

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Coventry Observer

UnNatural History: The Herbert's new exhibition uncovers how artists 'can encourage our ability to act on climate crisis'

21 April 2021

CoventryObserver

UnNatural History: The Herbert's new exhibition uncovers how artists 'can encourage our ability to act on climate crisis'



A life-size sculpture of a rhino and a time-travelling eco lab form part of UnNatural History – one of the first major exhibitions launching Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 this May. Curated by art and environment organisation Invisible Dust, this major new exhibition will run from May 28 until August 22 in newly refurbished contemporary galleries at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry.

Alice Sharp, artistic director at Invisible Dust, said: “I am thrilled UnNatural History will be one of the first exhibitions for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021. “The artists consider the past and future of the

deeply felt relationship between art and science of the great collections of natural history. This relationship is sometimes speculative, sometimes informative. “UnSNatural History artists uncover both a greater understanding of ecology and biodiversity, and encourage our ability to act on the climate crisis.”

More than 20 international artists will be showcased from Belgium, Germany, India, Ireland, Kenya, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Turkey, the UK and the USA, including four newly-commissioned works responding to the Herbert’s own Natural Science Collection – which includes more than 180,000 objects and specimens. Art works include Raqs Media Collective’s life-sized sculpture However Incongruous as a contemporary reinterpretation of Albrecht Dürer’s 1515 Rhinoceros.

Dürer’s original painting was speculative as, having never seen a rhino in real life and misperceiving descriptions of the animal, he depicts it with a horn on its back. In Raqs Media Collective’s work, the rhinoceros is reimagined as an out-of-place carousel animal. Multimedia installation, Colony, by artists Dubmorphology, is an observation lab of time-travelling researchers from the future trying to understand an imminent environmental disaster.

They travel back to the current age to investigate the impacts of human behaviour through the colonies of ants and bees. The exhibition of works by international naturalists and artists will explore the link between art and science when it comes to natural history, and how it has helped to develop our understanding of ecology, climate change, extinction and threats to biodiversity. It will show how, over time, the observational skills of artists have enabled us to learn about plants and animals long before technological advancements caught up.

UnNatural History will feature drawings, paintings, sculpture, installations, photography, film, digital media and new technologies. Francis Nielsen, cultural & creative director of Culture Coventry, which operates The Herbert, said: “UnNatural History is a large-scale and ambitious show which plays a significant part in our programme for UK City of Culture 2021.

“The exhibition features a diverse range of contemporary and historic works from across the globe, each showcasing how art can help us to better understand nature and inspire people to take climate action. “We’re incredibly excited to reopen the Herbert following the pandemic with two major, thought-provoking exhibitions – 2 Tone: Lives and Legacies which examines the musical phenomenon which started in Coventry and UnNatural History, exploring the role of art and natural history collections in understanding our environment.”

Artists featured are: Alex Hartley; Andy Holden; Angela Brazil; Calvin Pang & David Robinson; Christina Agapakis, Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg & Sissel Tolaas; David Claerbout; Dorothy Cross; Doug Aitken; Dubmorphology; Frances Disley; Francis Upritchard; Gerard Byrne; Gözde İlkin; Lisa Reihana; Marianne North; Mat Collishaw; Michael Landy; Raqs Media Collective; Sarah Sze; Sonya Schönberger; Tania Kovats; Wangechi Mutu; Yinka Shonibare.

The Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Alfred’s Café and Coventry Archives will reopen to the public on Monday May 17.