



Animals
Robert Davies

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This project is about our different perceptions and representations of the animals we encounter, as food, as pets and in our leisure. The drawings render two different types of animals, racehorses and farm animals. The first are famous and are held in high esteem by the race going public and are often described in human terms and given characteristics to define them. The second are the animals of food production and are more or less invisible as individual beasts to those of us who eat them or benefit from the by-products of their being farmed.

Robert Davies, 2010



Foreword

Joanna Lumley

The Farm Animal Sanctuary has always treated each creature in its care as an individual. Janet Taylor knows them all by name and habit: what they like to eat, where they go when they are in a bad mood, how they leap about when happy and how wily they can be in preparing to breach a fence or nick someone else's food. For this reason almost above all others I love being the patron of such an enlightened set-up: despite being on the brink of penury for much of its existence it nevertheless continues to offer safety and loving understanding to animals who have been thrown on the scrap-heap. The newsletters talk of the farm animals as others would write of friends and family; scrapes, mishaps, triumphs, losses and terribly funny incidents; you realise that you are reading about living beings with different characters and needs.

The quite astonishing thing about Robert Davies's work is that he draws accurate and telling portraits of the farm animals and birds in front of him. His work is fine, fine in every sense: beautifully restrained, with no mawkishness or sentimentality, and brilliantly accomplished. I love the way he draws the wool on a sheep's back, the foot of a cow; I feel I would recognise each beast from its picture, so clearly realised are their expressions and deportment. By showing the animal alone on the page he allows us to look at it without distraction as a wonderful creature in its own right. As Henry Beston wrote: "They are not underlings; they are other nations caught with us in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth." This show deserves to be a sell out. Robert's work is utterly superb, and the Farm Animal Sanctuary beyond reproach.

Sacha Craddock
October 2010

Close to the paper surface, working with pencils, at one level Robert Davies knows what he is doing, but cannot really see how it will turn out. The perpetual effort is the transfer of such a fine touch to such a huge scale. This describes the particular way a skill, or virtuosity, stops being that to become always abstract, lost, the idea not a notion but an attitude. The build up over the surface carries the inside and outside sense that comes with drawing, where the mind lessens as if in constant competition with the mindfulness of depiction, subject, and meaning. The making and meaning are divorced here, because this is not illustration. Robert Davies's most recent work, the painstakingly executed drawings of animals, with apparently actual skin, hair, pelt, fur, outlined against a surface of blank paper, asks questions about the possibility of a straightforward relation between artist and image. This creation of an image in real time is of practical and conceptual importance to the artist, and as subject and image are brought so close together, the work questions the literal value of artistic production and creation.

Davies uses drawing to do for animals what a civil liberties lawyer does when taking on a complex and probably financially unrewarding case, to protect the disenfranchised, downtrodden, maligned and tortured. The animals Davies draws range, in various sets of values, from 'Sea the Stars', one of the most celebrated race horses of the modern era, to 'Buttercup', a calf rescued when six days old from a veal crate on its way to the Continent. Both the racehorse; unapproachable, magnificent, famous, strangely personalised to the point of human, and 'Buttercup', the 'saved' Herefordshire Cross, with teats hanging, hair hanging, mud on folded skin apparent, are conjured by the artist from blank emptiness through a particularly painstaking method of drawing.

The key to the work, the crucial question, is the way that closeness to a subject can be conveyed through representation. It seems that Robert Davies, who is in fact a profoundly active, motivated, emotional, believer in the rights of animals, found that after many different series of works over a substantial artistic career, had no choice but to represent the 'rescued' farm yard animals he has got to know and the famous race horses he only knows about, and to represent them in the same way. Davies has spent a lot of time with a number of rescued farm animals at the Farm Animal Sanctuary, near where he lives in Worcestershire. 'Buttercup,' the calf rescued

from the veal crate, has been photographed often by Davies – since he made the drawing she has been attacked by children with a Stanley knife and has died. The difference in status and value between 'Curly' the sheep, for instance, an animal of food production, and 'Sadler's Wells', a hugely famous racehorse, is rendered invisible by the artist, because of the way he draws the animals for us. All creatures are granted the same level of committed obsession, 'I draw Buttercup in the same way because all animals are the same'.

