

PENNY DAVENPORT

SILENT ANCESTORS

September 6 - October 13, 2019

Opening Reception: Friday, September 6, 6-8pm

FORTNIGHT INSTITUTE

60 East 4th St. NYC

In a book from the 13th century found at the British Library, a simple text, on a piece of parchment reads: *For the whole world is full of different creatures, like a book written with various words and full of sentences...* The centuries-old text conjures Penny Davenport's works on paper in the exhibition *Silent Ancestors* with its chimerical collection of fantastical landscapes and beings that are wild, luminous, and, at times ominous. Entering the exhibition is like entering the world of a Medieval bestiary - a book of real and imaginary beasts (medieval bestiary manuscripts are among the most vividly illuminated books of their era). *Silent Ancestors* can be experienced like a book, each work flowing into one another, like shared worlds. The work, *Shared Worlds*, depicts just what its title suggests, an interconnectedness between stars, mountains and different creatures, residing above like below. Davenport says, "I like the idea of nature being observed, thrown up and remoulded." Like marginalia (annotations and doodles) found in Medieval manuscripts, some works include drawings on the verso with occasional text relics, that read like secret messages, such as in, *Endless Space Our Sea*: "This kind of experience is necessary for her learning."

The works included in the exhibition are on paper with various uses of ink, watercolor, pencil, and wax. Most of the ink drawings are monochromatic, blue or black, with occasional hints of other colors arising over the blues and blacks. In *Bitten Monk*, a manifestation of animal and human-like spirits linger over a dense blue sea-like surface, each ink marking seemingly infinite. The works appear to inhabit a timeless dream-like dimension, with the powerful yet serene presence of its figures, like ancestors from another realm, residing in the worlds that Davenport has created. The landscapes evoke a primordial place, such as in the work, *Cave*. The ink and pencil works are more detail-oriented with a diverse interplay of lines that cover most of the surface of the paper. Although the ink is more permanent and controlled, there are feelings of movement and atmosphere between sharper and softer lines, dark and light shadows. The watercolors are diaphanous and vaporous with pinks, yellows, and blues, at times faded like a memory.

When examining Davenport's work, one is confronted with an initial sense of familiarity looking at what seem to be dogs, bears or birds. When details reveal themselves, uncertainty penetrates. These creatures are not what they seem, they are spirits summoned from Davenport's imagination. The eerie yet playful images possess an in-between quality that could be said to live between the natural and supernatural. Davenport's drawings are whimsical, uninhibited and seemingly spontaneous. These qualities bring to mind the works of artists like Sophie Podolski, Kiki Smith, and Unica Zürn.

I make my work in an unplanned way, you could say that the drawings are always ahead of me. I embrace play, and the tension that's induced from mistakes that seem unrecoverable.

Penny Davenport (b.1979 Inverness, Scotland) is based in Liverpool, England, where she lives and works. She studied Fine Art in Liverpool. Recent group exhibitions include: *FOUR*, Wilson Stephens and Jones, London (2019) and *Truth And Fantasy*, Craven Museum, Skipton, North Yorkshire, England (2018).