**IN CONVERSATION WITH TIM HAYWARD**

For his exhibition

**BEGUILE**

at the Jonathan Cooper Gallery

(Nov 16th – Dec 19th 2020)

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Length of Audio Broadcast: 27 minutes

**TRANSCRIPT**

*Intro Music*

Victoria Pham (VP): Hello, I’m Victoria Pham and it’s my pleasure to introduce this conversation for an upcoming exhibition at the Jonathan Cooper Gallery. This exhibition is entitled *BEGUILE* and celebrates this year’s body of work by artist Tim Hayward. Tim is an internationally acclaimed contemporary artist who, over his career as a natural history illustrator and now painter, has developed a remarkably individual and imagination form of wildlife painting. I’m so pleased to have Tim here today to talk about his practice and his upcoming exhibition, BEGUILE, so thank you so much Tim for having this chat with me today!

Tim Hayward (TH): Oh, it’s my pleasure

VP: Well, I suppose my first question to you is going to be, how did this all start? How did you begin this journey as an illustrator and an artist?

TH: Well, I always painted as a child and drew, and after leaving school I went to art college. And I actually trained as a graphic designer and an illustrator, and after leaving, I worked as a graphic designer for a couple of publishers and then watched a freelance illustrator come into the studios one day. He got on the train, up from Devon, with some illustrators of some flint-lock pistols, and he was greeted, taken out for a great lunch and then put back on the train and I thought, that’s the life for me, that sounds great! So, I set up to be a freelancer and it took a long time to get an agent and representation, and I then worked for about 25 years illustrating natural history books and all sorts of things. But, I actually wanted to “paint properly” and so, in 1999 I was introduced to Jonathan Cooper and we took it from there.

VP: I see. And how was it that you came to meet Jonathan?

TH: Well, actually I had an appointment to see the owner of the gallery next to his and he as terribly nice but said he really only dealt with dead artists because they were easier and more expensive, so he suggested I go and see Jonathan, and that’s how I met him.

VP: And in a way it links up well with your practice because the Jonathan Cooper Gallery represents predominantly natural history artists.

TH: Oh yes, it’s an absolutely perfect fit.

VP: Well, now must ask, largely out of my own curiosity and having looked at a lot of your works, they are much more imaginative with a bit more narrative rather than having to rely heavily on an academic or anatomical presentation of biological specimens. When you were moving from studying and working for mainly natural history publications, what was the shift like from that experience into painting practice?

TH: Yes, as an illustrator, you’re very much working towards a brief and there’s not very much room for your own interpretation of things. Work had to be very precise, it had to suit the client, and be delivered on time – very important that you do that – whereas, actually if you paint as I am now, it’s very much the blank sheet of paper and scratching your own head and thinking what to do. But once it happens, it’s a far more exciting and gratifying producing your own work. And you live or die by what you do.

VP: And how much of this work is governed by – and I can see behind you in your studio you have a few taxidermy animals – how much is studio work – working with these taxidermy models and how much is sketching in the environment outside?

TH: Well, the taxidermy is really useful just for getting up close and feeling for texture and colour. They are stuffed animals and although some of them are really good, I never use them as something to copy but they’re invaluable purely as reference. Otherwise, I do a lot of sketches and take a lot of photographs and work from lots of sources and in the end, I make a bird or animal do what I want it to do on the paper and find the details to fit. So, sometimes, I sacrifice a bit of strict anatomical correctness for the look I want.

VP: In the same vain, has something like videography also helped as a reference to capture these animals – particularly birds in flight – and their movement?

TH: Yes, it does! It’s brilliant to watch things like that. We’ve got access now to references and information that were unheard of not so long ago, with things like flacons in flight, it’s wonderful to be able to watch a bird that’s 300 ft up – how it works and how it functions. Otherwise, it comes down to your own interpretations which I do anyways but it’s a great boon, and you have to be careful not to plagiarise too much.

VP: And now I should ask more about the exhibition that you’re about to present. I see that the title is called ‘Beguile, and I was wondering why you chose this for the whole exhibition?

TH: Ah I thought you might ask that! Well, actually, it’s quite simple. My daughter and I were looking at the completed body of work and we knew we had to come up with something and she said “well, they do all look very beguiling.” So, I thought that’s a good word, we’ll use that! And so, it’s really very straightforward.

