

A FEW NOTES ON *ARCHIPELAGO* (GEMMA ANDERSON)

1. Botanical

These etchings seem busy collapsing the distance between two types of images – one that is closer to the icon, and another that tends towards the index or a direct imprint or manifestation of nature.

2. Portraits

The work tries to bring the language of scientific display such as the diorama, of the presentation of the animal subject surrounded by its attributes, environment and extensions, into the sphere of human portrayal. These extensions are of elementary, commonplace nature – the portrayed are adorned by their own failures, ideals, chores and idiosyncrasies, they are limited by their own particular engagement with the world. The works that take the form of portraits are clearly caricatures, as they deal with the elusive boundaries that determine the subject's social role and what that same subject chooses to project onto others. They are also reminiscent of systems of belief that use the aura of science to attempt a reconstruction of the human image, either by benevolent commands or systematic suspicion. These etchings deliver portraits as quiet surfaces needing extra organs to make up for a loss.

3. Landscapes

In the landscapes present, a notion of childhood imperialism comes to mind. These works seem to have both the quest for accuracy and possession of the nineteenth century geographer, and the childhood drive to colonize through the imagination. A landscape is then subjected to fundamental categories – it is either precious or scatological, a fairytale of faeces or a hard-edged diamond world. Categorization, recording and judgment come together in the language of the landscape, reminding us of a link between the imposition of a worldview and the presentation of a view in all the guises of the natural.

4. Bonsai Animals

In several of Gemma Anderson's more recent etchings, animals are shown caught up in between categories, sliding away from symbolic fields and into other functional roles. One of these roles seems to be that of the victim – the animal is drawn upon, melted into a primal vegetable soup, decomposed into other creatures. It is as if creation was being caught at an incomplete stage, where each agent is still confused, looking for a rhizome, a partner or a role in a boundless game. And yet they are the most humorous works, where the victim reveals the contingent nature of the law by taking it too literally. Animals are comical victims, not as immediate subjects of external mistreatment, but as experimental actors of natural law. Bonsai animals, tricked and trimmed by invention.