

Jack Milroy INTERVENTIONS



Jack Milroy INterVENTIONS

21 November 2013—25 January 2014

ART FIRST

21 EASTCASTLE STREET • LONDON W1W 8DD • 020 7734 0386 • INFO@ARTFIRST.CO.UK • WWW.ARTFIRST.CO.UK





For my children: Sacha, Ella and Jake

Sardine Piccanti, 2013
cut and constructed sardine can
16 x 29 x 12 cm





SARDINE

JUL 2017 0J.L.199 U (P.F.A.B)

Waitrose

SARDINE PICCANTI

SARDINE FILLETS IN OLIVE OIL WITH HOT CHILLI

四季の花

夏の部 二



Jack Milroy INterVENTIONS

'Surrealism, then, neither aims to subvert realism, as does the fantastic, nor does it try to transcend it. It looks for different means by which to explore reality itself.'*

The title of his latest exhibition, *INterVENTIONS*, is a subtle and carefully poised hint at both the nature and the spirit of Jack Milroy's work. It is at once a playful and often humorous path that he treads, but also one of true discovery—of the uncovering and constructing of entirely new perspectives and interpretations of the existing imagery that is his vocabulary.

Milroy's practice as an artist is a dichotomous operation, relying on two distinct functions. The first, a calculating 'left brain' approach is that of an avid collector. Vast amounts of imagery on any and every subject and scale are absorbed into the studio by Milroy's keen eye. Grandiose and humble, sacred and profane, everything from the seminal paintings of Hieronymous Bosch to the cheerful advertising images on discarded sardine cans find themselves laid out for categorization and appropriation into the whole.

Neither is this collecting impulse restricted to purely visual imagery. Unlike many artists who define and tend only their own personal constructed narrative, Milroy is a fervent collector of stories, both fictional and factual. The theme(s) of his work over the past decades cover an astonishing breadth of engagement with subjects both serious and whimsical. A key characteristic of this engagement is the equality with which Milroy treats his material. Sociologically sensitive objects (such as printed money and official papers in his mash-up collages of the 1970's and 80's) and subjects (such as the modern day horror-stories of 9/11 and the darkly classic fairytales of Hans Christian Anderson in his *Into the Dark Wood* series of the early 2000's) have never been off limits, and the combination of these charged and raw elements with the larger pool of illustrational imagery in Milroy's studio has contributed hugely to the visual and emotional richness in his work, as has the lightness of touch and sharply honed wit that allows him to 'disarm' otherwise dangerous subjects without completely robbing them of their power or dragging them into farce.

**The Myth of the World: Surrealism 2*, ed Michael Richardson, Dedalus Books, 1994

John and Ann Tusa, writing of Milroy's work ahead of his 2001 exhibition *Hive*, make this point succinctly:

'Unlike a mere visual joke or the worst kind of conceptual art, these works do not pall. They create a world into which one is drawn. Milroy is not afraid to take mass images, or use ordinary everyday materials. We suspect that he loves working with calculated simplicity in a world of increasingly furious artistic gestures.'

Likewise the new works in *INterVENTIONS* deftly incorporate narratives both existing and imagined, and effortlessly combine the earnest with the irreverent. The hauntingly luminous qualities of the suspended and cut prints on translucent film in *Ophelia II* provoke a sense of the wrenching tragedy in the tale, whilst the palette of the work and garlanding of a symbolic bouquet of flowers above the water's surface offers a nod to the appropriation of the story as a tragic-romantic favourite of Victorian painters.

Works such as *The Cranes are Flying* are less specifically tied to a story, but still conjure entire landscapes and the sense of a broader picture. The cranes take flight amid falling leaves and incongruously placed goldfish that look unsurprisingly surprised to be there. Set against the golden disc of a setting sun, the work is a strange and exotic tableau upon which we can project our own narrative.

This sense of ambiguity in the work, of fascination with where a story may lead, is noted by the author A.S. Byatt—a collaborator of Milroy's—when she writes of his 2003 exhibition *Falling and Flying*:

'Like all Milroy's work, these pieces have a wit that is their own, and not easy to place . . . This is a world put together by bricolage and happenstance—ephemeral as cardboard and paper—but full of thought and visual curiosity.'