Through drawing them, lovingly, Davies believes he is able to restore a sense of dignity for real. Of course the range, from racehorse conjured from a photograph to a goose, cow or turkey, drawn from a photograph taken by the artist, plays with an equally complex notion of dignity. The personalised racehorse always fetishised as if a film star, but each farm animal now rendered as individually glorious. And dignity is merged with delicious desirability. Continually worried about the way we treat animals, Davies is working, not as an artist who displays a horse for its generic beauty, or a sheep for its historical relationship to naïve art, but as someone who tries, through an intense involvement in the creation of the individual pictorial image, to imbue each animal and bird with the specific quality of a portrait.

The fact that this artist once worked as an undercover photographer of a Midlands Hunt played no active part in earlier drawing and painting. His relation to nature has done so, of course, throughout. Davies, who completed his MA in Photography at the Royal College of Art in the early 1990s, has an unashamed understanding of art history. The recent works of animals play out differently in terms of image and time, but all his work has used photography as secondary source and primary base. There may be a certain return to basics at the moment, collusion with subject that is perhaps deliberately blunt in the need to merge intention with medium.

Each of Davies's previous series of work has been rationalised by a primarily parallel conceptual concern. The Epiphany series, for instance, which shows the exact moment of loss, or perhaps gain, during the World Cup tournaments from 1930-2002, extends a clever relationship between photography and moment. The artist

elevates the subject through attention, rather than medium. It is a matter of time, and so a photograph of a turn in a river exclaims constancy and perpetual time, while the football series show split second incidents extended and abstracted as if by the medium of paint. Skies, a river bend, stars at night, flowers; all represented in distinct and autonomous series, each revealing a close relationship to the founding source of photography. Up close and personal, though, Davies now weaves a sharp and virtuoso touch, with the surface of the paper carrying layers of described captured photographic light.

What Davies is referring to in the animal drawings, with ease, before anything else, is an historical measure of genre, with animal painting low down the hierarchy of artistic practice. Farm animals were generally painted, naively or even functionally, to celebrate or encourage ownership, or both; to register an upgrade in a breed of cattle, or to give evidence of a particular development and so, long before photography, this particular type of painting functioned as the equivalent of a 1930's seed catalogue. The bull, sheep or horse featured as examples for trade, as livestock for country folk and estate managers to recognise and desire. So Davies happily admits that he is strongly influenced by the work of the late 18th century painter George Stubbs, and in admiration of the real ideological change in attitude to both wild and domestic animals that was brought about partially by his work. Stubbs sought and managed to convey much more than the romantic, practical split in his need to give truth and force to an animal. He challenged the conception of the 'beast', from his representation of racehorses, through to more fantastic fictional scenarios.

So look, here is Paul, the goose, Stan the turkey, Curly the sheep in sheep's clothing' who looks out in an extraordinary fashion; there is Marmite the cow, but then also there is 'Sadler's Wells' the best horse by progeny of the last 20 years, each represented in such a way against a blank ground to seem so very grand in pictorial terms. What is the role of the artwork in this context? Is this propaganda? How can we project the quintessential ingredients of a liberation struggle, achieve the delicate balance between oppression and pride? George Stubbs's famous painting of the thoroughbred Hambletonian in 'Hambletonian, Rubbing Down' 1800, shows a perfect animal,

frisky yet docile. A stable lad, with cloth in hand, is represented as an individual, while buildings are outlined against the sky under the immaculate outline of the horse's stomach. It is stated that Stubbs felt sorry for this magnificent horse, which he felt had been ridden too hard at Newmarket. 'Hambletonian' who seems thoroughly blasted and exhausted, still manages to maintain a fragile and delicate stance in the painting.

