

Marvin Gaye Chetwynd's second exhibition with Sadie Coles HQ focuses on two bodies of work, each the subject of a major new publication. A recent group of the artist's *Bat Opera* paintings – produced last year during a residency in Tuscany, Italy – appears in conjunction with a new volume published by Sadie Coles HQ and Koenig Books, extensively documenting this long-running series. Also on view is an array of collages which Chetwynd was invited to create for a new edition of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, released this year by Four Corners Books. The exhibition reflects the various stages which led to the creation of each publication, with dummy runs of the two books viewable alongside the final versions.



Alongside her improvisatory performances featuring handmade sets and costumes, Chetwynd has also worked for over a decade on *Bat Opera* – a cycle of miniature paintings portraying bats of all shapes and sizes in a variety of quixotic settings. In one, a bat spreads its wings before an Italianate backdrop of pine trees and a palazzo. Elsewhere, bats' faces mass together in a cluster of glistening eyeballs and bared teeth.

These latest works indeed reflect the sweeping thematic range of the *Bat Opera* genre, which is at odds with its concise and unchanging format. Chetwynd shifts between individual portraits of bats – portrayed heroically or forlornly before billowing skies – and swarming colonies. Several of the portraits channel the pomp of regal or military portraiture, or perhaps the melodramatic poses and kitsch fantasies of Heavy Metal album covers. Others share something of the sumptuous imagery and high drama of wildlife documentaries. We also encounter vacant landscapes and imaginary cities. Half industrial and half biblical, these equally call to mind the roseate cinematography of Michelangelo Antonioni and the overwrought backdrops of nineteenth-century operas. Indistinct fragments of architecture moreover function in the same way as the sentimentalised ruins of Romantic landscape painting. Emblems of decay, they convey the sentiment of death's omnipresence or *Et In Arcadia Ego* ('I exist even in Arcadia' – famously the title of two paintings by Poussin, affirming death's dominion even in pastoral idylls). Other works are altogether more playful: one shows not bats but a pair of beetles in clumsy combat.

While evoking theatrical sets or grandiose historical paintings, the *Bat Opera* pictures – grouped here in series of nine or six – invite an intimate viewing experience. In this respect they stand in marked contrast to the riotous and collective spirit of Chetwynd performances. Yet viewers nonetheless become participants of a kind: the paintings' scenes implicate us as audiences of theatrical displays. Many of the elements found in Chetwynd's performances are also common to the *Bat Opera* pictures – infernal portals, semi-mythical creatures, troupes of figures. Like Chetwynd's performances, these images plunder the depths of high and popular culture, ranging between the extremes of heaven and hell, farce and tragedy.

Chetwynd's new *Canterbury Tales* collages – which number almost 200 – again embrace the participatory spirit of her practice at large, making use of photographs sent to the artist by friends and acquaintances alongside a plethora of found imagery. Excerpts from the different stories have been integrated into these schemes, in which Chaucer's characters and their tales are not simply retold but re-staged. We find reincarnations of the bawdy Wyf of Bath, a narrative cycle devoted to the Merchant's Tale (in which the lustful Januarie is struck blind and cuckolded by his young wife May), and allusions to the Pardoner's Tale – a fable about seeking to 'kill Death', told by a sly and unctuous cleric. Chetwynd's images combine references to Medieval churches and Baroque ornamentation with the absurdist jolts and bodily anagrams of Surrealist collage. At the same time, the poses and attitudes of the subjects glance at other more esoteric reference points such Renaissance etchings of duelling positions and Natural History photography. In their frenetic complexity and eclectic sources, the collages capture the richness of Chaucer's text – its shifts in between ghoulish ugliness, coarse slapstick, and flashes of disarming beauty.

Marvin Gaye Chetwynd (1973) was born in London and lives and works in Glasgow. She completed a BA in Social Anthropology and History, UCL, London (1995), followed by a BA in Fine Art, Slade School of Art/UCL, London (2000) and an MA Painting, Royal College of Art, London (2004). In 2012 she was nominated for the Turner Prize. Recent solo exhibitions and major performances include those at Nottingham Contemporary (2014); The Monteverdi Gallery, Castiglione del Trinoro, Monteverdi, Italy (2013); *Home Made Tasers*, Studio 231, New Museum, New York (2011-12) and *Odd Man Out*, Sadie Coles, London, 2011. Her work has featured in numerous group exhibitions, including "L'Almanach 14", Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2014); "Performance Now: The First Decade of the New Century", curated by Rose Lee Goldberg, various venues, USA (2012-14); Göteborg, International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Göteborg, Sweden (2013); "Performa 13", New York (2013); "Aquatopia", Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, UK; Tate St Ives, St Ives, UK (2013); "Turner Prize", Tate Britain, London (2012); "Topsy-turvy", de Appel, Amsterdam (2012); "British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet", various venues, UK (2010-11). Later in 2014 Chetwynd will stage major solo presentations at Studio Voltaire, London; the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, and Tadeusz Kantor CRICOTEKA, Kraków, Poland (2014).

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