

The Arts Catalyst

The Arts Catalyst in association with Yorkshire Sculpture Park presents:

The Case of the Deviant Toad

Work by Brandon Ballengée

The Royal Institution of Great Britain, London, 15 – 31 March 2010

New York artist, activist and ecological researcher, **Brandon Ballengée** brings his startling high-resolution scanner photographs, video and preserved specimens of deformed toads to the Royal Institution for his first London solo exhibition: **The Case of the Deviant Toad**. The show, exploring issues of biodiversity and ecological change, presents the outcome of the artist's 'Ecoactions' and study of UK amphibians commissioned by The Arts Catalyst and Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

In this the **International Year of Biodiversity**, Ballengée's artistic practice warns of high incidences of amphibian deformity in response to environmental degradation through his creation of aesthetically rich images and intriguing installations.

In the exhibition, Ballengée presents variations of his sculptural series 'Styx' which display cleared and stained specimens of deformed toads, each tiny animal presented in a precisely illuminated glass dish. In a gallery context, the specimens resemble translucent gems – enchanting, terrible and other-worldly. Framed watercolour prints of detailed vibrant specimens scans are reminiscent of x-rays, presenting large-scale images of fragile delicacy to invoke viewers' empathy.

The artist's long-standing interest in deformed amphibian species concerns their metamorphosis in water; amphibians are extremely responsive to changes in their environment and therefore serve as an 'advance guard' warning of environmental change. His work with the contemporary art organisations The Arts Catalyst and Yorkshire Sculpture Park began with a commission to study of amphibians in the Sculpture Park, looking at a particular population of toads with a high incidence of deformity. Between 2006 and 2008, Ballengée led numerous 'Ecoactions' (public field trips) in the Park, established an open laboratory, collected and observed thousands of specimens, constructed and painstakingly conducted experiments in an effort to determine what might be the cause. The exhibition includes new specimens and prints from this study.

Alongside Yorkshire naturalist Richard Sunter and with US scientist Dr Stanley K Sessions, Ballengée used a process known as 'clearing and staining', which renders the soft parts of the specimen almost transparent in order to study their morphologies. The fragile beauty of the resulting high-resolution scanned images of abnormal toadlets form the centrepiece of the exhibition. They are shown alongside the tiny specimens themselves, videos and drawings made during Ballengée's research.

The free exhibition at the Royal Institution, **The Case of the Deviant Toad**, from 16-31 March 2010 coincides with the launch of a new publication of **Malamp, The Occurrence of Deformities in Amphibians** by Brandon Ballengée. This monograph, jointly published by The Arts Catalyst and Yorkshire Sculpture Park, brings together

Ballengée's UK research with findings from his global amphibian studies. It includes texts on his practice from arts, science and ecological perspectives, including a keynote essay by the renowned art critic and curator Lucy R Lippard. Additional contributors include Clare Lilley, Head Curator at Yorkshire Sculpture Park; Nicola Triscott, Director of The Arts Catalyst; Dr Stanley K Sessions, Professor of Biology, Hartwick College and Dr Kerry Kriger, Director of Save the Frogs. The publication is richly illustrated with extraordinary photographs, Ballengée's drawings and other artworks.

The Arts Catalyst is the contemporary art organisation that makes bridges between artists and scientists as they address issues about our changing world. See www.artscatalyst.org and search for 'Ballengée'.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park comprises 500 acres of historic parkland and contemporary art galleries enabling the exploration, enjoyment and understanding of art and nature. See www.ysp.co.uk, go to Exhibitions, Archive, 2008.

Biodiversity is Life. 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. The diversity of life on earth is crucial for human well-being and now is the time to act to preserve it. For information visit www.biodiversityislife.net

Launch event:

Monday 15 March 2010, 6.30pm **Art-Science Cafe** – artist Brandon Ballengée in conversation with Michaela Crimmin, Director of Arts at RSA, chaired by Nicola Triscott, Director of The Arts Catalyst

Exhibition details: The Case of the Deviant Toad, work by Brandon Ballengée At The Royal Institution of Great Britain, 21 Albemarle Street, London W1S 4BS, UK 16 to 31 March 2010, open Monday to Friday, 9am to 11pm. Admission free

Publication:

Malamp: The Occurrence of Deformities in Amphibians, Brandon Ballengée. Edited by Nicola Triscott/Miranda Pope. 72 page, softback. £15.95. ISBN 978-0-9534546-7-9

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Press images for download at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/jo.artscatalyst/TheCaseOfTheDeviantToadBrandonBallengee?authkey=Gv1sRgCNfqyqShiauYFQ&feat=directlink>



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