



EXCURSION

KATARZYNA DEPTA-GARAPICH

28 APRIL - 25 JUNE 2023



Katarzyna Depta-Garapich
Excursion
Watermans Art Centre London
28th April-25th June 2023

The brown bear is the most widely distributed species of bear in the world. Historically, the species covered the whole European continent including Britain, Ireland and Sicily. However due to human expansion, the range of bears has been limited to areas less accessible and far from human settlements. In Western Europe, there are currently only isolated populations in the mountainous regions of the Cantabrian Mountains, Pyrenees, Apennines and Alps. In Eastern Europe, the most numerous is the Carpathian bear population, including a small number of brown bears that live in the Tatra Mountains in Poland and Slovakia.

At the beginning of the 20th century, bears in the Tatras were almost completely exterminated. They fell prey to the hunting aristocracy, as well as local poachers. Nevertheless, thanks to their curious migratory nature and the efforts of humans, the bears have returned. Although the brown bear is a living, real creature - it is not easy to encounter and for many it may be more of a fairytale beast that belongs in the realm of myths and stories from the world of fantasy, than to the natural world. In the region of Podhale in Southern Poland, the pronoun 'he' (curiously, never 'she') was commonly used to refer to the bear. Substituting the name of the animal with the pronoun had animistic and magical features, connected with superstition as well as with the anthropomorphisation of its image. At the same time, the bear became infantilized which is symbolised by the popularity of the 'white bear' mascot that entertains tourists on the main street of Zakopane, Poland. The place of the white bear in popular culture is therefore a case of role reversal where wilderness is tamed, and humanity made infantile.

In *Excursion*, artist Katarzyna Depta-Garapich approaches the theme of the brown bear in the Tatra Mountains through its popular culture alter ego represented by a 'white bear'. As part of the project, Katarzyna Depta-Garapich made a white bear costume and climbed the most difficult mountain trail in the High Tatras, recreating the routes used by local brown bears. The white bear costume refers to the mascot, a person dressed as a white bear that is providing entertainment for tourists while simultaneously side-lining the real bear.

The exhibition at Watermans Art Centre takes the form of a multi-channel video installation. Viewers are invited to take part in the *Excursion* through adopting many points of view, watching the projections of the Tatra landscape and the climbing white bear. By focusing on the bear, the artist wants to direct our attention to the impact of humans on the natural environment, the use of animals in tourism promotion and its negative impact on nature.

This exhibition is also a presentation of the artist's practice-led doctoral project that took place between 2017-2023 at the Slade School of Fine Art UCL. In her PhD, Katarzyna Depta-Garapich approaches the problem of protecting nature and endangered species and our relationship with non-human beings.

Katarzyna Depta-Garapich is a visual artist born in Kraków, Poland, living and working in London. Her practice takes a variety of forms including sculpture, drawing, performance and video. Graduate of the Sculpture Department of Wimbledon College of Art (BA 2010) and the Slade School of Fine Art in London (MA 2012) and Art History at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (1999). In her work, she often refers to themes taken from everyday life and her own surroundings,

especially those that represent her own fears and anxieties related to femininity and social expectations. She is interested in the relationship between humans and non-humans. She is fascinated by the absurd and finds inspiration in situations, stories and objects that deviate from the norm. Katarzyna Depta-Garapich's most recent exhibitions include: *Claw*, Kuns(z)t Gallery, Goethe Institut, Kraków (2022); *You Ate Three Hundred Devils*, Władysław Hasior Gallery, Tatra Museum, Zakopane (2022); *Matter of the Anthropocene*, Mathare Art Gallery, Nairobi, Kenya (2019) and Centrala Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2020); *Simple Gestures*, BWA, Katowice (2020); *Melancholia*, Freud Museum, London, UK (2020); *Handiwork*, Gallery Władysław Hasior, Zakopane (2019). She has participated in artistic residencies at the Tatra Museum, Poland (2019); Grymsdyke Farm, Buckinghamshire, UK (2019) and Grizedale Arts, Coniston, Lake District, UK (2014). In collaboration with Grizedale Arts, she facilitated the Polish edition of the *House of Ferment*, ArtBoom, Krakow (2015). In 2022 she won a prestigious drawing competition, the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize for student entry (2022).