

Irish Poet Jessica Traynor's Opening Speech for Margo Banks' New Exhibition

Crow Voice, Fox Voice.. Wolf Voice by Margo Banks

"I'm so happy to be here to launch Crow Voice, Fox Voice..Wolf Voice, the stunning new exhibition by Margo Banks. My name is Jessica Traynor and I'm a poet. Although I work with word, image and symbol are at the heart of everything I do, so it was a pleasure to immerse myself in the dynamic world of Margo's art.

Our world is threaded through with the voices of animals. As I write this, a blackbird somewhere outside is calling; not the ornate song of morning, but a repeated descending note like a gate hinge swinging in the breeze. Juvenile magpies are heckling each other in the branches of the Scot's Pine. And all of this is taking place in a normal suburb in north Dublin, all of it unnoticed except for in those moments we choose to isolate a sound from the wash of background noise.

Looking at Margo Banks' dynamic and intimate portraits of hares, deer, rooks, foxes, bears and wolves, I find myself thinking about animals, and their voices, and their language. The animals captured here move fluently through landscapes, leaving trails, leaving remnants of their language imprinted on the world through which they pass. A crow's voice is more than its call - it's the path it cuts through the air, its staggered sideways hop towards carrion. The voices of Ireland's wolves and bears reside now in bones found curled together in caves, in the stories of the last wolf-hunts, while their forest homes were being stolen for the building of far-away colonies.

Margo's art evokes for us the imprints that we, and animals, leave on landscapes as we move through them - desire lines, holloways, paths cut through and across the secret corners of landscapes that speak of our instinctive desire to move, to travel. These images capture the permanence of the marks these animals make on the landscape, as well as the energy and ephemerality of movement. The animals seem to emerge out of the canvas to confront our gaze, only to fade from our view, merging with a world not quite ours. Their voices speak of their otherness, their creatureliness. And they seem to tell us that if we listen with only our ears, we'll be missing most of the message.

When we were speaking about the genesis of her work and of the wildness she captures on the page, Margo mentioned a poem by William Cowper that she loves, called 'Epitaph on a Hare'. It's a brilliant poem that feels fresh even though it was written more than 200 years ago, and it tells the story of a hand-raised hare that resisted domestication:

Old Tiney, surliest of his kind,
Who, nursed with tender care,
And to domestic bounds confined,
Was still a wild jack-hare.

Cowper goes on to tell us exactly how the hare expressed this wildness:

Though duly from my hand he took
His pittance every night,
He did it with a jealous look,
And, when he could, would bite.

What this poem does so well is demonstrate the wild world and the human world in sometimes uneasy co-existence. It suggests that this is the correct state of affairs; hares stay wild and humans stay domesticated, and yet as humans we're gifted, at times throughout our lives, moments of connection and understanding. Cowper can no more tame this hare than we can pin one of Margo's animals or birds in flight onto the page. Everything moves, everything changes, but some of us are lucky witnesses to that moment, to an animal's tracks in dew-wet grass, to the llop of a hare into morning mist, to the chance sighting of a deer's dappled pelt under trees. Even to the ghosts of wolves. We hear their voices, and for a fleeting moment, we understand each other.

I'm delighted to launch this exhibition - a round of applause please for Margo".