VP: Well, it’s a beautiful word, and even then, I was looking through your catalogue earlier for this exhibition and you maintain your fascination with birds, but in this case, very specifically with barn owls. Is it because of the environment that you’re in that they’re plentiful and they inspired this beguiling series of work?

TH: Not particularly. In fact, it’s very hard to see a barn owl around me although everyone else seems to see them. No, I thought that there was a certain mystery about them, they’re very serene, very quiet and I think also, at this time and this year, has been obviously every difficult and it just felt right to be doing something quiet and thoughtful.

VP: Is this why so many of the birds in this particular exhibition, unlike the previous ones, are not in hunting mode but rather, like the barn owls, are resting peacefully upon the paper?

TH: Yes, that’s exactly why. I’m not sure if I was consciously aware of it at the beginning but it seemed to fit the mood, to paint things that were very serene and calming.

VP: Did the current circumstances affect your work and exhibition in any way, other than the serenity of these subjects?

TH: No, not really. I carried on as I always have done. Gone to work, sat down and worked through it. It’s after 7 or 8 months of work, here we are. I did at the beginning of the lockdown try to work at home and it just didn’t work, so after a few weeks I started going up to my studio but it hasn’t been affected at all.

VP: Well, that’s excellent news – also that you had access to your studio after the initial period. Coming out of those 7 to 8 months of work and into a bit of a broader question, I must ask, why this incredible fascination with birds?

TH: Well, that goes back to boyhood, it was something I hooked onto very young and became aware of. I think I got my first pair of binoculars at 8 or 9 and it never stopped. I’ve always grown up in the countryside so it’s a natural thing to be outside and to be looking at birds was an extra bit of fun. Then I started looking at pictures of birds and admiring particularly artists and plates, copying things, and yes, it’s always been part of me.

VP: And in this exhibition, aside from the brilliant array of birds, you’ve decided to include one non-bird – a hare – so why did you choose to include the hare as part of this series?

TH: There are two reasons. One, I just got a bit fed up of painting feathers and it was quite simple [laughs]. And also, hares, I find that I’ve been painting mostly British species and hares - all of them – are an animal that hold a bit of mystic about it. And that’s why I chose it, they’re very mysterious animals and they hold a certain presence. I’ve never painted a badger, for example, because I just don’t get that feeling from them. [both laugh]

VP: They have a difference attitude about them, I think.

TH: They do rather. Right now, I’m painting a pouncing fox but whether that makes it to the show, I don’t know.

VP: What’s interesting about the painting of the hare, is that it almost holds a similar pose to the barn owls that you’ve painted. Was that intentional?

TH: Subconsciously yes, I think it was.

VP: They all turn to the right?

TH: Yes, yes. I did notice that but that’s just the way things work out. I just feel comfortable, in fact, it felt comfortable. That’s how I drew it and went with it, no particular significance in it at all.

VP: Well, in a way it’s an interesting motif that runs through this body of work.

TH: Well, it is that beguiling look and that sort of enticement to engage with the picture.

VP: That is true, because without any of the birds or the hare looking directly out at the audience, you do feel drawn into the image.

TH: I mean it’s so important to get that contact right. And I just feel that it’s quite nice to have an animal not looking directly at you. It can be quite challenging for some. Sometimes it’s quite nice to have crept up on you and in its own moments, and sometimes again to have an animal staring straight at you can be quite arresting and that can work as well. It all depends, but I think with this exhibition, I didn’t want to challenge. Just seemed to suit the mood.

VP: And hence, more beguiling.

TH: More beguiling.

VP: So, I was having a little look through your catalogues and I’ve come up with some questions about your process and your style, and thinking about your exhibition beguiling and the word beguiling, is this also why you’ve chosen not to choose landscape in these works, so that the focus and alluring nature of these creatures are centred by the fact that they are the single subject against the textured colours?