Although Davies isolates each animal or bird against the white ground he aims for a level of dignity that transcends a need for sympathy. Each animal is suspended in air, the ground left out. He or she, or it, a singular item, an icon, a luxuriantly rendered beast or bird. The time spent drawing; softly adding five or six layers to gradually build the image, to make thigh muscle, ruffled feather, dark, dark underbelly, shiny sinew, and pointed tail against the invisible, untouched ground has an echo of Stubbs. The animals of contemporary food production are, by necessity, and as a result of their function, not individual, not pets, but part of a mass of matter with no real use when alive except from living long enough to be big enough when dead. Without even being involved in a moral issue the very basic notion of something being made to exist because it is better dead than alive is fascinating. Robert chooses pencil over paint because the touch, the contradiction of the surface of the animal, the fine soft and furry detail arrives slowly but surely through a built up monochromatic touch. The live goose wrapped in feathers that would then have to be pulled off, promises a marvellous pretence of volume, with fantastic detail at neck, beady eye, and whiteness foaming forward from nothing.

But the narrative is one thing; while the titles indicate a friendship with the farmyard animals through first name terms, there's not anything quite so familiar with regard to the racehorses. However, all the drawings carry a formidable virtuosity about them. But the way the imagery works needs to be investigated. The outline against the foreground, the current lack of colour, after coloured painting of animals in the past, the fact that this is made from photography rather than life makes for a build up of tension across the surface. A slavishness on the part of the artist; working at such a level of detail, with the small point of a pencil, at such a huge scale but unable to step back, to gain an overview or pull off any flourish or all-over sweep.

The work adds up to something so much more than an intention to reveal the contrast in attention and affection between the racehorse and the animal reared for food. In between there are pets, neither grand nor independent, but not for food. But the contrast between sympathy and self-determination is truly complicated. Davies draws his animals to a scale that is crucial, the relationship is fundamentally that of being face to face, whither to fetlock, ripple by ripple, and the attention is easily as close as that of a lover caught somewhere between sight and touch. The hand, in his case, literally builds the image as it smoothes, or soothes, its way across, over and over, on a mission to gather, or conjure, the presence of the life size animal. The glory of the animal is difficult to maintain as image, but Robert Davies finds his way there, unseeing literally, as he renders ripple by ripple of muscular definition.

Date	Task	Hours	Hours	Hours
	Curly			
	Scan photo	2		
20/11	outline/prep	2½		
25/11	outline prep	3½ (AM)		
25/11	drawing	3½		
26/11		6		
27/11		7		
28/11		6½	16/1	6
1/12		6	17/1	5½
5/12		6½	20/1	6
5/12		6½	21/1	6½
5/12		6½	22/1	6½
8/12		6½	23/1	1½
9/12		4	24/1	6
9/12		6½	27/1	hospital 3
10/12		5	28/1	4½ push!!
11/12		5½		
12/12		3½		
13/12	hospital ↓	4		168 hours
13/12		4		
19/12		4		
23/12		4		
23/12		4		
31/12		5		
2/1		2		
5/1		6½		
6/1		6		
7/1		6		
8/1		6		
8/1		6		
9/1		6		
10/1		6		
15/1		6		

