylon, in vitrine (detail), 44.4 x 41.4 x 41.2 cm/17.3 x 16.1 x 16.1 in.
Photo: David Lawson

CLAIRE MORGAN

*A tentative strategy for a renewal, or,
wanting to tell you everything and then changing my mind*

From 16 October to 23 December 2021

Opening on 16 October, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

In the presence of the artist

"I want my work to confront and destabilise the viewer, to encourage them to take responsibility."

Claire Morgan, 2021

Galerie Karsten Greve is delighted to present the new solo exhibition by visual artist Claire Morgan in its Parisian gallery. Designed as an immersive experience, the exhibition *A tentative strategy for a renewal, or, wanting to tell you everything and then changing my mind* unveils her most recent work, including two new large-scale installations, several works in vitrines and many on paper.

A tentative strategy for a renewal, or, wanting to tell you everything and then changing my mind reflects on the pain and inevitability of loss, but celebrates the powerful transformative potential that arises from the ashes of devastation. Morgan's work draws on the cycles in nature to evoke the possibilities that can only occur when we make peace with our own vulnerability: *"My practice has been focused on how we humans understand and interact with the rest of the natural world, and our unwillingness to acknowledge our absolute lack of autonomy or control. I look at humans as*

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

animals, and the complexity of our intellectual dislocation from the landscape that sustains us. We behave as individual entities with fixed identities, but the reality is less clear. The “me” that I was a few days ago no longer exists.”

Morgan studies the catharsis that can occur when we express our fears and our darkest secrets. For the very first time in her work, the artist has replaced taxidermic animals with their skins. Her transition to the use of tanning reflects the need to discover a truth and exorcise her most deeply rooted fears. This practice goes back to prehistory, when animal skins were essential to humans’ survival. In the Victorian era, the activity took on a new meaning to reflect the hold of colonialism and the importance of notions of class and property: animal skins became trophies of excess. The supple skins, stripped from their bony carcasses, look like strange, empty envelopes. The artist associates this complex process with the need to spark a psychological and personal quest: *“When you remove an animal’s skin for taxidermy, the gums are the last point where it remains attached. To see a body turned inside out like that, with the whole skin still attached by the teeth, it’s something that does not leave your memory”.*

To compose her ecosystem, Claire Morgan plays with contrast on several levels. In *Mourning for real* (2021), the polyethylene is sublimated through a colourful harmony, but does not, however, lose its parasitic function, as it erupts from the bird’s skin. The union between animals and plastic refers to mass extinction and the climate crisis. On the other hand, some organic elements, such as seeds, form elegant shapes around animals and hint at the passing of time. The artist thus composes an ode to nature through her interconnected works and various forms of materiality.

On the boundary between violence and vulnerability, notions of balance and tension underpin the whole of the exhibition. Claire Morgan addresses the past and archaic memory through a horn shape, used for the first time and revealed throughout the exhibition in different sizes and through different techniques. In the monumental installation *A tentative strategy for a renewal, or, wanting to tell you everything and then changing my mind* (2021), the larger-than-life horn cannot belong to any existing animal – it could be a mysterious relic of the past. The horn appears to be weighed down by a mass of weightless seeds, its point pressing into the mass as if it were flesh. *“It’s an inherently violent form, but don’t forget that it has no body, that it’s been broken and is now precariously balanced on its breaking point at the end. So it becomes this thing that seems both seductive and powerless”*, Morgan said of this work.

These installations discourse with *Archaeology* (2020-2021), a series of charcoal drawings. The artist introduces a human figure who interacts with a horn, straddling it, gripping onto it and exploring it in repeated attempts to master the unknown form, like a child learning to gather its bearings in a new world. If both entities coexisted, could they mutually support each other? The intimacy between the horn and the figure reveals a new direction in Claire Morgan’s work, closer to humans and their passions. To create this series, the artist draws on her personal experience of loss, trauma and pain, and shares her own secrets with viewers.

The suspended installations and works on paper illustrate a constant opposition between movement and immobility. This tension incites us to make our own choice: to stay in the past or to move forward. Claire Morgan would like everyone to consider the possibilities that can present themselves *“about things that might have happened, or things that could still happen”*.

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



Claire Morgan

Mourning for real
2021

Chaffinch skin, polyethylene and nylon, in vitrine
44.4 x 41.4 x 41.2 cm / 17.3 x 16.1 x 16.1 in

Signed and dated on the border of the base « CM21 »

Inv. #21S03

© Claire Morgan Studio / Photo: David Lawson
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Claire Morgan

Snag

2021

Pastel, pencil and watercolour on paper

37 x 28.3 cm / 14 ½ x 11 in

Recto right bottom signed and dated "CM21"

Inv. #21D04

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Public and private collections (selection)

MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, AU

Ghisla Art Foundation, Locarno, CH

ALTANA Kulturstiftung, Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, DE

Saarlandmuseum Moderne Galerie, Saarbrücken, DE

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, FR

Fondation d'art contemporain Florence et Daniel Guerlain, Paris, FR

Fondation Francès, Senlis, FR

Emerige, Paris, FR

Spaarne Ziekenhuis, Haarlem, NL

Cardiff Bay Partnership, York, UK

Silvie Fleming, London, UK

Awards and grants (selection)

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2019 | Fondation d'art contemporain Daniel et Florence Guerlain, Prix de Dessin, Paris, FR |
| 2007 | Wooda Arts Award, Cornouaille, UK |
| 2006 | Premio Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Prize for Young Sculptors, Fondazione Pomodoro, Milan IT |
| 2004 | Roy Noakes Award, selected by Royal British Society of Sculptors, London, UK |

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Personal exhibitions (selection)

