

## Murmurings

### A solo exhibition by Penny Davenport

17 September - 18 October 2021

Opening: Friday 17 September from 17:00

Referring to indistinct speech, as well as the soft noise of running water, and the sound of blood as it rushes through the heart, the word 'murmur' evokes a world of mysterious communication and feelings of internal change. The same could be said for Penny Davenport's drawings. For the artist's debut solo exhibition with OTP Copenhagen, the gallery is proud to present ten new works on paper that expand Davenport's treatment of daydreamed landscapes and the complex emotional consequences of our relationships.

Speaking on the phone as I prepared to write this text, Penny Davenport was definite in her view that the characters appearing throughout her work are decidedly non-human. Whilst the figures in these works are certainly anthropomorphic (they stand on two feet, they often hold hands and they gaze out at the viewer with eyes that suggest feelings of empathy and understanding) there is a distance between these gentle beings and the people who look at them.

Often covered in feathers or downy fur, these characters have bear-like snouts and soft drooping ears. We recognise the characteristics of other animals that are distinctly not us. And yet, at the same time we also see the uncanny reflection of ourselves in these figures, whose body language and facial expressions suggests an inner life just like our own. In many ways these works encourage an honest recognition of self, and that can be as comforting and affirming as it can be slightly unsettling.

In a work like *Because You Never Show It* (2021), two long-eared figures nervously approach each other or move apart in a refracted field of rainbows. Each clasps their hands over their stomach in a gesture that could suggest a shy but eager anticipation to touch, or the desire to confide in one another and share an emotional burden, or the sinking hurt of disappointment and the need to pull away. Each of these emotional effects is compounded by the richness and intensity of Davenport's use of colour. Bands of moss green, warm peach and cerulean blue frame the figures' interaction and emphasise the ambiguous nuances of the ways in which people and animals communicate non-verbally.

In the same way that murmurings can be produced by one quiet voice or several speaking over each other, Davenport explores how ideas of multiplicity can complicate our reading of any individual person. The figures in these works have strong personalities but defy easy categorisation according to any physical characteristics. Their bodies are obscured by finely rendered hairs or patches of fur. Oftentimes they seem to be shielding each other as they embrace, as if to protect the sense of privacy and intimacy they share within this realm, outside of economic systems and away from digital technology.

Group dynamics are also of central importance to the works in this show. In drawings like *Ow Do* (2021) and *Murmurings* (2020), Davenport explores how physical togetherness and feelings of isolation can overlap. Both images show communities that seem united in their close proximity, but as we look closer we notice figures standing apart and embraces that could be read as either nurturing or controlling.

Reminiscent of half-remembered images from childhood, or individual frames from an incomplete narrative, the viewer must introduce their own imagination to reach an understanding of these scenes. This strategy of incompleteness is just as much an honest reflection of human complexity as it is a strategy of inclusivity. Penny Davenport invites the viewer to engage with and become part of the work, visually murmuring not as a way to confuse or mislead, but as a soft invitation to come closer and to see what you think is being communicated.

## **Sitting with Penny Davenport's Otherworlders: An Artist-To-Artist Response**

By Kinga Bartis

Ambiguous emotions float around like confetti above a piece of land.  
A moon looks puzzled as it witnesses a fragile encounter between colourful lines and dots.  
When confetti weather finally clears out we are led into a gentle universe.  
Come, move closer and tune in.  
Here a handful of friendly creatures are gathering slowly, surrounded by a wavy, rich landscape.

A non-human couple gently teases one another amongst bright blue flora. An excessive body of birds drifts above their happy observers.  
I would like to live under the little red paths that run beneath the branches, above the green, and dance with them at their ritual.

Sensitive to their environment, Penny Davenport's otherworlders bear intense presence, attentiveness and care. Tension and feelings are rendered in their eyes, their mouth, their fiddling hands. How can these fine furry creatures show so many countless expressions? The heavy spirits of these works are thoughtfully encapsulated by their scale and medium. Pulsing with fey energy, they awaken our ambition to pursue a familiar strangeness.

Through image-making we are writing stories, contributing to narratives that shape our perceptions of reality. Ursula K. Le Guin uses the term psychomyth, to denote a story outside real time, past or future.

The show *Murmurings* could be a proposal for such an otherworldly narrative; one that advocates for generosity and care.

Through their radical softness, these works occupy multiple realities and show us different ways of accompanying each other. Here we see interconnectedness as mutual dependence, both on ecosystems and communal co-operation. Penny Davenport seems to provide us with a methodology for nurturing and kindness by rendering this environment.

Responding to grief, helplessness and the collective fragility we recently learned together, let's not let these wonderful gems run through our fingers, and disappear. Instead let's take them in our heart as tools and reminders for a necessary realignment of our worldview and as new stories to be told.