So, Milroy the artist is first and foremost a collector, but a collector is not just a hoarder: a characteristic of a collection is that it is built and nurtured rather than simply accumulated. As with the eponymous Utz in Bruce Chatwin's 1988 novel, a collection can become such an extension of the collector's personality it is hard to know which has the greater influence over the other. For Milroy this influence extends to the nature of attraction in new visual material. A key part of maintaining any kind of large collection is cataloguing and codification—and it is with books

that do precisely that that Milroy has an abiding fascination. Books of flowers, trees, birds, reptiles, insects, mushrooms, flags, knots and a hundred other readymade collections have been eagerly appropriated and dissected; their contents exploded and suspended in new and striking arrangements.

This brings us to the second function of Milroy's practice—the right side of the brain, the mode and act of expression. Unlike Chatwin's *Utz*, Milroy the collector does not seek to preserve and protect his collection. Instead it is offered up to Milroy the artist, who is waiting with scalpel poised. The act of dissecting and rearranging the prints and book-pages is a mixture of precision and violence reminiscent of surgery. A previous exhibition was titled *Surgery As a Pastime*, and as with surgery there is an element of discovery involved in the incision itself followed by (all being well!) a positive resolution.

In his introductory essay to Milroy's 2005 exhibition *Doodling With Intent*, Philip Hensher writes of the tangled and tragicomic pieces that:

'They can seem, initially, like dark and overwhelming pieces in their willingness to flirt not just with catastrophe, but with the appearance of chaos. But, just as convincingly, they can seem like the work of an artist who plucks order and lucidity from the surface of turmoil, offering a generous act of consolation. The scalpel, with which Milroy carries out much of his work, is not just an instrument for the cutting of flesh, but an instrument of healing.'

The act of cutting a book apart can be very provocative through a perceived 'lack of respect' for an existing art form, perhaps all the more so as books become less of a necessity and thus more rarefied through the advance of digital technology. Milroy's practice though is not intent on outraging the viewer (though neither is it about simple appeasement), the motive is rather the creation of beauty and intrigue. The books that give away their exquisite contents sparingly—piece by piece, page by page—are suddenly unbridled and able to display all their treasures in a single, bold statement. The book-works in this exhibition such as *GARDEN FLOWERS in colour* express perfectly the sense of celebration in Milroy's treatment of the book-form. As Michael Richardson says in the quote preceding this essay, the surreal is found in the ability to give the viewer a 'different means by which to explore reality itself'—in this instance Milroy achieves the feat through an elegant inversion of the recognized, paginated book into an immediate and arresting three dimensional sculptural form.

William Packer in his 2003 essay *Jack Milroy in Retrospect* notes:

‘... it has been the cutting and the tearing to see what is inside, and what might be thus, even in the act of undoing, be remade or otherwise set free, that has lain at the heart of his work. It is perhaps the image that has always excited him, and excites him still.’

It is then the fullness of possibility, the many varied visual outcomes of each and every cut, fold, collage and inversion that drives Milroy on. Here is an artist who is in many ways a product of the conceptual art movement of the 1960's, yet who never renounced the visual manifestation as subordinate to the idea. There is undoubtedly meticulous planning and precise execution involved in each of the highly complex sculptural forms that emerge from Milroy's studio, created to fit their minimalist Perspex vitrines to the millimetre, but these are not works that are simply the incidental byproduct of an idea. For Milroy the visual *richness* has always been the key to firing both his own and the viewer's imagination—whether in small, deftly executed works such as *Mountain Flowers* or in ambitiously scaled and highly technically complicated works such as the *Ophelia* series. The power of the original imagery is combined with the thrill of exploring and reworking—and through a practice that involves no small amount of wit, skill, patience and bold imagination—Milroy presents us with the familiar in extraordinary configurations and contortions. The sum of this exercise, a collaboration between left and right, collector and artist, is the creation of truly unique and beautiful works of art.

