

BECKY TUCKER

The Quarry

22 May - 30 July 2025

Parts of the walls are soaked in colour. Figures and other beings sit around or present themselves. They put themselves on show. They almost pose. Or crawl beyond the frames and display cases, out onto the gallery floor, where they have been turned into stone while on the run.

It is the world of the Quarry. The word translates to the prey, the hunted or the pursued. But it is also the technical term for a bonanza or clay pit or a mine. What one encounters in the room is a world populated by fictitious or reinvented, extinct creatures. Created from ceramics and glazes by Scottish artist Becky Tucker. It is no coincidence that the word is also reminiscent of the pseudonym of a sci-fi character or a rare single-celled organism.

The colour on the wall is not just any colour. If you look carefully, you will see that it resembles the colour of the fabric that connect the neck and torso of the figures. The unique bright indigo colour is the result of a special process used by the artist. Indigo has been used for this purpose since prehistoric times. It is considered to be one of the oldest plant dyes for textiles, with the oldest known examples from Peru dating back to 4200 BC.

Normally, indigo dyes a colour that appears dark blue to purple to the eye - but through a unique process, Tucker has extracted the pigment called indirubin from the tree leaf to create the light purple colour. Purple has long been associated with nobility and opulence, as it is rare in nature and the pigment is notoriously difficult to obtain (e.g. Tyrian purple is extracted from murex snails). But the colour chosen here is far from a deep, rich hue, which in turn destabilises this association and instead plays with themes of the otherworldly. 'I'm interested in coupling ancient and futuristic aesthetics. Ceramic is often associated with earth tones, which are very muted and natural, whereas this colour is very synthetic almost sickly,' says Tucker.

The immersive environment elevates the works from objects to inhabitants of their own environment. What are the beings looking for here? The wall colour speaks a language, conveys a feeling. It is a portal that teleports these special beings into the present or the future.

The influence of costume and armour on Becky Tucker's artistic style is obvious. However, Tucker goes even further back in the history of our planet when she reinvents extinct creatures, medieval-looking armour, suits or ornaments. The search for the Quarry began with a book called *My Mind To Me A Kingdom Is* by Paul Stanbridge, as Tucker explains. It begins with the story of the exploration of *Doggerland* - a now-submerged landmass in the North Sea where various artefacts have been found. 'This led me to deepen my interest in archaeology and ancient artefacts, but also to think about mapping connections through time. A cornerstone of my practice is looking for references from very different cultures, eras and aesthetics. I am interested in finding out what connects material practices and understanding patterns of creation.'

The depiction of creatures and figures can be found all over the world, thousands of years and thousands of kilometres apart, with very different symbolic and functional purposes. From the German 'Lion Man' and the 'Venus of Hohle Fels' (both circa 38,000 BC) to Chinese Zenmushou tomb guards from 600 AD to Zuni fetishes from around 650 AD, it's clear that the depiction of creatures is enduring and important. 'For me, it's not really about the animal, it's about the history of the objects and the cultural symbolism.'

A very special mysterious radiance emanates from the works. It is not entirely clear where this comes from, whether it is the strikingly careful details or the glazed splendour of colour. Or perhaps it is the fact that you have to dare to approach them, that you are drawn to them. Like with a vampire, you are deterred and yet at its mercy. The interplay of attraction and repulsion. Cuteness and the formidable have a magical effect. Like a good horror film. One acts out of an irrepressible fascination for the exploration of the known unknown. The term anachronistic artefact has become established in Tucker's work.

For some of the fictional creatures with human hands, it is unclear whether they have reached the final form of their development. A symbiosis of the past and the fictional, fossilised in the moment of an evolutionary transformation.

A certain nostalgia also plays a part in the story. *Atlas*, *Anthem* and *Harbinger* are telling titles. If you look *Anthem in the eye*, you might think the black tears were meant for us and the tragedy of our time. All three figures are hybrid messengers - simultaneously from the past and the future - whose tears hold up a mirror to us. Atlas, from the Greek, 'he who shoulders the world' and thus has to bear it, endure it; Anthem, who sings a hymn to what once was, and Harbinger embodies the messenger who announces what is yet to come. Perhaps they are themselves the bearers of nostalgia for what once was, and regret where humanity is heading.

Tucker's works are shape and genre shifting, creating a fascinating bridge between the focus on making in terms of the rich history of the material, its fragility but also its longevity, and the expression of a zeitgeist-angst. Through them, one embarks on a path of exploration and yet feels transported into a new experience through a primal force.