- 2021 *Claire Morgan : A tentative strategy for a renewal, or, wanting to tell you everything and then changing mind*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
Claire Morgan – Joy in the pain, Saarland Museum Modernegalerie, Saarbrücken, DE
Claire Morgan, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, DE
- 2019-2020 *As I live and Breathe*, Horniman Museum, London, UK
- 2018-2019 *Losses*, Maison Deyrolle, Paris, FR
- 2018 *Here is the End of All Things*, Emsdettener Kunstverein, Emsdetten, DE
Recent Lapses in Judgement, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, DE
- 2017 *Recurring Truths*, Galerie Karsten Greve, St. Moritz, CH
Perpetually at the Center, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
Stop Me Feeling, FRIST Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, USA
RESURGENCE - My God-shaped Hole, Fondation Francès, Senlis, FR
- 2017-2016 *The Sound of Silence*, Noordbrabant Museum, s'Hertogenbosch, NL
- 2016 *Claire Morgan and Fine Oceanic & Eskimo Art*, Berney Fine Arts, Basel, CH
Plenty More Fish in the Sea, Musée Jean Lurcat, Angers, FR (in-situ installation)
- 2015 *Act of God / Höhere Gewalt*, Church of Sankt-Peter, Cologne, DE (in-situ installation)
Claire Morgan, Fondation Fernet Branca, Saint Louis, FR
- 2015-2014 *Try again. Fail again. Fail better*, Stadtmuseum Jena, Jena, DE
Try again. Fail again. Fail better, Osthaus Museum Hagen, Hagen, DE
- 2014 *Trappings*, Musée Joseph-Denis, Beaufort-en-Vallée, FR
- 2013-2014 *The Slow Fire*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, DE
Interference, Nässjö Konsthall, Nässjö, SE
- 2012-2013 *Arresting*, Växjö Konsthall, Växjö, SE
Gone to the Seed, Metropolitan Arts Center, Belfast, UK
- 2012 *Quietus*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
- 2011 *No Match*, Helmshore Mills Textile Museum, Lancashire, UK
Ménagerie, Kunstverein Münsterland, Coesfeld, DE
Terminal, Centre for Recent Drawing, London, UK
Under The Sun, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, DE

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- 2010 *About Time*, Hub : National Centre for Craft and Design, Lincolnshire, UK
Life. Blood., Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
- 2008 *Periphery*, James Hockey and Foyer Galleries, Surrey, UK
Gone With the Wind, The Laing Gallery, Newcastle, UK
Fluid, ROLLO Contemporary Art, London, UK
Chasing Rainbows, Selfridges, London, UK
The Fall, The East Room, London, UK
- 2007 *If you go down to the woods today*, The Hospital, London, UK
Head in the Clouds, Wooda Farm Holiday Park, Cornwall, UK
- 2006 *Crowdpleaser*, Persistence Works Studios –Yorkshire Artspace, Sheffield, UK
- 2005 *Hunter Gatherer*, Old Museum Arts Center, Belfast, UK
- 2004 *"All that is solid..."*, Grosvenor Chapel, Mayfair, London, UK
Emotional Response, Lagan Lookout Visitors Centre, Belfast, UK

Collective exhibitions (selection)

- 2021 *MORGAN – RUSSELL – SHAPIRO*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, DE
- 2020 *Re-cyclage/ Sur-cyclage*, Fondation Villa Datriis, L'isle-sur-la-Sorgue, FR
- 2019 *12^e Prix de Dessin Contemporain*, Fondation Daniel et Florence Guerlain, Palais Brongniart, Paris, FR
Nature, Life, Human, MoCA Busan, Busan, KR
OVNi Festival, Nice, FR
Accrochage, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
Bêtes de scène, Villa Datriis, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, FR
Les Rives de l'Art, Biennale Éphémère, Château de Monbazillac, Monbazillac, FR
ARTENREICH – Insekten in der Kunst, Museum Sinclair-Haus, Bad Homburg, DE
Elements, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
Artcurial Autriche, Vienna, AT
- 2018 *Futur Antérieurs*, Maison Guerlain, Paris, FR
Tension, Centre d'art de Lancy, Villa Bernasconi, Lancy, CH
De fils ou de fibres, Centre d'art Meymac, Meymac, FR
Audubon, Then and Now, Biggs Museum, Dover, USA
- 2016 *Brave New World*, Biennale Nationale de la Sculpture Contemporaine, Trois Rivières, Quebec, CA
Cause and Effect, The National Centre for Craft & Design, Lincolnshire, UK
- 2015 *A Piece of Time. Avesta Art*, Verket Museum, Avesta, SE
The Mystery of Birds, Venue Energie AD, Linz, AT