TH: Yeah. Well, when I started with the gallery I was painting in a very traditional way. Looking at the past works of other painters and landscape featured very heavily and I really, decided to focus on the animal. And bit, by bit, I toned it down – it’s not being lazy, it’s not that I don’t like painting landscape, it’s just that I thought that the animal deserved the attention, and I’m not trying to recreate a photograph with a landscape with a creature in it, but to focus attention on that bird or animal, and by having it free in the frame, I’m allowed to shape it and form it into the graphic shapes that I want to see. So, I see the paintings, as I’m drawing and sketching them as sort of abstracts, where I look at negative spaces as well as the animal itself. And so, if you turn it upside down, put it against a mirror or make it black-and-white, it would still work as a shape. I’m obviously concerned to get the details right but it is the overall feeling that that picture gives that I’m most concerned with initially. In fact, the most fun I get is painting the backgrounds which are now quite time consuming. They look as if I got a paint render and whacked it off in half an hour, but in fact, some of them can take a week-and-a-half to do because they’re multi-layered, wash after wash after wash of watercolour and gouache, all worked separately until I feel I’ve got the effect I want so if you’re standing close to one of these painters, they’re not just a matte colour. You’ll see underpaintings shining through – other colours, other textures – that are not as apparent on a small photograph.

VP: In fact, if you go and anyone has a chance to see the catalogue itself – it’s very evident in painting *No.6 the ‘Black Swan – Aubergine’* you can even see the layers you’ve imbued onto the paper.

TH: Yes. That was fun! That’s the dark bird on the dark background. And I didn’t quite have an idea about how that was going to look by the end, I just thought that that colour would suit the bird and I just worked on it, and yes, I put a layer down, sponge it, brush it, I put things under a shower now to put excess paint off and start again. They get quite a tough time in the process of painting, but luckily the paper’s good and it can take the punishment.

In the end, I come to the moment when it’s time to stop and then I paint the bird. Very often, that’s the hard work – doing that. The background is fun although it can be exasperating. I’ve had really tough moments doing that when it hasn’t gone right, and I have scrapped things after a week’s work when I know it can’t be saved.

VP: Do you then have a process to select the colours you wish to have in the background?

TH: I have been. A couple of exhibitions ago, I started to choose rather unlikely colours. Almost like stain-glass window colours, and it was very effective. But what I don’t want to do is to use a colour just for the sake of it, I think it has to compliment the subject and I want to feel comfortable with it and I hope other people are comfortable with it. I’m not really in the business of challenging people too much, to say ‘wow look what I’ve got, isn’t it different?’ I mean, perhaps I should, but there’s a time for that and it is appropriate in some cases. But for the moment, maybe it’s this year, and I didn’t feel like it was a bright and happy time and I thought it was what people needed, so I have put a lot of colour into the show.

VP: For example. I really enjoy the colour you chose for the Hare – that beautiful, muted green.

TH: Oh yes that worked out really well. I had in my mind’s eye that I wanted but it’s very much a happy accident when it happens because when I lay the colour down, because It’s gouache and watercolour, it looks a lot darker when it’s wet than when it’s dry it lightens up. So, I never know what I’m going to get after the drying process, which is why sometimes I go back in and work and lay down more, and there was that moment with the hare painting where it was just right. Just leave it alone.

VP: We talked a bit earlier about this transition from landscape or more traditional elements in your painting moving into the slightly more abstract textured and multi-layered coloured backgrounds of your current practice, was there a particular work or turning point that encouraged this shift?

TH: Well, definitely there’s definitely been an evolution I think. So, when I look through my catalogues from 2000 to now, I can see the evolution of the style and the approach, and it happens quietly and it’s only when I look back I can notice what’s going on. There was painting I did, I think it was 10 years ago, and it was the first larger painting I did, it measured 60x40cm. I just wanted to paint a Peregrine Falcon in a position called the corkscrew stoop where the bird is up high, almost a dot and it spots its prey and it tumbles through the air until it forms its diving position and it’s the fastest bird on earth, and it’s that moment between flight and dive I wanted to capture. And I placed the bird, a lot of research and drawing, up at the top of the picture and its very obvious device just to create that space beneath where it was going to drop, but it was also that bird on its own against a very literal background of sky which started me off on a series of works about birds of prey which were a series of work where they were diving. And rather than clouds and all the usual colours you expect, I started to go why not go a bit mad here and put a bright blue and pink here and have some fun and that led to a whole series of paintings. But that was quite a pivotal moment or a seminal moment, whatever one likes to call it, into just the solitary bird.