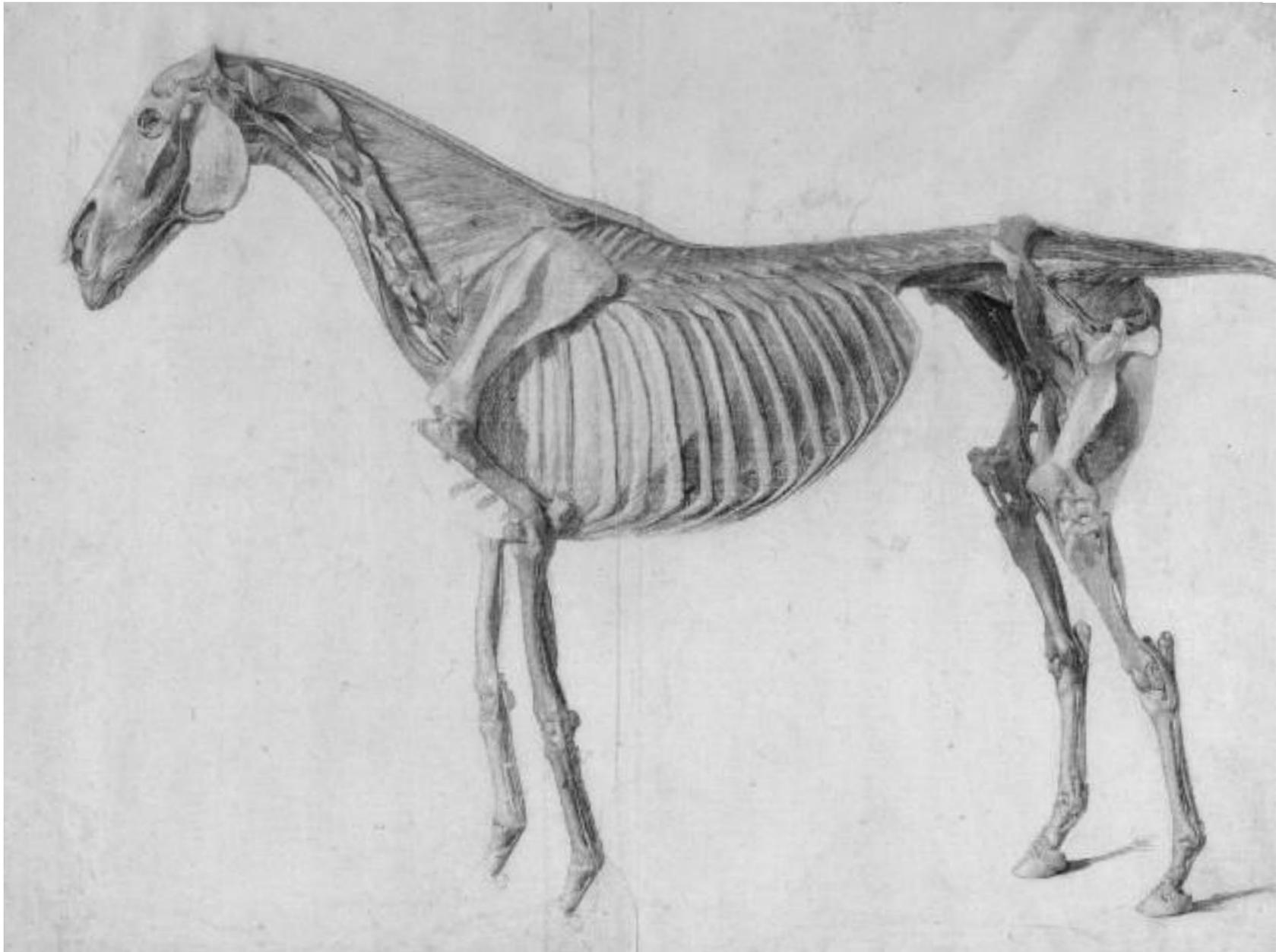
Hours sheet

Stubbs is quite central to this project. His drawings from 'A Comparative Anatomical Exposition of the Structure of the Human Body, with that of a Tiger and a Common Fowl' (1795-1806) were intended to accentuate the fundamental physical similarities between disparate creatures. His work elevated the idea of an animal's sensibility and possible cogniscence and it is no coincidence that this work supported the scientific progressions of the day (England's first veterinary college was founded in 1791) and pre-dated the foundation of the RSPCA in 1824. Humphry Primatt wrote in 'On the duty of Mercy and the sin of cruelty to Brute animals' (1766), "...a Brute is an animal no less sensible of pain than a Man. He has similar nerves and organs of sensation, and his cries and groans, in case of violent impressions on his body, though he cannot utter his complaints by speech, are as strong indications to us of his sensibility of pain." Although in the same year it should be pointed out that Stubbs did bleed several horses to death to allow him to make accurate drawings of their muscles for his landmark book 'The Anatomy of the Horse'.

Robert Davies 2010



'Prize Ram', English Provincial School, Oil on canvas
© Compton Verney, photograph by Hugh Kelly.