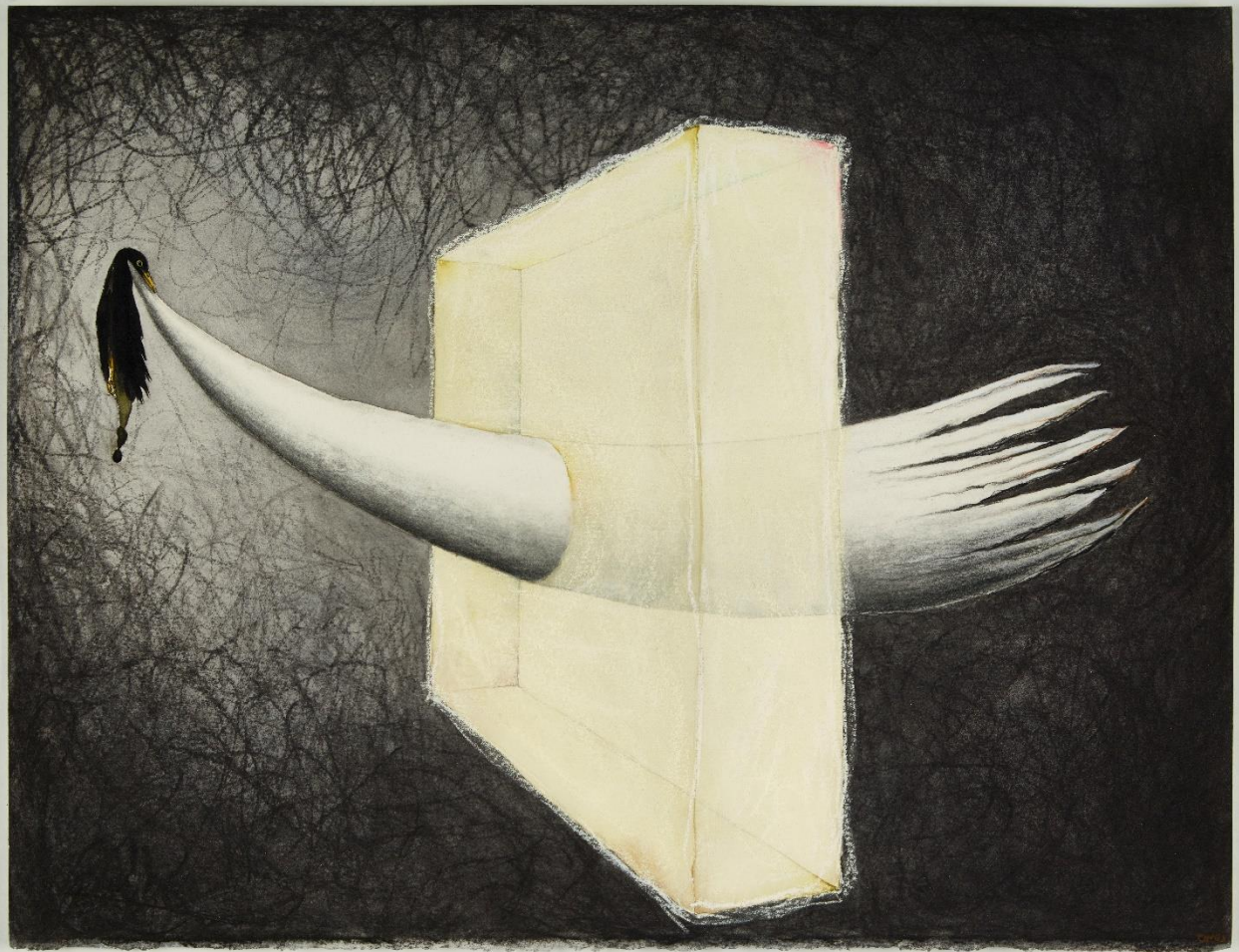
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- Les Chasses Nouvelles – Claire Morgan. The Gathering Dusk*, Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris, FR
- 2014 *Plastic Age. Faszination und Schrecken eines Materials in Kunst und Wissenschaft*, ERES Stiftung, Munich, DE
The Tourist, Fellbrigg Hall, Norwich, UK
- 2013 *Wunderland*, Château de Rue, Fribourg, CH
Beastly Hall, Hall Place, Bexley, UK
Fiac hors les Murs, Ménagerie, Jardin des Plantes, Paris, FR
- 2012 *100 Sculptures Animalières: Bugatti, Pompon, Giacometti*, Musée des Années 1930, Paris, FR
Making Waves: International Contemporary Art from the Saatchi Collection, Hyatt Regency, London, UK
Asthetik Der Natur, ALTANA-Kulturiftungn Sinclair Haus, Bad Homburg, DE
Monanism, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, AU
Death, SHOWstudio, London, UK
The Bones of My Hand, The Last Tuesday Society, London, UK
Miniartextial 2012 – Agora, Villa Olmo, Como, IT
- 2011 *On paper III*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
Bêtes Off, La Conciergerie, Paris, FR
Bestes, Bestiaux, et Bestioles, Château D'Oiron, Plaine-et-Vallées, FR
Repetition, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne, UK
Counterpoint, Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, UK
Suspense, EX3 Centre for Contemporary Art, Florence, IT
Disconnected Everyday Tensions, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, UK
Anthro[physis], Rivera & Rivera Gallery, West Hollywood, Los Angeles, USA
Compulsive, Obsessive, Repetitive, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne, UK
Nature - Contemporary Art from the collection of the Altana Cultural Foundation, Hagen, DE
- 2010 *Dead or Alive*, Museum of Art and Design, New York, USA
On&on, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, ES
Spain Heart of Glass, 20 Hoxton Square, London, UK
Enragés, Fondation Francès, Senlis, FR
Resilience, Espace d'art contemporain La Tôlerie, Clermont Ferrand, FR
- 2009 *Consumer*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR
Editions, Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, UK
Caught In A Moment, ROLLO Contemporary Art, London, UK
Building With Colour, Gallery North, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
- 2008 *EChO Wanted*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
Landscape, 18 @ 108, Royal British Society of Sculptors, London, UK
Domestico, Ierimonti Gallery, Milan, IT
Jerwood Drawing Prize 2007, Jerwood Space, London, UK

