

EXHIBITIONS Michelle Molinari *Here and After* 1st March 2016 - 19th March 2016

Michelle Molinari is a painter, printmaker and taxidermy artist. Her work thematically focuses upon and encompasses the notions of death, memorialisation and observation through the genre of taxidermy. Here, she looks to blur the divisions that exist between these artistic disciplines by incorporating them within a single installation and explore the relationships that are created between the image and object.

A Victorian College of the Arts graduate, Molinari was awarded the Fiona Myer Award and the Majlis Encouragement Award in 2012. She exhibited in Flinders Lane Gallery's annual emerging artist exhibition Exploration 13, and was announced joint winner of the FLG Emerging Artists Encouragement Award. Molinari held a highly anticipated and successful first solo exhibition with Flinders Lane Gallery in 2014, and in the same year was announced as a finalist in the Eutick Still Life Award. In December 2014 Molinari was announced the winner of the Graeme Hildebrandt Foundation Travel Grant, and for this upcoming solo exhibition she showcases a new body of work inspired by residencies undertaken in New York and Florence.

'As a young girl, still learning how to tune out from my teachers, I remember gazing out of my classroom window towards a group of sparrows foraging in the quiet garden. I don't think I'd ever really watched a bird that intently before. Fluttering light and free, I was totally captivated by their capricious energy. Their movement spoke to me of the pure joy of being. That night when I described to my mother the qualities of those small happy birds, she laughed heartily. She told me they were just common sparrows, plain and insignificant, nothing remarkable at all. Mediating my emotional response to that memory now, the feeling of deep disenchantment her laughter gave me, I can almost see the life dropping out of their little bodies, the air vanishing from under their wings.

The title of Michelle Molinari's latest exhibition, *Here and After*, draws attention to the often oblivious nature of our relationships with common garden variety creatures; of how they are appreciated, understood and remembered. With death functioning as the primary point of contact between subject and viewer, the lifeless bodies of Molinari's birds press up against society's capacity for indifference.

Perhaps best known for her skill as a taxidermist and painter of flamboyant exotic birds, this series has been intentionally limited to a group of restrained death portraits and small wax body casts. These naturalistic images of the inanimate and corporeal allows for an unsettling paradox in their reception; they are at once strikingly beautiful and yet thoroughly disconcerting. Her highly detailed oil paintings, limited to a muted



Michelle Molinari
Here and After We Come Together 2016
oil on linen
102cm x 76cm , 137 x 112cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Nell 2015
oil on linen
76cm x 102cm , 112 x 137cm framed

palette of grey, brown and cream, reveal the truth of mortality; clawed feet stiffly point skyward, eye sockets contain a black nothingness, necks and chests flop and bend limply. Without any classical tropes or nostalgic devices these purely factual accounts of death, shrouded in darkness, suggest a moment of quiet mourning, of genuine loss and remembrance.

The accompanying wax sculptures reference the ancient practice of death masks, as well as suggesting the somewhat macabre quality of 17th century anatomical wax models. Through her use of overtly fleshy tones and sharp, clinical details, the visceral nature of these corpses is utterly unmistakable. A series of confronting emotional responses – a simultaneous sense of sorrow, wonder and repulsion – is triggered.

This uncanny reception offers a key insight into the core intention of *Here and After*. A question of value emerges. Why uphold the memory of a sparrow? Why hold onto the death cast of something so common, so irrelevant? Molinari sees more than just the ubiquitous. She sees that 'these animals have a history of their own, a sense of their loss and their resistance. I wanted to capture a past and present and offer an additional reality to them.'

The Flemish painter Frans Snyder was among the first to nuance the 'dead animal' still life. Within his masterpieces swans, peacocks and other exotic fowl can be seen hanging, lifeless yet utterly beautiful, from hunters hooks or drooping over the edge of market stalls, these sorts of game signifying the wealth of a select few. His superb treatment of plumage, his ability to capture the graceful curves of each creature's body, demonstrates a keen observation of both natural beauty and the realities of death.

Molinari's skilful rendition of feather and form confirms the undeniable influence of Snyder on her practice, but instead of reserving her gaze solely for the splendid or desirable, she has chosen to look down at the small overlooked fatalities, the quiet and yet essential natural world that surrounds us everyday, to ask the question, "Who will remember them?"

Essay by Phe Luxford 2016

[MICHELLE MOLINARI PROFILE](#)
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Michelle Molinari
Birds of a Feather 2015
 oil on linen
 50cm x 60cm , 70.8 x 80.96cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Flock Together 2015
 oil on linen
 50cm x 60cm , 70.8 x 80.96cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Found Fatality White Rock Dove 2016
 oil on linen
 98cm x 71cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Found Fatality Starling 2016
 oil on linen
 98cm x 71cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Found Fatality Quarrion 2016
 oil on linen
 71cm x 98cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Found Fatality Wood Pigeon 2016
 oil on linen
 71cm x 98cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Found Fatality Black Bird 2016
 oil on linen
 71cm x 98cm framed



Michelle Molinari
Found Fatality Spotted Dove 2016
 oil on linen
 71cm x 98cm framed



Michelle Molinari

Found Fatalities 2016

wax, natural pigment and black glass beads

cm x cm dimensions variable

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