Matt Inledon

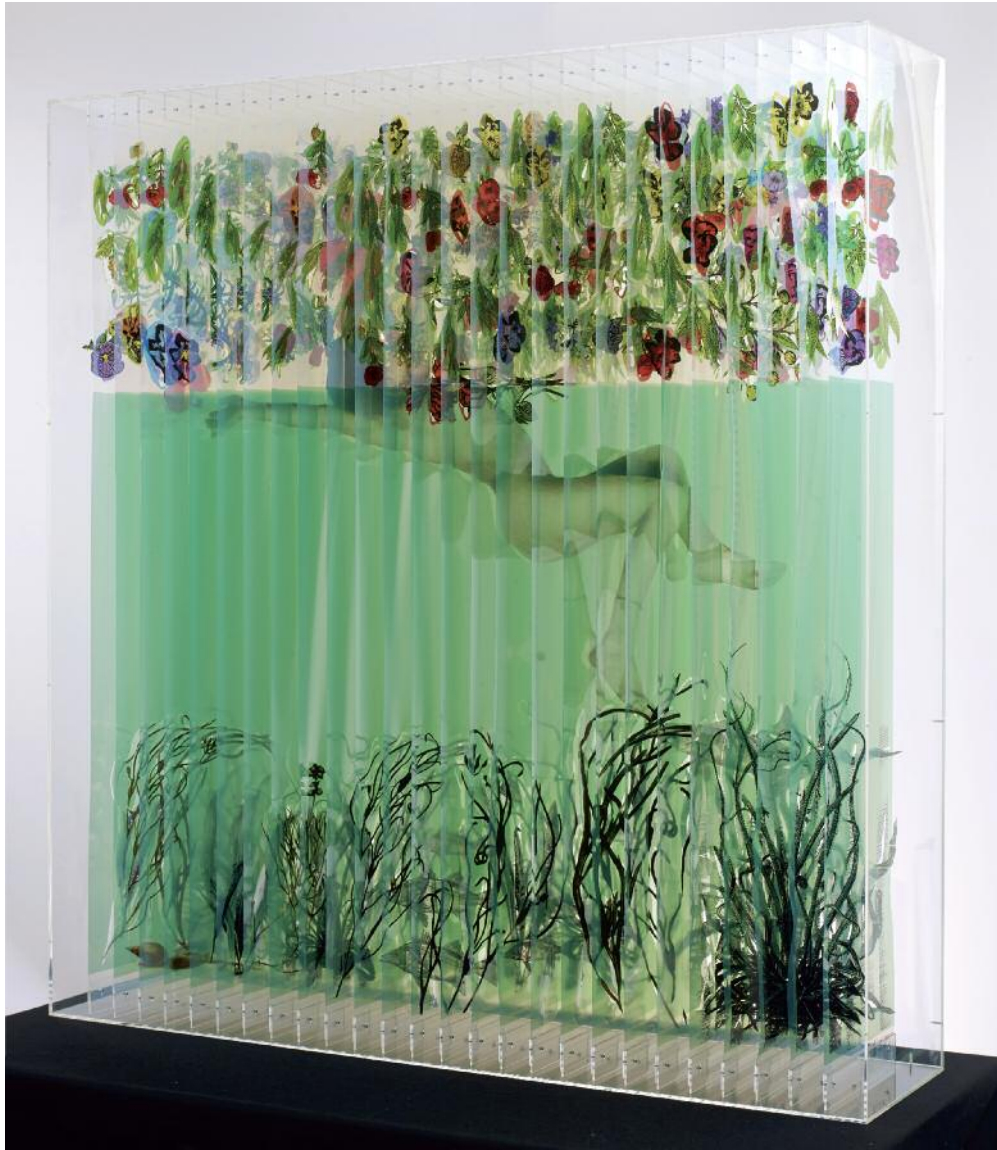
November, 2013



AND FORD
MOUNTAIN
FLOWERS
ANTHONY REEKE

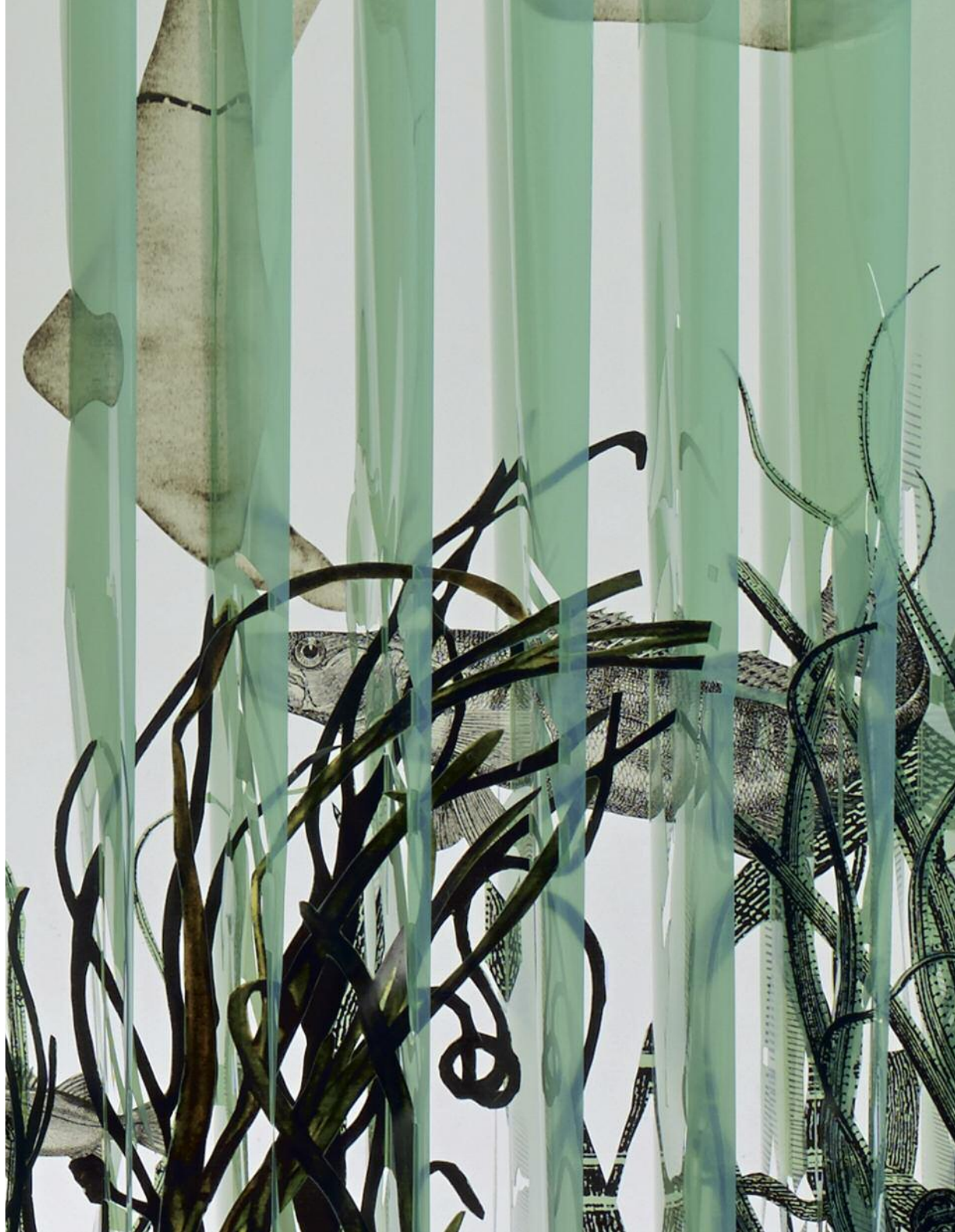
THE MOUNTAIN FLOWERS OF THE
HIMALAYAS AND NEPAL
BY ANDREW AND FORD ANTHONY REEKE
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ANTHONY REEKE AND
ANDREW AND FORD ANTHONY REEKE
LONDON
1911





Ophelia II, 2013 • cut archival inkjet on film, 147 × 137 × 32.5 cm • Details shown on following two pages.





The Cranes are Flying, 2013 • cut archival inkjet on film, 98 x 89 x 31.5 cm







Japanese Garden, 2010 • cut and constructed book, 31.5 x 189 x 22 cm



Volcano

Nature and Culture

James Hamilton



Eruption, 2013 • cut and constructed book, 116,5 x 81 x 22 cm





Plantes de Rocaille, 2011 • cut and constructed book, 31 x 101 x 69 cm

This work relates to Milroy's *The Librarian's Garden* of 1999 in the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Museum no 38041999102799). It was recently included in their exhibition display *Quotations & Subversions*.