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- 2007 *Radiance 07*, Glasgow's International Festival of Light, Glasgow, UK
Die Green, Live Pretty?, Pia Getty, London, UK
Miniartextil 2007, Church of San Francesco, Arte & Arte, Como, IT
Jerwood Drawing Prize 2007, Jerwood Space, London, UK
Waste and The Natural World, The Gallery @ Adventure Ecology, London, UK
Vital Signs, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK
Miniartextiel 2007, Chiesa di San Francesco, Como, IT
- 2006 *Your Gallery @ The Guardian*, The Guardian Gallery & Saatchi, London, UK
Unnatural Selection, Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, Shropshire, UK
Inside Out at Cragside, Cragside House, Northumberland, UK
- 2005 *Out There, (CAN 05)*, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, UK
Sculpture at Hebden Bridge, Hardcastle Crag, Yorkshire, UK
Bolwick Arts 3, Bolwick Hall, Norfolk, UK
- 2004 *RBS Bursary 2004*, RBS Gallery, 108 Centre, London, UK
Exposure, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
- 2003 *12 x 12*, University Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
- 2002 *Konturen*, Kloster Bentlage, Rheine, DE

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Claire Morgan

Piercing
2021

Charcoal, pastel, pencil, watercolour on paper
28.3 x 36.7 cm / 11 ¼ x 14 ½ in.

Recto right bottom signed and dated "CM21"

Inv. #21D11

© Claire Morgan Studio / Photo: David Lawson
Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Paris, Köln, St. Moritz

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Claire Morgan

A tentative strategy for a renewal, or, wanting to tell you everything and then changing my mind

2021

Fusain, pastel, crayon et aquarelle sur papier

28.3 x 36.7 cm

Signé et daté au recto en bas à droite "CM21"

Inv. #21D12

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Publications by Galerie Karsten Greve

- 2017 *Perpetually at the Center*, essay by Lucia Pesapane, exhibition catalogue [Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, France], Paris, Galerie Karsten Greve, 2017
- 2014 *Claire Morgan, The Slow Fire*, essays by Darren C. Ambrose, Stefanie Kreuzer and Tom Hembra, exhibition catalogue [Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Germany], Cologne, Galerie Karsten Greve, 2014

Other publications

- 2017 *Claire Morgan: Stop Me Feeling*, essay by Trinita Kennedy, exhibition catalogue [The Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, USA], The Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, 2017
- 2016 *Claire Morgan. The Sound of Silence*, essay by Darrem Ambrose, introduction written by Charles de Mooj, exhibition catalogue [Het Noordbrabantts Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, Pays Bas], 's-Hertogenbosch, Het Noordbrabantts Museum, 2016
- 2015 *Claire Morgan. Try Again, Fail Again, Fail Better*, essay by Vincent Schmidt, exhibition catalogue [Osthaus Museum, Hagen, Allemagne], Hagen, Neuer Folkwang Verlag, 2015
Claire Morgan, essay by Erik Stephan, interview by Pierre-Jean Sugier, exhibition catalogue, [Fondation Fernet Branca, Saint Louis, France], Saint Louis, Editions de Saint-Louis, 2015
- 2014 *Claire Morgan. Act of God*, essay by Guido Schlimback, exhibition catalogue [Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, Cologne, Germany], Cologne, Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 2014
Claire Morgan, Trappings, essay by Darren C. Ambrose and Jean-Charles Taugourdeau, exhibition catalogue [Musée Joseph-Denais, Beaufort-en-Vallée, France], Beaufort-en-Vallée, Musée Joseph-Denais, 2014
- 2007 *Crowdpleaser*, essay by Deborah Kermode, interview by Ele Forsyth, Sunderland, Art Editions North, 2007

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Commissions (selection)

- 2016 *Human nature*, National Biennale of Contemporary Sculpture, Quebec, CA
Plenty More Fishes in the sea, Musée Jean Lurçat, Angers, FR
Murmurations, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, Wilson Real Estate, London, UK
- 2014 *Porcelain*, Nina Ricci, Paris, FR
- 2013 *Undercurrent*, Spaarne Hospital, Oncology Center, Hoofddorp, NL
- 2012 *No Match*, Helmshore Mills Textile Museum, Lancashire, UK
- 2010 *To Woo You*, Town Hall Hotel, London, UK
- 2009 *Canopy*, The Big Chill Festival 2009, Herefordshire, UK
Pressure Makes Diamonds, Assembly Square, Cardiff Bay, UK
- 2008 *Spooning*, Sheffield Millennium Galleries, Sheffield, UK
Re(a)d, HLC, Telford, UK
- 2007 *Vital Signs*, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK
- 2006 *A New Moon* (below), voyage à Bristol Broadmeads, Bristol, UK
Rising Tide, Temporary Address, Blyth, Northumberland, UK
- 2005 *A New Moon*, Whitstable Harbour, curated by Canterbury Council, UK
Shift, Tynemouth Station, Tyne and Wear, curated by Nexus, UK
- 2004 *Leave*, Westonbirt Festival of the Garden, Westbonbirt, UK
Parallel, Grainger Market, Art in the Market, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

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Claire Morgan

Archaeology (11607)

2021

Charcoal on paper

25.4 x 25.4 cm / 10 x 10 in

Recto right bottom signed and dated "CM21"

Verso bottom middle numbered "11607"

Inv. #21D05

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Claire Morgan

You asked me if anyone had ever broken my heart and I thought of my mother

2021

Lithograph on paper

Ed. 1/25

38 x 56 cm / 15 x 22 in

Recto right bottom signed and dated "CM21"

Inv. #21P01

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DEAD OWLS AND BLUE BOTTLE FLIES

By Heather Swan in *The Learned Pig*, ROT, published online on October 18 in 2020.