'The Fifth Anatomical Table of the Muscles of the Horse' 1756-1758. Courtesy of the Royal Academy of Arts, London.







Buttercup



Curly



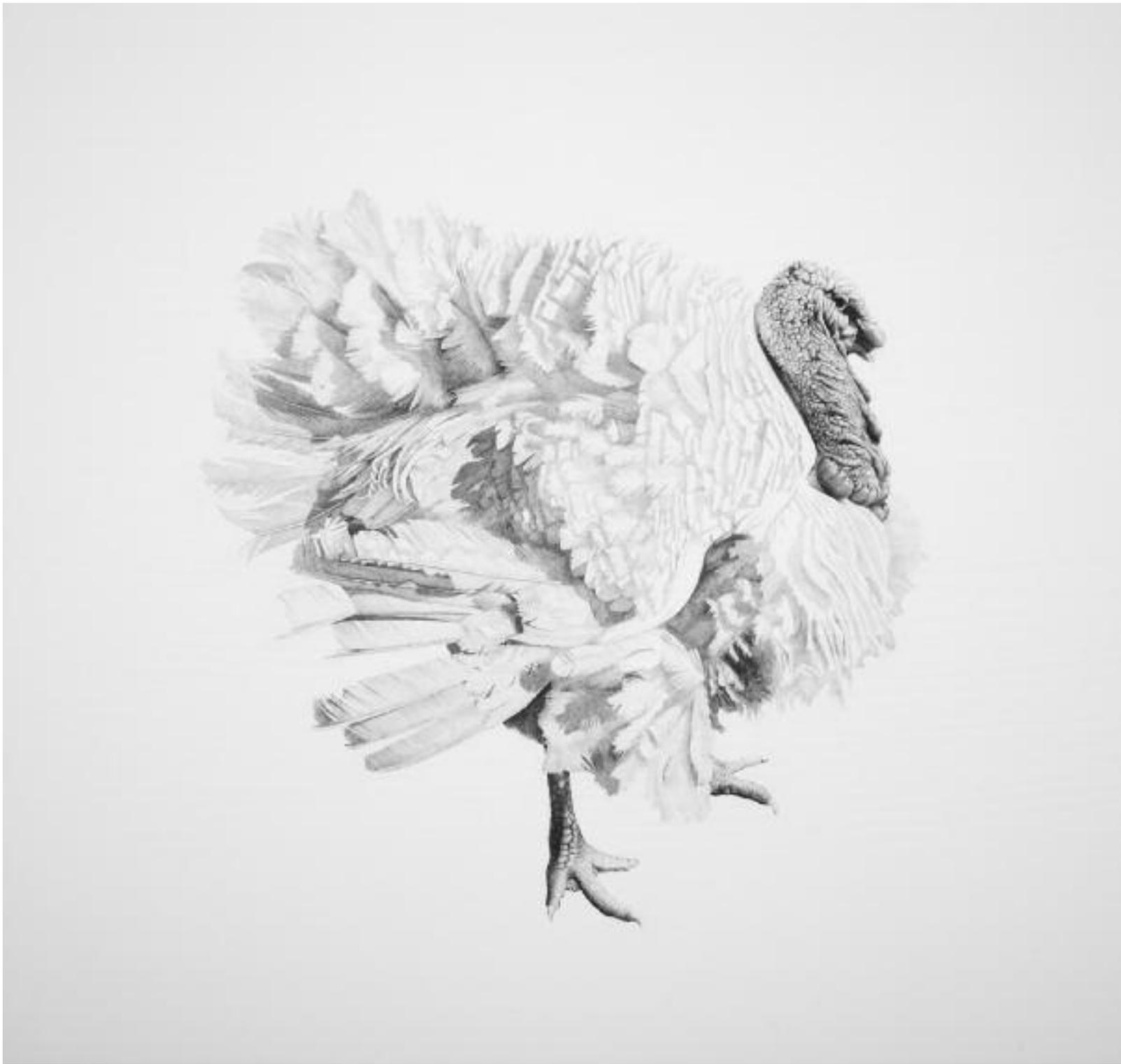


Sadler's Wells



Mon Mome













