

# Darren Waterston

## Ravens and Ruins

March 28 - May 18, 2013

Join us for a reception with the artist Saturday, May 4, 2013, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

For his eighth exhibition with Haines Gallery, *Ravens and Ruins*, New York based Darren Waterston presents new paintings and works on paper that consider the transgressive potential of both the natural and imaginary worlds. Through a series of stunning paintings, Waterston utilizes his ethereal aesthetic to depict utopian visions gone awry. A suite of twenty-five gouache on paper silhouettes from his recent bestiary project reference an animal kingdom unsettled by the volatility of morphing forms. Additionally, collections of curated works on paper are displayed within a vitrine, acting as a conceptual bridge for Waterston's panel paintings and the bestiary. This vitrine displays a selection of works produced over the past two years, including preparatory sketches for both the exhibited paintings and bestiary works.



*New World*, 2012, Oil on wood panel, Panel: 20 x 16 inches

Waterston offers a contemporary meditation on the medieval tradition of the bestiary, an encyclopedic compendium of animals, both real and mythical. In addition to exquisite illustrations and an account of the creature's natural history, these entries were embedded with allegorical significance: we see ourselves reflected in these animals, and through them, are meant to consider the potential pitfalls of human experience. Waterston's almost totemic silhouettes incorporate species from insect to bird to mammal, captured in motion as they hunt their prey, build their nests, or protect their young. As Waterston explains, his gouache bestiary "follows the form of the animal into states of being and becoming, metamorphosis, dematerialization, and decay." While these striking compositions read as playful compilations from the animal kingdom, there is an underlying menace at work as well, producing an unexpected harmony of dissonant elements.

This play of beauty and disquiet is echoed in Waterston's paintings where there is evidence of human life in the fragments of

architecture—temples, cathedrals, ziggurats, bridges—that emerge from the organic detritus. Waterston has often engaged with mythological, theological, and natural histories while proposing visual depictions of the ineffable that transcend the picture plane. These scenes evoke places of refuge, offering an escape from the processes of time and mortality. For Waterston, however, utopian potential is untenable as such. With abstracted elements that are both corporeal and celestial, Waterston's scenes become simultaneously Edenic and dystopian.

*Ravens and Ruins* is presented concurrently with *A Swarm, A Flock, A Host: A Compendium of Creatures*, an exhibition of works from a recently commissioned portfolio by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and printed by Paulson Bott Press, at the

Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco's Legion of Honor from March 30 through December 29, 2013. *A Swarm, A Flock, A Host* is accompanied by a publication that includes poetry by Mark Doty. A lecture and book signing with Waterston and Doty is scheduled for May 15 at 6:30pm at the Legion of Honor.

Waterston's work has been exhibited internationally and is included in many collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Eli Broad Family Foundation, Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, Seattle Art Museum, and Portland Art Museum. In 2014, he will be featured in a solo exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art featuring a new, mixed media installation based on James McNeill Whistler's exquisite painted interior, *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room*. Reconstructed to scale and with much of the room's original architecture, Waterston's sumptuous parody – *Filthy Lucre* – imagines the room in a state of decadent demolition, full of both beauty and discord as it collapses in on itself, heavy with its own excess and tumultuous history.