When you enter a gallery transformed by the artist Claire Morgan, you are immediately transported to a magical place that unsettles your basic human understandings—a floating world that defies gravity and rational thought. The body of a dead fox hovers midair surrounded by a precisely measured cube made of suspended bits of ripped plastic. A sphere of thistle seeds wraps a diaphanous force field around a falling crow that seems to be frozen in time, endlessly falling and also not falling. A plane of gold flies floats above a dead chaffinch as if carrying his spirit upward. The world she creates is beautiful—in its composition, its airiness, its patterns—and is wildly discomfiting at once. Death and life intertwined; gravity and time stop; and creatures designated as pests are presented as lovely, as an integral part of the constellation of beings. Here, you enter the deeper mystery of interconnection between the human and nonhuman worlds in this moment of global environmental devastation.

Many of Claire Morgan's installations feature a central taxidermied animal surrounded by an atmosphere created by dead insects or flower petals or bits of plastic hung on invisible threads. In *Here is the End of All Things*, Morgan has created three cubes out of suspended thistle seeds and one out of bluebottle flies. A barn owl appears to have tunneled through the first three cubes and is arrested at edge of the fourth, with wings open, as if caught mid-flight, perhaps in the moment of exiting this realm. The dead owl looks strangely alive, immortal.

I am not accustomed to picking up newly-dead animals, like Claire Morgan. I do have piles of individual bird feathers and nests, shells, and even the skull of a racoon on my mantle at home, but I have not ever done the work of picking up an animal who had recently died.

On a canoe trip this summer, around the edge of a marsh, I noticed an awkward splay of long, mottled feathers lying still in a tuft of grasses on a tiny island no more than six feet wide. My friend and I moved our canoe closer to investigate. Face down with wings spread wide and head pressed to the ground, a great horned owl seemed to have fallen from the sky like a crashing plane. My chest tightened. The ungraceful end of such majesty seemed wrong somehow. There was no sign of violence. What had happened? The soft small feathers by her ears moved slightly in the night air. We could not tarry too much longer or it would be dark. I could not stop thinking about the owl. In a week's time, I went back, and a sprinkle of tiny blue flowers had bloomed on the minuscule island. Forget-me-nots. I vowed to return for the skeleton later, once the insects and time had done their work. Unlike Claire, I had no idea how to preserve the owl, but I wanted to honor her somehow.

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

I knew little about the practices of dead animal preservation, but I teach on a campus that has a remarkable zoological collection. Inside one of our large stone edifices are boxes filled with mammal and reptile skeletons, shelves covered with glass jars full of dead fish and amphibians, and drawers filled with extinct birds and the hides of common rodents. “Bones and skins”, our curator once explained to me during a visit, “are useful for different kinds of research.” It’s like a library of dead bodies, nonhuman ones. A few of the skeletons are articulated: a six-foot-long sea turtle from the Galapagos, a chimpanzee, a bat. And several others have been preserved to look like they are perched or poised on pedestals: a wolf, a beaver, a great horned owl.

Many of these animals are endangered, some on the extinction list, some already gone. All of these zoological specimens died naturally. Dead animals can tell us a lot about what is killing them. Some have been shot, others sickened by diseases, others poisoned. They can also tell us about environmental change over time. At the Field Museum in Chicago, the amount of soot found in bird feathers told a story about air pollution over the Rust Belt in the early 1900s. There are so many stories.

In the “skins” preservation room, I watched a woman turn a warbler inside out, slicing the belly first, emptying the body, peeling the skin back carefully so as not to damage the feathers, and then preparing it to be stuffed with cotton. The “bones” preparation involved a flesh eating beetle colony. The curator and I walked down a musty cement tunnel into a chamber with several large tubs. The beetles would not eat live flesh, she assured me, so we were not in any danger.

The label ‘pest’ gives us permission to kill creatures without any sense of guilt.

When I found the owl, I knew I could not do any of that, so I thought I would let nature do its work, the insects and the fungi so efficient at helping things decompose and return to soil. I assumed the bones would remain, and I could take the skeleton then.

The great horned owl was not a common sighting to us. Lately, I have been watching the juvenile barred owls in the woods near my home. Their already huge wings are nearly silent as they drop to the ground to hunt. Several times, locked in the gaze of their large piercing eyes—eyes that could spot prey scores of feet from the ground—I felt relieved I wasn’t a rabbit, a shrew, or a mouse. Barred owls and great horned owls eat many of the same things, but the great horned owl is the larger apex predator. A young barred owl could be attacked by a great horned owl, but the great horned owl has few enemies here. We described the death scene to a falconer we knew and she said the death was most likely due to pesticide poisoning.

The National Institute of Health defines pesticides as “chemical substances used to prevent, destroy, repel or mitigate any pest ranging from insects (i.e., insecticides), rodents (i.e., rodenticides) and weeds (herbicides) to microorganisms (i.e., algicides, fungicides or bactericides)”. It goes on to say that over one billion pounds of pesticides are used in the United State each year and approximately 5.6 billion pounds worldwide.

Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines a pest this way: “a plant or animal detrimental to humans or human concerns (such as agriculture or livestock production).”

To Claire Morgan, this very definition is problematic. She told me, “Whenever I am making my work, I am using bodies of animals, and quite often these are animals that humans regard as pests....We are animals, we are part of the natural world. We tend to behave as if we live ON the natural world, like we are separate entities

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

that can use it, take advantage of it, that it is our resource, when really the earth is one huge organism that we are part of.”

The label “pest” gives us permission to kill creatures within the same system we are a part of without any sense of guilt. Our stories and myths have demonized so many creatures: spiders, bats, mice, crows, wasps, snakes, even dandelions. In our attempts to eliminate these beings for our convenience and comfort, we not only break strands of a fragile web, we destroy countless other beings in the process. Bees, frogs, songbirds, owls...even humans can be damaged by this killing practice. The Audubon Society reports on the horrific deaths of owls who have died from internal hemorrhaging after eating rodenticides. Many others are sickening slowly.

