

Nashashibi/Skaer *Chimera*

Cooper Gallery, Dundee

30 September – 19 December

Since 2005 Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer have made films collaboratively alongside their work as solo artists. 2009's *Our Magnolia* takes Paul Nash's wartime 1944 painting *Flight of the Magnolia* as a departure point (fragments of the Nash painting are used as stills in the film), continuing the artists' interest in art-historical quotation as a framing device. But where Nash's painting invokes a surreal vision of Britain's invasion by parachutes flowering, magnolia-like over the skies, Nashashibi/Skaer cast former prime minister Margaret Thatcher as 'our magnolia' at another key historical moment: a warmongering politician-in-pearls working with the US to initiate the first Gulf War (and remembered by the artists as a key player in the oil politics which resulted in the Iraq War under Tony Blair). In its use of found imagery, including footage of the looting of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad in 2003 in which thousands of artefacts and works of art were stolen, and photographs of Thatcher herself, *Our Magnolia* at first appears formally and tonally distinct from the other two films in the exhibition, *Lamb* (2019) and *Bear* (2021), whose close-up ethological gaze centres exclusively on ewes and lambs.

Companion pieces, the two later films were shot in a lambing shed on the Isle of Lewis. In contrast to *Our Magnolia*, they seem to reassert a nature-culture dichotomy in depicting the cyclical nature of life, but the exhibition's title, with its reference to the monstrous, hybrid creatures of Greek mythology and its related definition as something illusory or dream-like, encourages the viewer to read all three films (as Roger Cardinal writes of Paul Nash's work in a text found in the exhibition's reading area) as 'brimful of poetic suggestion' moving 'towards a register that appears to outstrip, even to annul the idiom of the commonplace and the readily understood'.

*Lamb* and *Bear*, , approach this shift, unanchored as they are from specific historical events. Where *Lamb*, filmed pre-pandemic lockdowns, is almost straight documentary (save for the Samuel Palmeresque golden hue of sunlight on sheep and the sound of music and human voice) *Bear*, filmed during lockdown is silent and uncanny, something closer to a cine-poem. Nashashibi has described her work as being 'a filter for looking at things', through which 'an activity can change from being banal to something strange, fantastical, miraculous'. Through Nashashibi/Skaer's filter, the pregnant, panting ewes and unsteady, newly born lambs begin to take on an altogether more chimeric quality through the addition of ink on film and digital drawings. With these glitching, glancing, momentary overlays, the flock are transformed into altogether less bucolic, more mythic beasts on the brink of metamorphosis. With *Our Magnolia*, the possessive pronoun and the return to the motif of Nash's blossoming parachute suggest that this is more a meditation on the artists' memories of their formative years than a straight critique of Thatcher's legacy. The newer works may signal a move away from the collage / documentary approach or implied political content of *Our Magnolia* but poetic suggestion runs through all three. *Susannah Thompson*