The display label distinguished two approaches to form and style, and suggested that some upset assumptions about the object's use, form and subject matter, whilst also sharing a revival of interest in meaning, an assertion of personality, and a celebration of surface through texture or pattern:

'Jack Milroy's work with books hovers between the two-dimensional realm of the printed page and the three-dimensional sculptures he creates from them. His work has been likened to Joseph Cornell and has been described as sharing some of the poetry and casual wit of the Surrealists. Milroy acknowledges influences from Picasso and Max Ernst, and his work shares the spirit of inventiveness of the former and the humour of the latter. *Librarian's Garden* is a beautifully evocative piece which uses the book form as both container and liberator.'

The Librarian's Garden II, 2013 • cut and constructed book, 26 x 16 x 13 cm



More signs of the world - with more of the world

Milner



Dangerous Book, cut and constructed book, 2013 • 26 × 16.5 × 13cm





- 99. *Chrysanthemum indicum*, 'Gold Dust'
- 100. *Chrysanthemum indicum*, 'Aurantiac'
- 101. *Chrysanthemum Korean hybrid*, 'Aquila'
- 102. *Chrysanthemum Korean hybrid*, 'White'

- 114. *Chrysanthemum*
- 115. *Chrysanthemum*
- 116. *Chrysanthemum*

- 117. *Chrysanthemum*
- 118. *Chrysanthemum*
- 119. *Chrysanthemum*
- 120. *Chrysanthemum*

- 121. *Chrysanthemum*
- 122. *Chrysanthemum*
- 123. *Chrysanthemum*
- 124. *Chrysanthemum*

- 125. *Chrysanthemum*
- 126. *Chrysanthemum*
- 127. *Chrysanthemum*



- 131. *Eranthis*
- 132. *Eranthis*
- 133. *Eranthis*

- 134. *Dahlia*
- 135. *Dahlia*
- 136. *Dahlia*
- 137. *Dahlia*

- 138. *Dahlia*
- 139. *Dahlia*
- 140. *Dahlia*

- 141. *Eranthis*
- 142. *Eranthis*
- 143. *Eranthis*

- 144. *Dahlia*
- 145. *Dahlia*
- 146. *Dahlia*
- 147. *Dahlia*

- 148. *Dahlia*
- 149. *Dahlia*
- 150. *Dahlia*

- 151. *Dahlia*
- 152. *Dahlia*
- 153. *Dahlia*
- 154. *Dahlia*



- 155. *Eranthis*
- 156. *Eranthis*
- 157. *Eranthis*

- 158. *Dahlia*
- 159. *Dahlia*
- 160. *Dahlia*

- 161. *Dahlia*
- 162. *Dahlia*
- 163. *Dahlia*

- 164. *Dahlia*
- 165. *Dahlia*
- 166. *Dahlia*

- 167. *Dahlia*
- 168. *Dahlia*
- 169. *Dahlia*

- 170. *Dahlia*
- 171. *Dahlia*
- 172. *Dahlia*

- 173. *Dahlia*
- 174. *Dahlia*
- 175. *Dahlia*



Garden Flowers in colour, 2013 - cut & constructed book, 149 x 131 x 13.5 cm





Wall Flowers, 2013 • cut & constructed wallpaper, 202 x 91.5 x 59.5 cm



GREEN AND AMAZONS (PRITAGIDAE)

TOUCANS

SMALL PARROTS

NIGHTJARS (CAPRIMULGIDAE)

PHALOPES (PHALOPIDAE)

SEALS, JAGGERS (STERNAE) AND SHEARWATERS (STERNAE)

