San Francisco

“Trying to Cope with Things That Aren’t Human (Part One)”

DAVID CUNNINGHAM PROJECTS
1928 Folsom Street
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It’s not uncommon to see nocturnal raccoons ambling through San Francisco, yet the encounter is often dreamlike, especially when the creatures pad through pet doors and raid pantries, hungry for the same things humans consume. Our struggle to reconcile with nature forms the thematic backbone of this absorbing group exhibition, “Trying to Cope with Things That Aren’t Human (Part One).” Artist and curator Ian Brown wrangles fourteen artists (including himself) who are inspired by “natural” behaviors, language, and landscapes. Alex Pearl, Alan Currall, and Brown contribute works that address our inclination to anthropomorphize, creating videos of, respectively, scampiring little machines, a verbal attempt to teach word processing to a computer chip, and the construction of a patinated scale model of a vehicle that’s parked in front of the gallery (prompting viewers to move into and out of the space to compare). The show’s tone is more cerebral than earthy. Mariele Neudecker’s Heaven, The Sky, 2006, is a stunning sculptural representation of German Romantic mountainscapes contained in water-filled tanks perched, with religious majesty, on plinths above eye level. The work occupies a room painted a clinical white, and the lighting is industrially clear, pointing to the immense power of institutionalized nature. Tucked into a small screening room just beyond is Marcus Coates’s troublesome, witty video Journey to the Lower World, 2004, in which the bespectacled artist dons an elk pelt and attempts to communicate with animal spirits. He performs in an immaculately clean unit in a dreary Liverpool apartment block decorated with dolls and crimson carpeting before an audience of middle-class matrons who either litter at his shenanigans or look for solace in his shamanistic recap. Such curious attempts to communicate are echoed in Annika Strom’s video of her mother’s eccentric cell-phone habits (she hides it under pillows when she leaves the house) and Ryan Gander’s poster of layered typfaces and texts that employ ink that has bled through the page to generate a new alphabet of irregular dashes and dots. The message itself is indecipherable, invoking the sentiment-turned-mantra of Heather and Ivan Morison’s pre-Internet-style classified ad in the local paper: YOU’RE LOST. YOU’RE LOST. YOU’RE LOST.

This exhibition was produced with airspace gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, England, and will open there March 28.

— Glen Helfand