Claire Morgan’s work tells us a new story. Her pieces honor all of the animals in them. Pests are just creatures that are mortal like we are. They are part of our interconnected world. They are kin and we have created this imbalance.

The baby barred owls will be hunting further from their home soon, over yards covered in pesticides.

In one installation, called *Elephant in the Room*, a nebula of tiny pieces of torn paper (that she sees as a symbol of our obsession with reckless consumption) creates the shape of a fourteen-meter long North Atlantic right whale. The enormity of the sculpture is balanced by the immaterial ethereal aspect of the giant mammal as it swims above you through the air. Ideas of impermanence and the danger of a looming extinction come into my head, but the piece also offers another more haunting sensation as if this might be a sacred moment caught by an artist, the whale spirit living on. A ghost whale perhaps with a warning.

The poet and artist Ian Boyden once told me a story about traveling to Mitla, an archeological site in the state of Oaxaca in Mexico. As he walked along the edge of one of the elaborately carved stone buildings, he was suddenly surrounded by thousands of white moths fluttering madly around him. For a moment he was blinded and also completely dazzled by the frenzy of wings. Moments later they disappeared, and Ian noticed that a guard who stood nearby had seen what happened was laughing heartily. “You looked like a cloud,” the guard said. “The clouds are the intermediaries of the gods. Looks like they were trying to take you!” Reflecting back, Ian said at that time he was “too heavy”. He had “no spiritual helium”. They had to put him back down.

The whale in Claire Morgan’s work seems to be light enough. I think of all the animals facing extinction and how none of them have caused this crisis. I carry the weight of that.

The baby barred owls will be hunting further from their home soon, over yards covered in pesticides. The other night I sat on the ground in the dark under a tree where one had perched. I watched her swoop from branch to branch, her elegant brown and white wings riding the breeze. Then she would pause to peer at the ground intently, often looking directly at me, perplexed perhaps by my rapt attention. And then suddenly, she dropped down to the ground just a few feet from me, staring straight into my eyes. I held my breath, heart beating wildly at this gift. And then just as suddenly she took to the air again, the wind from her wings whooshing over my face. How, then, could I do anything but tell her story, the story of her radical trust, her faith that this human would do her no harm?

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

DAMN°

ARRESTED ANIMATION: Claire Morgan's vanity of supposing significance.

By Anna Samsom in *Damn Magazine*, published in October 22 in 2017.

A male peacock, its pristine feathers fanned out, is lying on top of its female partner in Claire Morgan's solo show at Galerie Karsten Greve in Paris. Five large interlocking circles, fashioned from bluish and brightly-coloured confetti-like petals of plastic, burst into atomised euphoria above the mating birds. Titled *The Vanity of Supposing Significance*, the taxidermy installation at first glance seems celebratory. But, as with many of the Morgan's works, it is heavily ironic – in this case, of western people's self-indulgent lifestyles.

'What I've been preoccupied with for a while is all the horrific violence in the world, like the refugee crisis and the Grenfell Tower fire in London, and how easy it is to forget and just continue your personal indulgence,' says Morgan, 37, about the starting point for the piece. 'The peacocks having sex and the fireworks over their heads is about the significance that we attach to fleeting things and how that can be captivating. It's a beautiful bad joke.'

Our conversation is taking place at the opening of Morgan's exhibition, *Perpetually at the Centre*. Several visitors are walking round, intrigued by her painstakingly labour-intensive work. 'Until this exhibition, I've predominantly used animals that share our environment – like crows and foxes – or that live on the periphery of cities,' the Northern Irish artist explains. 'But the peacocks were perfect for this piece because I wanted it to be showy. They're beautiful animals but it was incredibly difficult to get the tail layered out in the right spirals.'

In another sculpture, *A Lesson in Failure*, two foxes are playfully fighting each other, their footprints scratched into the mud. 'I was holding real foxes and pushing their feet into the mud,' Morgan says, laughing. The foxes are in a geometric grid delineated by suspended nylon lines of meticulously threaded dandelion seeds. A flurry of seeds behind them gives the impression that they have kicked up the undergrowth and run into a clearing, where shafts of light are beaming down. 'I was thinking of how sunlight filters through the trees,' says Morgan. 'The idea of landscape has become more important to me and I've been looking at scenarios for the animals.'

Morgan's fascination with nature harks back to her childhood near Belfast. 'Belfast is so small that in 15 minutes from the city centre you're surrounded by farmers' fields and countryside,' explains Morgan, who studied Fine Art (Sculpture) at the University of Northumbria in Newcastle. Her early installations, from 2002 - 2003, were composed of fresh fruits, such as a room filled with two thousand suspended strawberries. Morgan threaded them one by one onto nylon threads to create an ephemeral, perishable environment, the strawberries rotting over the duration of her exhibition.

'My work has always been about the passing of time and change,' she says. 'With the huge, room-filling installations, I wanted to scare people and make them feel uncomfortable. The process of suspending things captured my attention and, as I became more skilled, the work became more precise. I wanted to control what role the animals took and that led me to taxidermy.'

Morgan began learning the craft of taxidermy in 2008, setting herself the challenge of finding a way to connect it with the suspended elements. The first piece was *Fantastic Mr Fox* – a fox entering a tilted cube dotted with tiny pieces of torn, black polythene bags. An arrangement of plastic fragments on the ground evoked the cube's shadow. The situation of arrested animation is characteristic of Morgan's work. 'Having an animal there makes us see a narrative, and there's a formal relationship between that and the contrived,

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geometric and precise elements,' she says, adding that the employment of plastic is meant to be unsettling. 'It has a superficial prettiness but is cheap, horrible stuff that has a suffocating presence.'

