

Tristan Hoare



Anwar Jalal Shemza, *Birds* (2021), New Zealand wool tapestry. Image courtesy the Artist and Hales Gallery. © Anwar Jalal Shemza. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2022.

The Conference of the Birds

Curated with Flora Hesketh & Omar Mazhar

TRISTAN HOARE
6 FITZROY SQUARE
LONDON W1T 5DX

EXHIBITION
9TH JUNE - 8TH JULY 2022
TUES - SAT, 11AM - 6PM

The Conference of the Birds

Curated with Flora Hesketh & Omar Mazhar

9th June - 8th July 2022

Tristan Hoare is delighted to present *The Conference of the Birds*, a multidisciplinary group exhibition curated with Flora Hesketh and Omar Mazhar. The title is taken from Attar of Nishapur's 12th century poem which tells the story of the wise Hoopoe leading the birds of the world on a journey in search of their ideal king, the legendary Simorgh.

Birds have fascinated humans from the beginning of time, inspiring amongst other things architecture, science, technology, poetry, opera, folklore, fairy tales, film, fashion, and of course the visual arts. Our fascination with flight, the feelings of freedom, movement, not to mention migration, are inextricably connected with birds. There are over 10,000 different species living in every habitat on Earth, from desert, mountain and jungle, to farms, gardens and cities. Most people see or hear a bird every day. Different birds mean different things to different cultures and civilisations; they can be seen as harbingers of good luck or bad luck, rebirth or death, they can be beautiful and yet terrifying at the same time, and in art they are often symbolic.

During the pandemic, we spent much more time observing the small changes in nature around us and interest in birdwatching rose significantly. Birds have always been messengers, informing us of changes in the environment, connecting us with nature and providing us with a deeper understanding of nature itself, perhaps thus explaining their predominance in art. Birds appear in the art of every culture throughout the ages, from Neolithic cave drawings to significant roles as gods and deities in pagan religions, to symbolic representations in Christian paintings such as Piero della Francesca's dove in *The Baptism of Christ* from the 15th century. In the 17th century with hunting no longer the preserve of the nobility, paintings of birds as trophies, by artists such as Frans Snyders and others,

proliferated as the upwardly mobile society of the time fuelled demand. In the 19th century, John James Audubon's spectacular landmark work of ornithological illustration, *Birds of America*, follows on from the 18th century Indian masters' paintings of birds commissioned by East India company officials, an example of which by Sheikh Zayn al-Din is included in this exhibition. In the 20th century, birds appeared in many art movements, sometimes as symbols of hope, freedom and peace, and at times, with darker, more ominous connotations, as with some surrealist paintings. Researching this show, we were surprised by how many contemporary artists were looking back at this rich subject in art history, as well as looking directly at the natural world.

The Conference of the Birds explores different facets of the subject and presents artworks from a wide variety of cultures using different materials. The exhibition stretches from 800 BC to the present day, with an emphasis on contemporary art and how the subject continues to inspire artists today. Flight, feathers and birds are presented in a multitude of ways, such as Emilie Pugh and Aimée Parrott's magnificent murmurations or Rafaela de Ascanio's depictions of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, a winged figure with talons for feet. Birds are the most recurring subject in Kiki Smith's practice, who describes them as 'stand-ins for souls'. A 9th century bronze of a celestial musician, part human and part bird, will be in good company with photographic works by Richard Learoyd, interactive works by Kate MccGwire and ceramics by Pablo Picasso and Paula Rego!

Birds are both familiar and mysterious, spending much of their time outside our vision and understanding. This small attempt at a giant theme illustrates the continued importance they play in art and in our lives.

The Gallery

Founded in 2009, TRISTAN HOARE is a multi-layered gallery focusing on young and established artists working in a variety of mediums. African photography, glass, painting and drawing are all areas of interest, as well as a developing passion for ceramics.

Each year we curate an ambitious exhibition with an overarching theme. *Geometrica* (2018), *Botanica* (2019) and *Folds* (2021) enabled us to collaborate with multiple artists and galleries, combining work from BC to the present day. Exhibitions are executed with the intention of telling a story and connecting with both seasoned collectors and people less familiar with the art world.

The gallery is located in a Grade I listed Georgian house in Fitzroy Square.

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Tuesday - Saturday
11am - 6pm