But I do put a lot of work into researching – it’s a bit flippant, maybe, about detail. I’ve got a good relationship with a museum and I go down there and study skins, and I have a friend who’s a taxidermy dealer, and I often go down there and look at things and borrow things from him. I’ve given up buying things because they get destroyed by moths and it gets rather expensive, I had a terrible attack lately. But, no that is always hugely important to get all that right but I like to go on a bit from that to exaggerate or obscure, because what I don’t want to do is to have anyone say “it’s a copy of a photograph,” I want it to be more than that.

VP: And do you feel this pressure of having to encompass so much detail or anatomical detail particularly during this process?

TH: Oh, I can get hopelessly caught up… so as an illustrator I had to be very accurate with everything because they were for identification clients and I’m not sure if I want to shake it off. Sometimes I get a sense when I’m painting that I get the sense that things are loosening up nicely, and there are a lot of moment when I’m painting feathers or fur when there’s a transitional fraction of a second when instead of painting on paper, you’re actually stroking the creature and there’s that connection. So, when that starts to happen, it’s like magic and the things start to go really well after that.

VP: And in many ways, as an artist and or a painter, you are tasked with telling a visual story of these creatures. For example, I’m fascinated by the white peacock and the very regal display of her feathers, or his sorry.

TH: It’s him. Yes. I found him locally, he was spotted wandering in the lanes and I tracked him down and it turns out he was called Jack, because it’s the males that have the train. And I’d seen and photographed a white peacock years ago, and it had since died. So I went to visit Jack, and he was very uncooperative, and every time I appeared he would leap over a wall and into a wood but I did get him in the end.

VP: Did you sketch him or was it a photograph that finally got him?

TH: Now I got some sketches and I photographed him, and I got back to the studio and used that as a basis for that painting. A very tricky one, white-on-white made it very difficult.

VP: It’s interesting that you mention that he was disgruntled by your presence because it’s as if I can see that in his expression now.

TH: [laughs] Yes, yes. He wasn’t so happy.

VP: And it’s so clear that you have a great love of birds and animals, so is there an overall sense through your practice and work that you wish to impress upon your clients, this great appreciation of the natural world and its creatures?

TH: Oh, I hope so. I don’t deliberately set out to do that but it’s certainly how I feel, and I hope that it comes out through my work.

VP: It’s interesting thinking about that because looking at a lot of your work, there’s a great sense of contemplation when I interact with it. Because there is often a single figure - a bird or fox or hare – against this almost-abstract background that forces you to contemplate the creature that is on the paper.

TH: Precisely, that is exactly what I was hoping for.

VP: And so, I have a final question for you, that I suppose links up with the sense of contemplation. What would you like people to take away from your works?

TH: Oh Blimey! Well, I never really thought of that. I just do what I like and what I enjoy and hope that other people will share that experience. I’m not really trying to give any messages but I’m rather trying to accentuate the beauty of these animals and bring them to people’s attention. Some of them aren’t exotic, I could probably do much more colourful and exciting birds – they have merits and their charms and these are the birds I’ve grown up with and I feel like I know. Nothing to profound, I’m afraid. I’m always flattered if anyone likes a painting I’ve done, anyways, everyone is a fresh experience of being pleased, so I’m rather surprised really.

VP: Well, I think it’s very beautiful that you’ve managed to tread the line between something that’s very, very real because of the detail and work you’ve put into it, as well as something that is imaginative and playful

TH: Well thanks, I’m glad you’ve seen that.

VP: And really, that’s all the questions I have to ask you this afternoon. I have to say an incredible thank you for taking the time out today to have this chat with me about your practice and upcoming exhibition, Beguile, all the way from your studio!

TH: It’s a pleasure! And thank you very much, it was a pleasant!

VP: For everyone listening, Tim Hayward’s exhibition *Beguile* is open at the Jonathan Cooper Gallery, London, from November the 16th to December the 19th 2020. The exhibition will be on-line from November the 16th and from December the 2nd, physical viewings can be arranged via appointment. For any details or enquiries and access to the Beguile catalogue, please head to the Jonathan Cooper Gallery website. Hope you enjoyed this conversation with Tim Hayward, and thank you for listening.

*Outro Music*