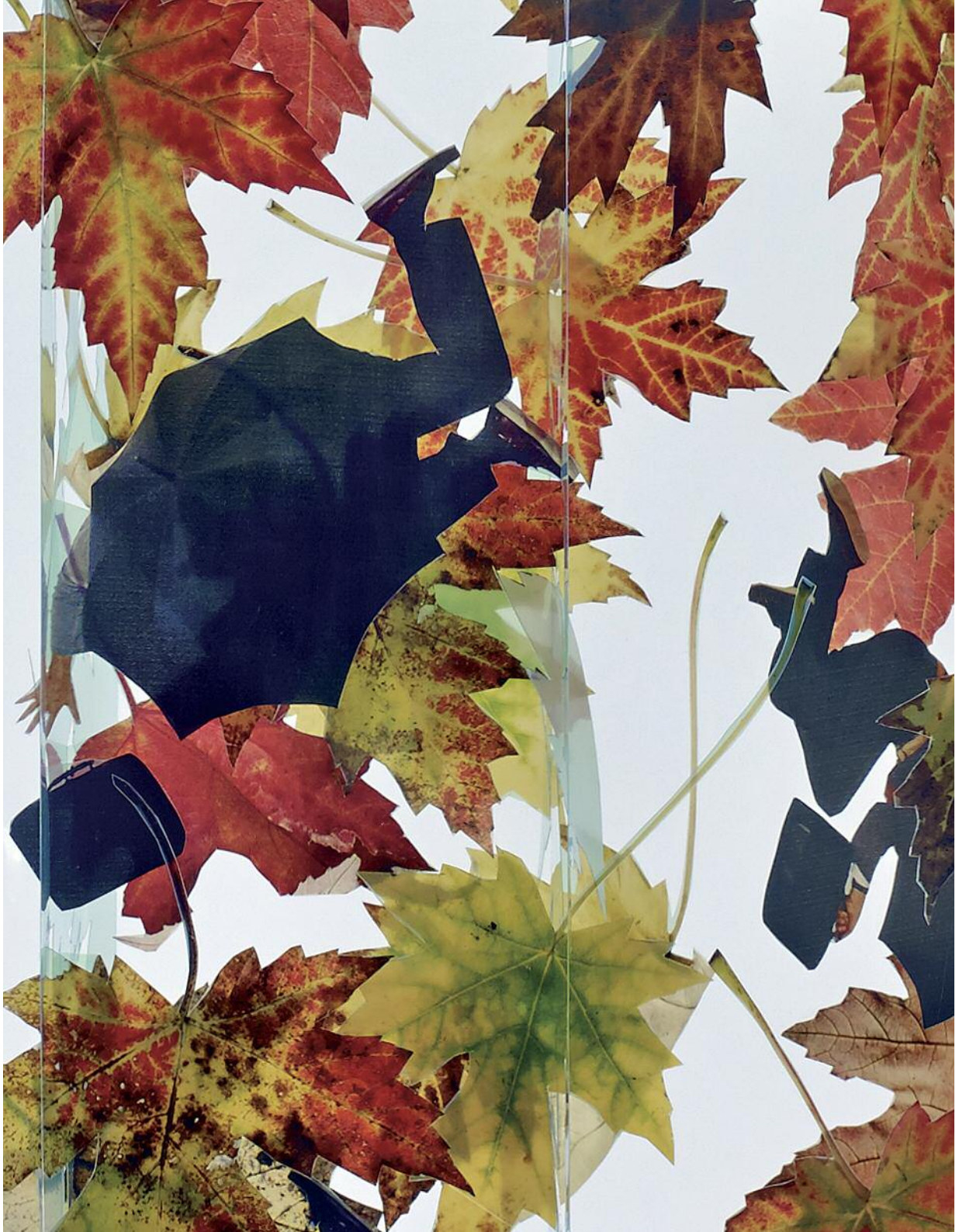
NIGHTJARS AND NIGHTJARS (CAPRIMULGIDAE)

PHALOPES (PHALOPIDAE)

SEALS (STERNAE)



Flock, 2013, cut & constructed book, 115 x 101 x 14.5 cm





Fall, 2013, cut archival inkjet on film, 124.5 x 26 x 29 cm



JACK MILROY

b. Glasgow, 1938

Jack trained at the Scarborough School of Art and the University of London. He has been based in London, where he has taught and worked, ever since. Over a 40 year period he has been exhibited through the UK and the USA. He has been represented by Art First since 1996. For further details please visit http://www.artfirst.co.uk/jack_milroy