After a few years living in London, Morgan recently relocated to Gateshead, northeast England, to be nearer the countryside. She does the taxidermy herself and says that the animals are mostly roadkill, birds which have flown into windows or, in the case of the peacocks, have died in captivity. 'It's quite strange to work with birds that have never flown in the sky,' she notes. Certain sanctuaries and breeders call her when creatures have died, enquiring if she wants to collect them. Additionally, Morgan's own five cats bring her mice and rats. 'I've got at least a couple of hundred things in my three freezers,' she exclaims, giggling. 'I'm making myself sound mad! There's a badger that an assistant of mine found dead on a roadside a few years ago. I've still not figured out what to do with it.'

Besides the installations, Morgan makes smaller pieces in vitrines, such as *To an End* – a blackbird perched on a branch and encased in a glow of orange blossom. 'With the vitrine pieces, every thread is threaded through the animal, so it's a slow, complicated process that demands patience,' says Morgan, who makes several sketches, combining shapes, colours and materials, before beginning the taxidermy and suspended elements. Another piece spells out a phrase from Rutger Hauer's monologue in *Blade Runner* (1982) – 'All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain' – through dandelion seeds. 'The titles of my work are really important and some- times appear before the visual side, so it seemed a natural progression to introduce text,' explains Morgan, who has a concurrent show, *Resurgence – My God-Shaped Hole* at Fondation d'Entreprise Francès in Senlis, northern France, featuring mostly 'black-and-white pieces'.

Certainly, Morgan's works combine a poetic sense of fragility with violence and death. Asked which artists have inspired her, she cites Francis Bacon, Cy Twombly, Joan Mitchell, Joseph Beuys, Wolfgang Laib and Anselm Kiefer, as well as minimalism and Arte Povera. And outside of the art world, she is an enthusiastic fan of the musicians Bjork and Aphex Twin, and the American writer David Foster Wallace. 'Bjork in particular has been an inspiration, since I first heard her over 20 years ago,' says Morgan. 'She is such a unique and incredibly strong creative force.' However, it is nature that inspires Morgan the most. 'Exploring the landscape seems to be where my ideas come from,' she says. 'There's something unpredictable and intriguing about the darkness inside a forest.'

Lately, Morgan has been working more on paintings, too. While some depict landscapes, others reveal an influence of abstract minimalist art, with grey rectangles painted onto a white background and birds embedded in the canvas, if they have accidentally crashed into it. Morgan allows herself more spontaneity and freedom with the paintings than with the sculptures. 'The forms of my sculptures are designed beforehand, so it's nice to make a mess with the paintings,' she remarks.

Regarding the recurring themes in her practice, she says, 'We want to pretend that we're immortal and that death doesn't affect us. The process of surrounding ourselves with more stuff is directly related to our unwillingness to confront the situation that we're animals and are going to die.'

There's a Shakespearean sense of tragedy and comedy in Morgan's work. The taxidermy animals in her sculptures are stand-ins for all of us: mortal beings that, depending on the moment, may behave like preening peacocks, cunning foxes, house sparrows or wise owls.

Claire Morgan: Perpetually at the Centre, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, until 23 December 2017
galerie-karsten-greve.com

Claire Morgan: Resurgence – My God-Shaped Hole, Fondation d'Entreprise Francès, Senlis, until 23 December 2017
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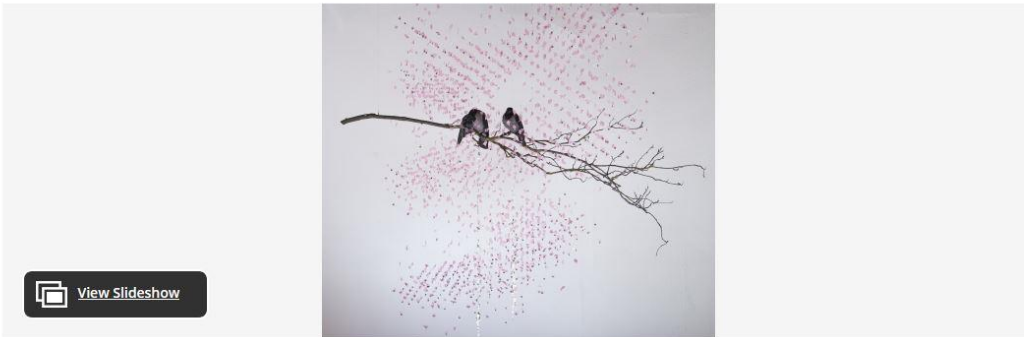
BLOUINARTINFO

By *Blouin Art Info*, published online on October 26 in 2017.

VISUAL ARTS / GALLERIES / ARTICLE

"Perpetually at the Centre" by Claire Morgan at Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | OCTOBER 26, 2017



Life Support, 2017, Hooded crows (taxidermy), wood, plastic foil, nylon, lead, color, 300 x 182 x 100 cm - Claire Morgan (Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris)

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The relationship between self and violence come under investigation in "Perpetually at the Centre," the latest collection of works by Claire Morgan. This solo exhibition, by the world famous visual artist of Irish origins, is currently being presented at the Galerie Karsten Greve in Paris and will be there until December 23, 2017.

This exhibition showcases Morgan's latest work that includes four suspended installations consisting of animal taxidermy accommodated in synthetic materials, representing the dichotomy between the natural and synthetic worlds. There are also new compositions on glass and one of them has text written on it. Through these works the artist investigates human relationship with nature and the destruction of it through progression of human civilisation. His taxidermy animals are fixed, though there is a motion, which signifies the relation between life and death and as if the animals have adapted to an artificial world. Her work reflects on the vastness of nature, oceans, meadows, and mountains, in front of which human presence is infinitesimal. Recent tragic events worldwide also affect the artist; the Ocean of Hope becomes the Angel of Death for thousands of refugees, especially children.

