Prof Mike, Collier (2017) Singing the World. [Show/Exhibition]

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SINGING THE WORLD

A Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn
The Stables Gallery
26-28 August and 2-3 September 2017

Catalogue with a brief description of work in the exhibition

This exhibition was inspired by listening to the Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn – a choir of sixteen birds heard early one morning in May 2016. Together their songs, represented here variously as digitally manipulated sonograms and musical transcriptions, form the basis of this show of screen prints, music, digital prints, relief sculpture, poetry and glass.

1. *The Song of the Wren*
   **Mike Collier**
   Produced in collaboration with EYELEVEL Creative
   Digital print
   2017; 100 x 100 cm
   For sale: price £500

   The circular text in this work is an onomatopoeic representation of the Wren’s complex song. For such a small bird it has a remarkably loud voice – Mike’s colleague, the natural historian Keith Bowey, calls it ‘The Opera Singer of the Bird World’

2. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn (1)*
   **Mike Collier**
   Produced in collaboration with EYELEVEL Creative
   Digital print
   2017; 75 x 75 cm
   For sale: price £300

   The circular text in this piece lists some of the colloquial names for the sixteen birds in our Cheeseburn Dawn Chorus. The names are Northumbrian (or Northern if Mike couldn’t find a Northumbrian name). His source was *All the Birds of the Air: The Names, Lore And Literature of British Birds* by Francesca Geenoak.

   CHANCIDER – Spotted Flycatcher
   TINNOCK – Blue Tit
   WOOFELL – Blackbird
   CRUSHET – Wood Pigeon
   RUDDOCK - Robin
   REDSTARE - Redstart
   THUMMIE - Chiffchaff
   SCOPPIE - Chaffinch
   HECKYMAL – Great Tit
MIZZLY DICK – Mistle Thrush
CUTTY - Wren
WOOD CRACKER - Nuthatch
SMOKEY - Dunnock
PEASWEEP - Greenfinch
KINGLET - Goldcrest
THROSTLE – Song Thrush

3. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn* (2)
Mike Collier
Produced in collaboration with Geoff Sample and EYELEVEL Creative
Assisted by Tina Webb
One work; sixteen individual frames
Screen print onto glass (kiln-fired) framing pastel on paper
2017; total size 200 cm square
For sale: Price £4500

The sixteen birds here are the ones Mike heard between 4.30 and 7.00am at Cheeseburn in May 2016. The circular images have been loosely adapted from Geoff Sample’s sonograms and ‘placed’ on staves. Running left to right, top to bottom, the birds here are:

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER
BLUE TIT
BLACKBIRD
WOOD PIGEON
ROBIN
REDSTART
CHIFFCHAFF
CHAFFINCH
GREAT TIT
MISTLE THRUSH
WREN
NUTHATCH
DUNNOCK
GREENFINCH
GOLDCREST
SONG THRUSH

4. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn* (3)
Andrew Richardson
Digital sonic image, laser cut into Beech Ply
Eight pieces.
On the stairs from top to bottom; Blackbird, Chaffinch and
In the gallery from left to right; Dunnock, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest and Mistle Thrush
2017. Various sizes
For sale
Edition of three; each individual bird £120
These images were created using a specially written digital programme created by Andrew to generate rings from a pre-recorded sound file.

Each shape can be read from the centre outwards - each ring in the shape represents a moment of time in the sound (the song of that particular bird) - the longer the sound then the more rings there are.

The distance between the rings is created by the sound levels of the song - so louder points in the sound create larger gaps - periods of silence are represented by tightly packed rings.

The shape of the ring is a representation of the sound 'spectrum' - a range of frequencies within the sound at a given point in time. 'Spikes' in the ring shape are created at the points in the sound spectrum which have the highest frequency - so low pitches of sounds will create spikes at different points around the ring compared to high pitch sounds.

5. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn* (4)  
**Mike Collier**  
Produced in collaboration with Alex Charrington, Bennett Hogg and Geoff Sample  
Assisted by Rachael Clewlow  
Silkscreen on 410gsm Somerset paper  
A set of ten pairs of monoprints (each different)  
2017; 101 x 100 cm  
For sale: price £650 (including CD of music) each or £1200 for the pair

The offer of an exhibition at Cheeseburn this year enabled Mike to realise a long-held ambition to make work based around the dawn chorus. 'For some reason', says Mike, 'this idea was always accompanied by a feeling that the work should be predominantly yellow. I imagined a yellow ‘bloom’ of colour and rhythm' he says, ‘a multi-layered visual choir’.

This is a seven-layered screen-print of the sixteen birdsongs from the dawn chorus.

