

Milton Keynes Gallery

Press Release

Lyndall Phelps: *The Pigeon Archive*

4 July – 30 August 2009

Free Admission

Exhibition and pigeon race supported by the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, Bletchley Park Trust and The Milton Keynes Parks Trust



The Pigeon Archive 2007-9

Photography: Richard Davies and Ståle Eriksen

Artist Lyndall Phelps' exhibition *The Pigeon Archive*, documents the re-enactment of pigeon manoeuvres undertaken during both World Wars, through photographs, film and other paraphernalia.

In the Second World War it was recommended that every military aircraft leaving Britain carry two pigeons in case of emergency. If the plane was shot down, pigeons were dispatched carrying the survivor's coordinates for rescue. Homing pigeons were also parachuted behind enemy lines in order to retrieve crucial information on enemy manoeuvres for the British and Allied Forces. Some even carried miniature cameras to document military sites behind enemy lines.

Although large numbers of pigeons lost their lives through starvation, exhaustion, being killed by the enemy or exposure to harsh elements on homing flights, Phelps is particularly interested in the procedures that inhibited or denied their natural behaviour. These included restricting the birds' wing movement by strapping their bodies with elastic harnessing before parachuting them from planes.

The first of three series of photographs Phelps has created for this exhibition captures pigeons in flight wearing cardboard tube message carriers on their back. The second sees pigeons descending through the air, bound and attached to parachutes. The third references the unlikely union of pigeons being transported, bound and incapable of flight, within the large, mechanical flying machines, Lancaster Bombers. *Just Jane*, the Lancaster Bomber at the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, formed the backdrop for these photographs.

Phelps has also devised a miniature video camera holder for pigeons to wear, resulting in a 'pigeon's-eye-view' film over the Cambridgeshire countryside which will be shown as part of the exhibition, which pays tribute to these unsung and unusual heroes.

The Pigeon Archive Race

Saturday 18 July, 11am

Events Plateau, Campbell Park

A special pigeon race will be held in Campbell Park, central Milton Keynes while Lyndall Phelps will also release pigeons with video cameras strapped to their bodies, to document the race from 'a pigeon's eye view'. No need to book.

Gallery Talks

Meet the Artist: Lyndall Phelps

Saturday 18 July, 1pm, Free.

Join artist Lyndall Phelps as she talks through the historical themes of her exhibition *The Pigeon Archive*. Pre-booking required on **01908 676 900**. BSL interpretation is available on request with prior notice.

Talkback

Saturday 22 August, 1 – 2pm, Free.

Take a walk around *The Pigeon Archive* and *Silent Revolution* exhibitions with a member of the Gallery's education team.

Notes to Editors

Lyndall Phelps, based in Ely, Cambridgeshire, completed her degree and MA at the College of Fine Art in Sydney, Australia. Recent solo exhibitions include *knit one purl one*, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London, *Coded Ornithology*, Babylon Gallery, Ely, *Evacuate*, Natural History Museum at Tring, *tenderest white*, The Town Hall Galleries, Ipswich, *I am obsessed with detail*, Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, *Enigma* Firstsite, Colchester and *Fragile*, Alsager Arts Centre Gallery, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Milton Keynes Gallery

900 Midsummer Boulevard, Central Milton Keynes, MK9 3QA

Admission free

Open: Tues – Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm, Thurs open late until 8pm.

Telephone: 01908 676 900 **Website:** www.mk-g.org

For further information or press images please contact Rosie Jackson on **01908 558 302** or email r.jackson@mk-g.org

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