The arrangement of the exhibition is guided by the personal conflict of emotions within Claire Morgan, where the will and battle for self-preservation is guided by passion and violence. The works are displayed according to pairs of ideas — the self and violence; the passage of time and supremacy; the fear of darkness and drowning; and fire and death. Her taxidermy works represent the discrepancy between the act itself and death, where dead animals appear to be alive. This dichotomy is present in all of her art works, and her paintings show body parts of animals with ritualistic symbols.

Claire Morgan was born in 1980 in Belfast in Northern Ireland, and she lives and works in Gateshead in England. Her works have been showcased in many exhibitions across Europe as well as the United States. Her installations and drawings have been included in many international public and private collections such as Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Australia; Foundation ALTANA in Germany; and Collection Guerlain in France.

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BLOUIN modernpainters

By *Blouin Art Info*, published online in 2017.

'Claire Morgan: Perpetually at the Centre' At Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris

This exhibition, on view through December 23, showcases the artist's latest work, which includes four suspended installations consisting of animal taxidermy set in synthetic materials, representing the dichotomy between the natural and synthetic world and highlighting human damage to the environment. There are also new compositions on glass and one of them has text written on it. Through these works, the

artist investigates the human relationship with nature and the destruction of it through progression of human civilization. The animals presented in her work are fixed, though there is a motion, that signifies the relationship between life and death and as if the animals have adapted to an artificial world. Her work reflects the vastness of nature, the ocean, the meadows, the mountains, in front of which human presence is

infinitesimal. The recent tragic events worldwide also influence the artist, the ocean of hope becomes the angel of death for thousands of refugees, especially children. The arrangement of the exhibition is guided by the personal conflict of emotions within Morgan, where the will and battle for self-preservation is guided by passion and violence.

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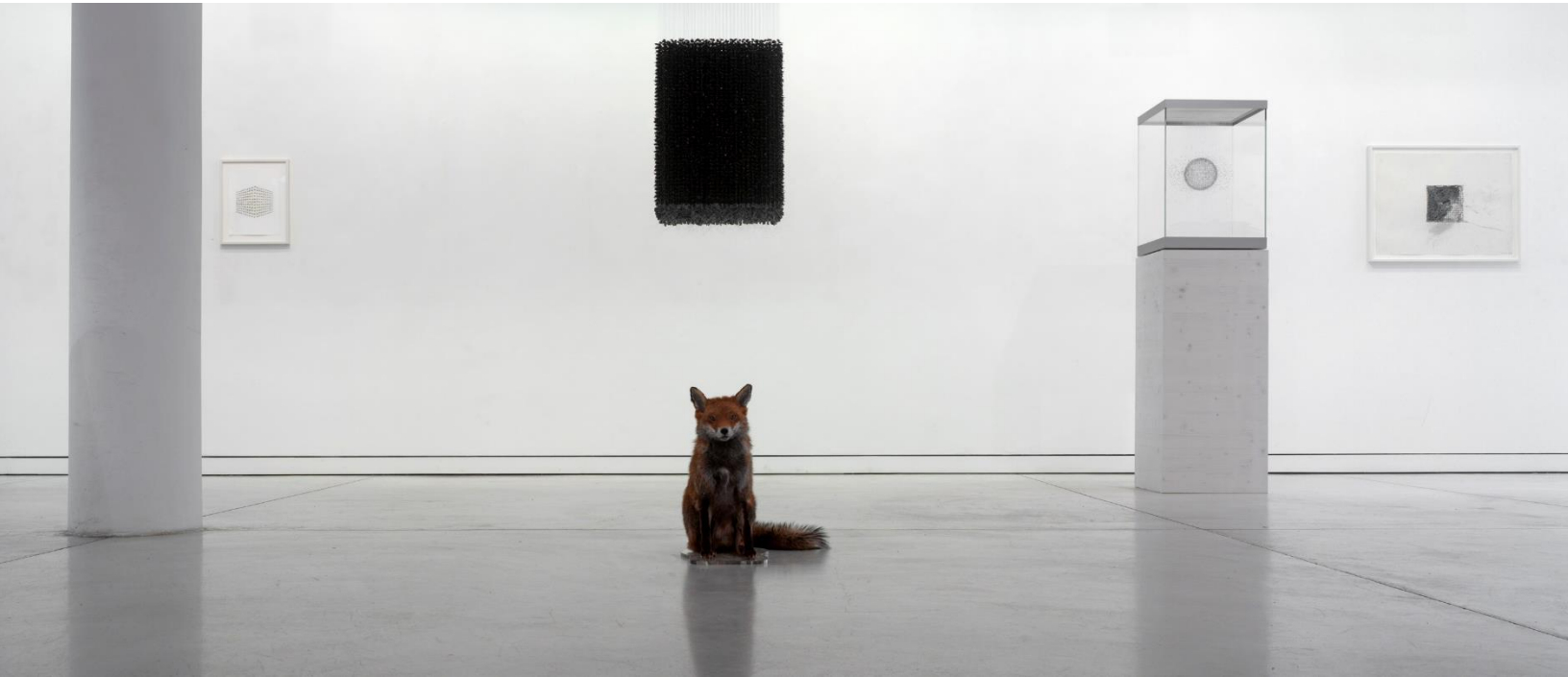
<http://www.galerie-karsten-greve.com/>

Claire Morgan's
Beacon (detail),
2017. Canaries
(taxidermy),
polythene,
bones, nylon,
lead, cob, paint,
300 X 98 X
188 cm



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