Abstract

Documentation of a contemporary art project by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson centred on the histories of taxidermied polar bears in the UK, considering the broader history of hunting and the display of stuffed animals as trophies and museum specimens. Highly illustrated with the photographic work of the artists, as well as previously unpublished images of polar bears in captivity from the late nineteenth century. Four essays by Patricia Ellis, Dr. Steve Baker, Michelle Henning and Dr. Garry Marvin include topics such as animals in contemporary art and contemporary trophy hunting in America. Part of the story laid out in Nanoq: flat out and bluesome unpacks what it is to exoticise something – to consider the poignancy of souvenirs, and the intrinsic sadness and ultimate futility of collecting things by which we seek to remember places and events. The photographic images are taken with a medium format camera to enable enlargement with maximum clarity, offering intimate detail of the polar bears collected by the artists, giving the images a grandeur and elegaic atmosphere. This book charts the work of artists Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, who between 2002 and 2004 undertook a survey of taxidermic polar bears in the UK. The book is a lavishly illustrated document of the research and resulting photographs, including essays by the artists, as well as essays by leading academics on the topics of taxidermy, trophy-hunting and the depiction of animals in art. Looking at the shifting relationship between the wild and its depiction in our museums and galleries, the title references the melancholy that these majestic creatures, taken from their natural habitats, evoke in the viewer.