Kayf Tara







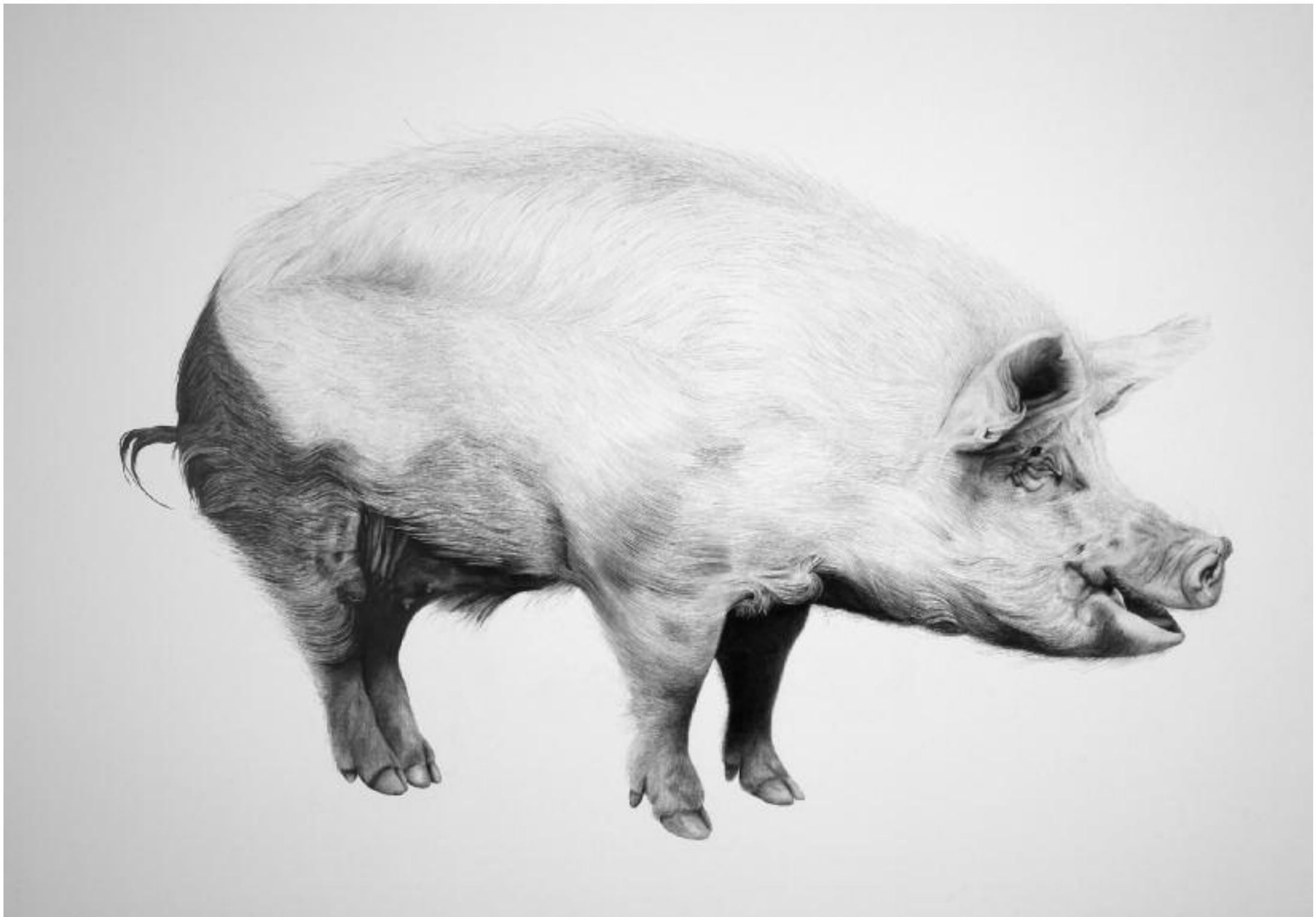


Artist's studio, drawing 'Sea the Stars', February – June 2010

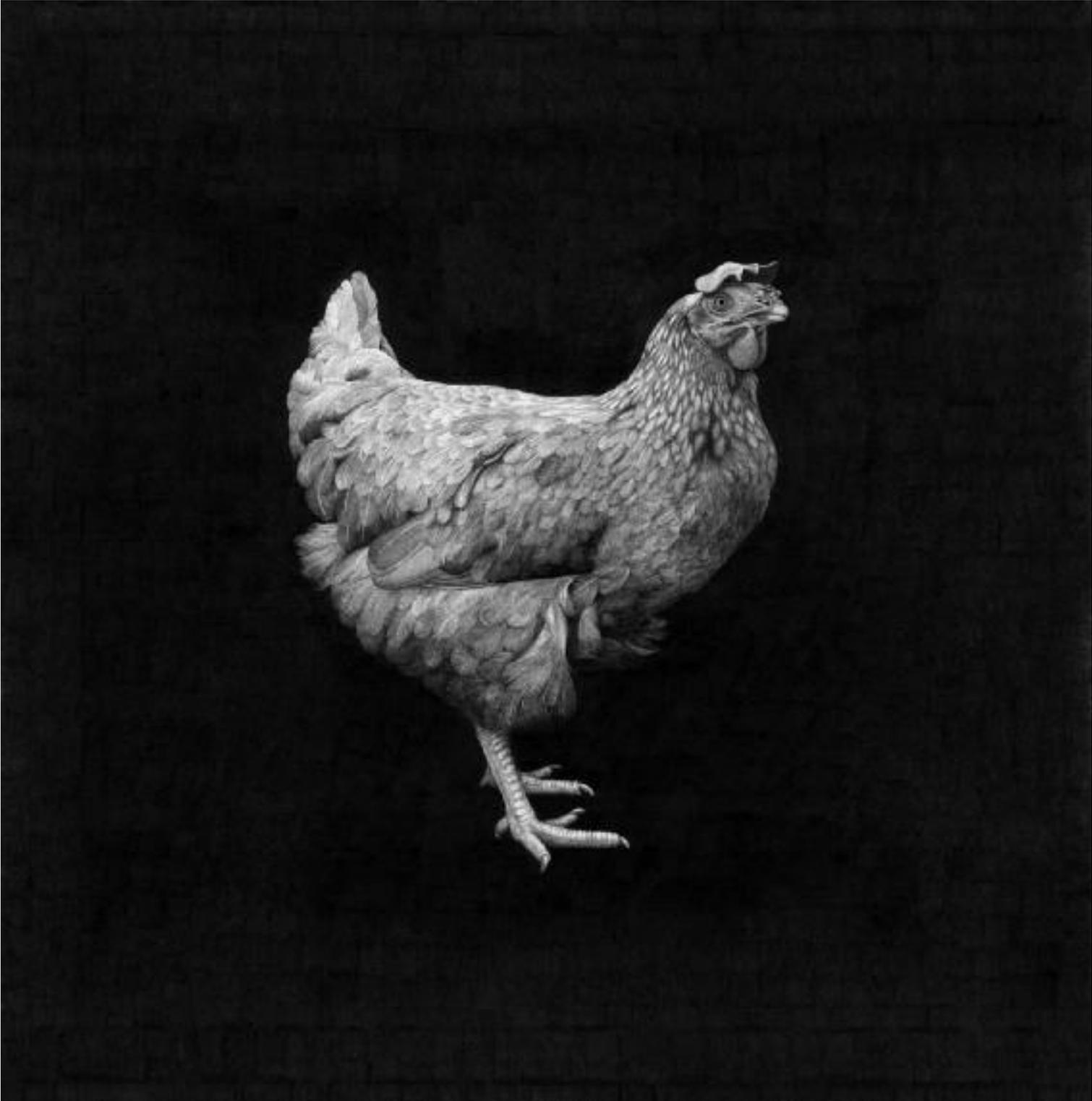












Animals

Buttercup

Hereford Cross, aged 15. Was at the Farm Animal Sanctuary for 15 years since she was bought as a 7 day old sick calf who was at market for veal export. She had salmonella but recovered at the sanctuary in 4 weeks. Died after being attacked with a Stanley knife in 2009.

