



Human Nature

Marcus Coates, Ellen Lesperance & Jeanine Oleson, Heather & Ivan Morrison, Yoshua Okon, Gerry Smith, Gitte Villesen, Zoe Walker

Curated by Erica Burton, Rebecca Harris, Adriana Marques, Victoria Preston, Sarah Schuster
Pump House Gallery, London. Supported by Goldsmiths College, University of London.

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Human Nature, is an international group exhibition that visually examines our reactions to spatial and social environments. The artists in *Human Nature* all explore our fascination with human behaviour, where in an era of reality TV, surveillance cameras, and videophones, it seems that nothing captivates us more than our own actions. Have we become addicted to watching? How do we behave when subjected to the voyeuristic gaze? And do surveillance cameras provide safer environments, inducing moral behaviour? When constantly under threat of being watched, does life become an oscillation between performing and hiding?

Battersea Park was developed in 1858 into a cultivated park to promote healthy recreation and moral behaviour and in 1951, the Pleasure Gardens were created to raise morale after the devastating world wars. Through *Human Nature*, the Pump House Gallery now contextualises this history by exploring contemporary conduct.

Marcus Coates, renowned for his humorous parodies of humans as animals, blurs the boundaries of where human instinct meets animal nature in his new film, *Journey to the Lower World*. Dressed in full deer suit, Coates performs a comic shamanistic ritual for a local community whose block of flats is about to be demolished, in order to find their protector. The surveillance footage that runs in a small monitor next to this film, charts his animalistic and spiritual journey.

Heather and Ivan Morrison present *Still Life*, a limited edition vinyl LP, playing a series of short conversations recorded between themselves and people they accompany on their hobbies, such as bird-watching, astronomy, fishing, and gardening. Here, the Morrison's informally depict human interaction with nature, and how our leisure activity is often derived and created from natural spaces. A series of postcards will also be produced and mailed out to the mailing list, charting small observations from nature, such as the growth of a flower, or a list of birds seen that day, playing with associative memory, while being universally relatable.

The large format performative photographs of Ellen Lesperance and Jeanine Oleson, explore the gestures and performances of survival by setting up open-ended situations in the natural landscape where they perform as if they are the only human presences in the world. A woman urinating in a beautiful marshland landscape, and a man embracing a tree in a snow covered forest, she illustrates the preconception that we may act differently when we feel we are hidden in nature, indulging in the fantasy of living outside of society while being absolutely rooted within it.

Gitte Villesen's work also investigates the intrusive role of the camera. In *Vorbosse Horse Market and Fair, (The Young One)*, (1995), her film rests somewhere between fiction and reality. As she interviews a young fairground boy, who plays up to being filmed, she proves the behavioural change that being watched through a camera can have on the subject, as she captures both the boy's dialogue and her own in what seems to be this exchange between subject and camera.

Yoshua Okon, however, challenges assumed human behaviour in *Crabby*, where a small screen in a fake tree trunk shows two Mexican women in a primitive fight over food, accompanied by a running commentary of their actions. The prop of the tree trunk also alludes to the physicality of bird hideouts, where one might spy on nature, yet here it is human behaviour that is reduced to its primitive components and explained to the voyeuristic viewer.

Gerry Smith considers our social conditioning in *Respectful Silence*, a large sinister painting of a formal crowd where all eyes are acutely watching something. It depicts our uniform behaviour when we are "en masse", and how easily our attention can be held when it is engaged in the act of watching.



But how do we escape the voyeuristic gaze, and the socially inscribed space? Zoë Walker explores our ideals, and emotional reaction to spaces, developing the idea of escaping to idyllic landscapes. Drawing on the nature of travel in *Somewhere Special*, Walker builds her own mountain that fits inside her rucksack, and uses it as a prop that can never quite transport her to another location. Walker's work charts the adaptation of human's in foreign settings, and here it highlights how travelling becomes a voyeuristic act itself, where everything is absorbed and recorded.

Human Nature ultimately charts our behavioural needs and reactions to different spaces; it goes some way to exploring how our actions are mediated through the voyeuristic lens, and how behaviour changes when aware of being watched. Essentially, when all recorded activity is viewed in the past tense, how does this instigate models for future behaviour, and in what spaces will we choose to be seen?

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