

# Milton Keynes Gallery

## Press Release

### Marcus Coates

#### *Psychopomp*

15 January – 4 April 2010 (preview 14 January, 6pm – 10pm)

Admission free

*...my work is all about our relationship with animals and nature...There is humour in the work, but a serious side explores how we use our relationship with animals to define our humanness.*

Marcus Coates

This exhibition is the first survey of Marcus Coates' work in a public gallery in the UK and includes early film pieces, sculpture, sound, costumes and photographs as well as new work.

In the artwork on display, Coates often assumes the identity of an animal, such as a fox, goshawk or stoat, by simulating its appearance, enacting its habits and appropriating its language. In the film, *Stoat* (1999), for example, Coates totters around on ramshackle platforms, learning to recreate the animal's bounding movements; in *Goshawk* (1999), a telephoto lens captures the artist as a rare bird perched precariously at the top of a tree; while in *Finfolk* (2003), the artist emerges from the North Sea spluttering a new dialect, as spoken by seals.

Coates has also trained as a shaman and the exhibition includes films of his rituals, where he achieves a trance-like state and communes with the animal kingdom to address social issues. Wearing an array of costumes such as a badger's hide, a stuffed horse's head, a blonde wig and a necklace of money (all of which are displayed in the Gallery), Coates has addressed issues including prostitution, regeneration and swine flu for communities worldwide and most recently in Israel, Japan and Switzerland.

*...I feel that my imagination can be put to good use socially, even politically.*

Marcus Coates

*Dawn Chorus* (2007) is a major, multi-screen installation in which human voices re-create the chorus sung at dawn by birds, including a chaffinch, pheasant and yellowhammer. Together with wildlife sound recordist Geoff Sample, Coates recorded individual birds singing simultaneously on a single morning. Each was slowed down to a human pitch, so that people could be filmed mimicking these lower and slower sounds in their own natural habitats, such as a hotel, osteopath's clinic or even a bath tub. The films were then accelerated until people twitter like birds and their voices precisely echo the original birdsong.

Coates' interest in appearance and transformation is encapsulated in the sculpture *Peregrine*, 1999, where an ordinary starling has been re-cast as a powerful predator, through the simple painting of its feathers.

The exhibition includes works spoken in numerous tongues as Coates exploits the spiritual and social potential of art and ultimately addresses his audiences using the universal language of the imagination.

Exhibition supported by Mannakin Ltd. Media Partner: Aesthetica. With thanks to Kate MacGarry, London & Workplace Gallery, Gateshead

## Notes to Editors

**‘Psychopomp’** means ‘the guide of souls’; they are creatures, spirits, angels, or deities in many religions whose responsibility is to escort newly-deceased souls to the afterlife, or to act as mediators between the unconscious and conscious realms. They have been associated in many cultures with animals, such as horses, dogs, crows and sparrows. In many cultures, the shaman fulfills the role of the psychopomp.

### Marcus Coates Biography

Marcus Coates' (born 1968) practice questions how we perceive human nature through imagined non-human situations. An extensive knowledge and understanding of British wildlife has led him to create interpretations of the natural world and its evolving relationship with society. An aspect of Coates' recent work sees him as a ‘useful social agent’ or problem solver. Using his skills and position in society as an artist and his knowledge of British wildlife he seeks resolutions to social issues for clients. Through self designed rituals informed by traditional cultures he consults a non conscious world of animals and birds to seek relevant information. He has performed ‘consultations’ with a variety of clients: Ikebukuru Council, Tokyo, Japan, the Mayor of Holon in Israel, a residents housing association in Liverpool and City Council of Stavanger in Norway. Their problems range from illegal cycle parking, prostitution and the Israeli/Palestinian crisis. Coates’ videos, performances and installations have been shown internationally.

Recent exhibitions include: *Altermodern*, Tate Triennial, London, 2009; *Lisson Presents 2*, Lisson Gallery, London, 2008; *Manifesta7*, Trento, Italy, 2008; Kunsthalle Zurich 2009; Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo 2009; Sydney Biennial 2010.

Coates received the Paul Hamlyn Visual Arts Award 2008 and the Daiwa Foundation Art Prize 2009. He was the Calouste Gulbenkian Artist in Residence in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, 2008. Coates lives and works in London.

### Related Events

#### **Meet the Artist:** Thursday 18 March, 6.30 - 8pm

Join Marcus Coates and Gallery Director Anthony Spira for an informal discussion about the artist's work. Tickets are free, booking is essential on 01908 676 900.

#### **Half Term Workshops**

##### **Young Filmmakers Club**

8 - 12 year olds: Monday 15 & Tuesday 16 February, 10am - 3pm

13 - 16 year olds: Thursday 18 & Friday 19 February, 10am - 3pm

Film Screening: Friday 19 February, 4 - 6pm

Work with a professional artist to develop a short film documenting natural behaviour in a man-made environment. £30 per child, book on 01908 676 900

#### **Parent and Toddler Activity Session:** Wednesday 17 February, 10 - 11:30am

Get creative with your tot exploring fun ways of making art together. £3.50 per child, book on 01908 676 900.

#### **Drop-in Wednesday:** Wednesday 17 February, 12noon - 3pm

Work with your children and a professional art educator to explore themes and ideas from the Marcus Coates exhibition. Stay for an hour or the whole afternoon. Suitable for children 4 -8 years. £3.50 per child, pay on arrival.

#### **Open Access Tour:** Monday 22 February, 2 – 3pm, free

Join staff for a drink and tour of the exhibition with the support of audio description and British Sign Language interpretation. Please contact Linzi Stauvers on 01908 676 900 or l.stauvers@mk-g.org with any questions.

For further information and press images please contact Rosie Jackson, Press and Marketing Coordinator on 01908 558 302 or email r.jackson@mk-g.org.

Date of issue: 14 January 2009