2008 190x150cm

Curly

Aged 12 when this drawing was made. Originally from Devon has been at the Farm Animal Sanctuary for 6 years.

2009 190x150cm 168 hours

Jessica

Border Leicester, aged 8. Been at the Farm Animal Sanctuary for 8 years.

2009 190x150cm 136 hours drawing

Sadler's Wells

Won the Irish 2,000 Guineas and the Eclipse Stakes. His greatest success came as a sire at the Coolmore Stud in Ireland. He's been champion sire 14 times in Great Britain and Ireland and 3 times in France.

2010 190x150cm

Mon Mome

Won the Grand National in 2009 at odds of 100-1. Was third in the 2010 Cheltenham Gold Cup. Trained by Venetia Williams.

2009 190x150cm

Dylan Thomas

Out of Danehill. Trained at Ballydoyle, Dylan Thomas won the Irish Derby (2006), the King George (2007) and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (2007). Now standing at stud at Coolmore.

2009 190x150cm

Stan

Commercial Christmas turkey living at the Farm Animal Sanctuary. He was 2 when this drawing was made.

2009 106x120cm

Paul

Unwanted goose, bought as company for a female, Pauline, at the Sanctuary. Has been at the Farm Animal Sanctuary for 3 years.

2009 118x139

Kayf Tara

Owned by Godolphin, Kayf Tara won the Ascot Gold Cup (1998, 2000) and the Irish St Leger (1998, 1999). Now standing at stud he was the champion sire in 2009 in Great Britain and Ireland.

2009 190x150cm



Buttercup



Curly



Jessica



Sadler's Wells



Mon Mome



Dylan Thomas



Stan



Paul



Kayf Tara

Kauto Star

Winner of the Cheltenham Gold Cup in 2007 and 2009. Four times winner of the King George VI Chase (2006-9). Fourth highest rated jumper of all time.

2008 190x150cm

Marmite

Aberdeen Angus, aged 12. Was born on the farm to a mother who was resident. It is very rare for an animal of food production to live its whole life on the same farm.

2009 190x150cm 123.5 hours

Sea the Stars

Out of Urban Sea. He was the first horse to win the 2,000 Guineas, the Epsom Derby and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in the same year. Also won the Eclipse Stakes and the Irish Champion Stakes in 2009. Stands at the Gilltown stud, Ireland.

2010 380x240cm 375 hours

Bluebell

Aged 8 when this drawing was made. Bluebell had been at the Farm Animal Sanctuary for 2 years. She is a Large White (commercial pig). Came from a pig farm in Shropshire. An exceptional mother she looked after orphaned piglets. Too old at 7 for her own litter so prior to slaughter a local person asked for her life to be spared, bought her and gave her to Janet at the FAS.

2009 190x150cm

Smithers, Lisa

Lisa and Smithers arrived at my house from the Battery Hen Welfare Trust in May 2009 (they are considered 'spent' at 18 months old). After about 10 weeks of foraging in the garden, a varied diet and lots of treats they regained full plumage and deep colour.

Smithers 2010 90x90cm

Lisa 2010 90x90cm 73 hours



Kauto Star



Marmite



Sea the Stars



Bluebell



Smithers



Lisa

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Janet Taylor for inspiring me to do this work and all the helpers at the Farm Animal Sanctuary. Janet is an amazing woman who deserves to be recognised for her contribution to the welfare of animals and for the love and time she gives them.

I'd like to thank Mum and Dad for their encouragement and Amy, Giles, Hilary, Graham and Claire for their help and inspiration and Pumpkin and Parsnip for keeping me company. I'd like to thank the racehorse trainers and owners who allowed me to photograph their animals and David Holdsworth at Timeform. Also to Sacha Craddock and Joanna Lumley for their contributions and Andy Davies and Roddy Canas for their help with the film 'Sadler's Wells'.

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