SOLO EXHIBITIONS at ART FIRST

- 2011 *A Garden of Earthly Delights*
- 2007 *Cut*
- 2005 *Doodling with Intent*
- 2003 *Falling and Flying*
- 2001 *Hive*
- 1999 *Surgery as a Pastime*
- 1996 *Cuttings from the Library*

FURTHER SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Cutting the Edge*, Six Chapel Row Contemporary Art, Bath
- 1999 *Portals: Traces of a House in the Cevennes*, Stephen Lacey Gallery, London
Ex Libris, Six Chapel Row Gallery, Bath
- 1992 The Pike Gallery, London
- 1987 Scarborough Art Gallery, Yorkshire
- 1986 *Pictures from France*, James Hockey Gallery, Surrey
- 1985 *Bright Beams from the Blackboard*, Bracknell Arts Centre, Berkshire
- 1981 *Madge Whip, Lucy Blush and Others*, Anne Berthoud Gallery, London
- 1980 *The Queen, The Countess and a Waterfall*, Thumb Gallery, London
- 1979 *Portraits of the Queen*, Delahunty Gallery, Dallas, Texas, USA
- 1978 Glen Hanson Gallery, Minneapolis, USA
- 1977 *Anagraphs*, Hester van Royen Gallery, London
- 1967 Rotherham City Art Gallery, Yorkshire



SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Hester van Royen Gallery, London
Coriander Studio Exhibition, Curwen Gallery, London
Ozaukee Art Centre, Milwaukee, USA
Works on Paper, Minneapolis Art Institute, USA
Gallery 209, University of Wisconsin, USA
Coriander Studio, Jordan Gallery, London
The British Art Show 1 (1979), Arts Council of Great Britain (touring)
Painter-Printmakers, James Hockey Gallery, Farnham, Surrey
Visual Aid, Royal Academy, London
On a Plate (1987), Serpentine Gallery, London (and touring)
Figures and Landscapes, Fine Art Society, London
Cleveland International Drawing Biennale (touring)
Books, New British Library
Hunting Art Prizes (1997/98 and 2003/05), London & Bath
The Discerning Eye, Mall Galleries, London (prizewinner 1996)
Flight, Virgin Atlantic Airways, Terminal Three, Heathrow
Artfutures, Contemporary Art Society 1999 & 2000
Still Lives Live Still, FIVE Princelet Street Gallery, London, 2001
Translations, Art First, London, 2006
Collected Fragments (2009), Sunderland Art Museum, Co. Durham
Quotations and Subversions, V&A Museum, London

COLLECTIONS

American Life Insurance, Wisconsin
Bank of America, London
Bowes Museum, Co. Durham
British Airways Plc, Waterside, Heathrow
Caldic Collectie, Rotterdam
Chase Manhattan Bank
Dansac A/S, Denmark
De Beers, London
Fidelity Investments
Imperial War Museum
Government Art Collection
Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital, London
New British Library, London
Nieman Marcus, Dallas, Texas
Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow
Queen Mary College, London University
Seagrams, London
St. Marks Hospital, London
University of Wisconsin
Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Published for the exhibition

Jack Milroy: INterVENTIONS

20 November 2013—1 February 2014

With thanks to

Clare, Benjamin and Matt at Art First, for their continued support and encouragement.

Irena Frantal, my studio assistant for her hard work and dedication in helping to put on this show.

John Williamson and The London Door Company for the plinths.

Steve White and Luella for the photography.

Hamar for the acrylic cases.

OUTSIDE FRONT COVER

Garden Flowers in colour (detail), 2013

cut and constructed book

149 x 131 x 13.5 cm

INSIDE BACK COVER

The Cranes are Flying (detail), 2013

cut archival inkjet on film

98 x 89 x 31.5 cm

Art First
21 Eastcastle Street
London W1W 8DD
020 7734 0386
info@artfirst.co.uk
www.artfirst.co.uk

Published by
Art First Limited, London

Copyright © 2013 Art First Limited
Clare Cooper · Benjamin Rhodes

Publication © Art First 2013
Images of paintings © the artist
Essays © respective authors

Photography of works: Steve White
Typography: Strule Steele



ART FIRST

WWW.ARTFIRST.CO.UK