*Layer one* - background colour (yellow - or blue on Evening Chorus pieces)  
*Layer two* - bands of colour; one each for each individual bird song  
*Layer three* - a series of hand-drawn then printed staves  
*Layer four* - notations of various songs of Blackbird, Robin, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Wren, Chiffchaff, Chaffinch and Great Tit neumatically notated from Geoff Sample’s sonograms of the bird songs.  
*Layer five* - all of the above with the addition of Dunnock, Nuthatch, Redstart, Blue Tit, Goldcrest, Woodpigeon, Greenfinch and Spotted Flycatcher, again neumatically notated.
Layer six (when used) is layer four turned 180 degrees
Layer seven (when used) is layer five turned 180 degrees

There are ten different pairs of prints, developed in collaboration with Charrington Editions. Only one pair is displayed here.

6. The Evening Chorus at Cheeseburn
Mike Collier
Produced in collaboration with Alex Charrington, Bennett Hogg and Geoff Sample
Assisted by Rachael Clewlow
Silkscreen on 410gsm Somerset paper
A set of ten pairs of monoprints (each different)
2017; 101 x 100 cm
For sale: price £650 (including CD of music) each or £1200 for the pair

Geoff, Bennett and Mike explored the subtle differences between the dawn chorus and the evening chorus, which has a more ‘laid back’, spacious feel to it than the dawn chorus, though the ‘choristers’ are roughly the same. The idea for a musical and visual pairing of dawn and evening pieces grew from this discussion. Mike settled on blue as the dominant colour for this part of these Evening Chorus prints.

7. "...singing every minute high up in a golden-green blossom..." *
Bennett Hogg
In collaboration with Mike Collier and Geoff Sample
Music for seven pianos
2017
7 mins

Geoff, Mike, and Bennett spent several days transcribing and refining the digital transcriptions of birdsong. This was originally transcribed into musical notation for contemporary singers. However, there was always a sense that the human voices, singing in chorus, somehow didn't "fit" the images. Bennett explained that:

Mike's prints operate on a level twice removed from the original birdsong - the digital visualisations, and then the further refining and stylisation of these images into the prints you see on the walls. I decided to do the same, recomposing the original choral music into a complex and multi-layered piano piece (by co-incidence, Mike's prints have seven layers to them, and there are seven pianos overlain in my piece). This extra distance from the original sound of the birds was just what was needed to connect to Mike's images.

Bennett’s score for two voices and piano moves into a slower, more thoughtful and reflective phase as his new piece, accompanying the Evening Chorus print, draws to a close.
8. *Pre-dawn Light*

**Ayako Tani**

In collaboration with Mike Collier, Bennett Hogg and Geoff Sample
Borosilicate glass, heat-shrunk tubes, steel and a lighting unit.
Special thanks to: Natsumi Jones, Alise Stopina and John Smith
2017; 1500 cm tall x 100 cm diameter
For sale: price £6500

The opportunity to show work in the darkness of the Hayloft at
Cheeseburn presented the artists with a unique opportunity to
represent the transition from night to day, moving from darkness
through to light. Ayako’s glass chandelier of birdsong signals the
dawning of a new day.

Ayako visited Geoff with Bennett and Mike and developed her own set
of musical notations for each of the sixteen birds in the Cheeseburn
dawn chorus, which she transferred on to glass rods of different
lengths. These were then fixed into sixteen glass tubes at the National
Glass Centre made to be lit and hung in the Hayloft as a chandelier.

9. “... a note touched on the instrument of night . . . “ *

**Bennett Hogg**

In collaboration with Ayako Tani, Mike Collier and Geoff Sample
Electroacoustic – birdsong and glass
2017
7 mins

The piece of electroacoustic music that accompanies the chandelier in
the Hayloft was composed by Bennett. He explains:

*I wanted to create a parallel sound piece for Ayako’s chandelier
hanging in the Hayloft next to Mike’s prints. Because sound travels, it
was crucial that this piece was synchronised exactly with the piano
music to avoid one sound work interfering with the other. To achieve
this, I radically simplified the piano piece into a "skeleton", in which
only the absolutely essential notes remained.

*This skeleton served as a template around which to compose a
separate piece, in which the recorded sounds of Ayako’s glass are
digitally infused with birdsong, transformed, and then recombined with
the bell-like original glass sounds to form a gradually changing
soundscape that evokes the material of Ayako's chandelier (the glass),
but also reintroduces the sound of birds that are encoded into the
chandelier itself.

*In this way, the sound piece and the chandelier use the same
materials but in different sensory dimensions. The two pieces - the
restored piano piece and its electroacoustic "ghost" in the hayloft - can be heard together, or separately, depending on where you are in the gallery.

* From a short essay by Edward Thomas called "Insomnia", published in The Last Sheaf of 1928

10. **Dawn Chorus, Cleadon Village**  
**Jake Campbell**  
Poem laser-printed onto beech wood  
2017; 60 x 40 cm  
Edition of five; £75 each

Fusing lyricism and a sense of place with a bigger social and political landscape, this poem gently weaves together culture with nature, reflecting and complementing the approach taken by each of the artists in this show.