

Matthew Ballantyne – Artist Statement

Practice Overview

Using found objects, constructed sculptures, and text, I aim to explore the poetics and politics of songbirds as a historically persisting preoccupation. Themes of, captivity and captivation, survival, theology and violence are woven throughout.

Project Description

In his posthumously published *Mourning Diary*, Roland Barthes describes the grief of his mother passing enveloping him as “Black wing (of the definitive)”. This brief poetic was the starting point for a sculptural work which it borrows as a title. *Black Wings (of the definitive)* is a pair of jackdaw wings which have been sourced from a farmer in the Cotswolds who has culled the bird, which he considered a nuisance and then sold it online in parts as crafting supplies. Jackdaws are part of the corvid family, and have long been subject to superstitious projections through folklore and mythology. They have been considered harbingers of evil, bad omens and even representatives of Satan. Jackdaws are also frequent residents of chimneys, and their feathers are often layered in ash and soot, which seems to suit their already black, charcoal colorations. The wings themselves have been encrusted with light-absorbing black suede, chimney soot and the ashes of my maternal grandparents. The work circles around the unexpected poetic manifestations of grief, desire, and loss, viewed alongside a troubled relationship with the alterity of birds.