

EDITED BY AMIT KATWALA & GIAN VOLPICELLI

# START

A photograph of two gibbons in a lush forest. The gibbons are dark-furred with light-colored faces and chests. They are surrounded by dense foliage with vibrant red, pink, and yellow leaves. In the background, there are blue mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene is bright and colorful.

H Y P E R





In his latest solo show, *Ereozoic*, British visual artist Jim Naughten dreams up psychedelic scenes of wildlife designed to reflect both humanity's rose-tinted view of the environment and our growing estrangement from the natural world. Here, for example, *The Gibbons* depicts the animals swinging through an unsettling-yet-familiar alien landscape that sits just on the wrong side of being ultra-realistic.

# UNREAL



Humans have long had an unrealistic relationship with nature, having developed our outlook through the filter of zoos, safari parks and idealised TV shows. Artist Jim Naughten seeks to disrupt that cosy viewpoint with a series of works that unsettle as much as they inform, in the hope that they can jar us out of complacency

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The most striking feature of *Bear* is not so much the majestic creature, but rather the unnaturally pink grass, which evokes a sense of dislocation and disorientation





Naughten. “I realised that I had to do a project about this. I also thought that to get the audience in, rather than doing pictures of desolate landscapes, the work has to be dramatic and engaging and beautiful.”

In dreaming up Eremozoic, Naughten visited various natural history museums across the US and the UK, photographing animal dioramas, taxidermy specimens and zoological displays. He then manipulated the images using software, adding “layers of fiction”. It’s an art form he refers to as “digital painting”, which essentially combines elements of photography and painting—two disciplines that he trained in. “With an oil painting, you would come

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In works such as *Gorilla*, Naughten digitally manipulates photos of typical natural history dioramas to create defamiliarized, decontextualized settings

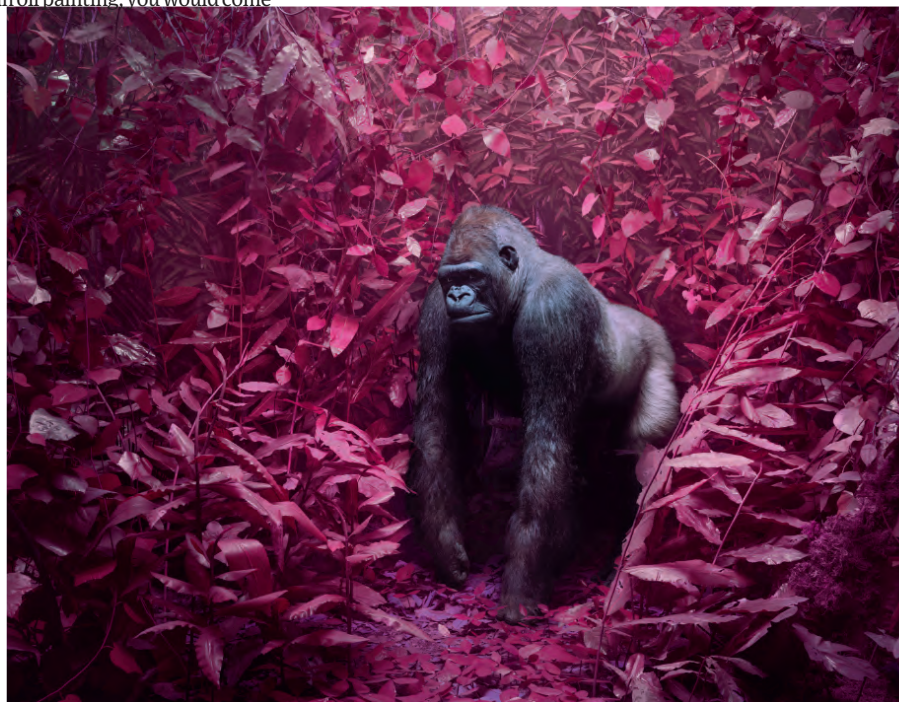
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rom an enormous bear standing in a valley to river birds roosting by the water and gibbons swinging through the trees, British visual artist Jim Naughten’s latest solo exhibition appears to depict idyllic naturescapes. Look closer, however, and you’ll notice that not everything is quite as it seems: the leaves in these images are an unusual shade of blue, the grass unnaturally pink. The effect is a strange sense of dislocation; a vague disquiet about a dreamlike world that somehow manages to be both familiar and uncanny.

This is precisely the objective of Eremozoic, which seeks to underscore the precarious state of the natural world—and humanity’s growing disconnect from the environment—by depicting it as a fantastical Shangri-La of sorts. “The idea behind the work is that our view of the natural world is fictional,” explains Naughten. “[Such scenes] barely exist anymore, except in safari parks and zoos.”

The work, which was displayed at London’s Grove Square Galleries, takes its title from the “Eremozoic” period (or “the Age of Loneliness” in Latin)—a term coined by American biologist and writer E.O. Wilson, who describes the modern age as an era of mass extinction. Indeed, around 96 per cent of mammalian extinctions over the past 126,000 years have been attributed to human activity.

“I was exasperated by the fact that no one seems to be particularly interested [in the extinction crisis]. The vast majority of humans are looking the other way,” says

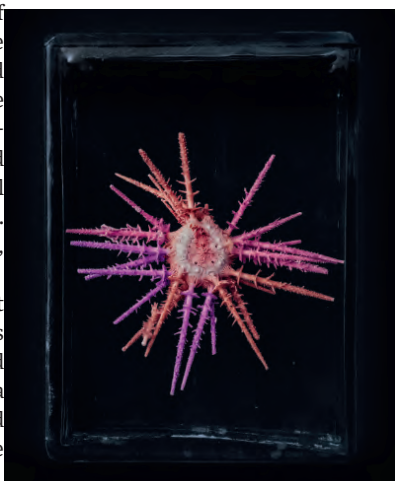


back and work on layers, and keep altering and changing it. You could work on it for months,” says Naughten. “That’s the same way that I work with a photograph.”

Most striking about the images is their psychedelic colour palette, which imbues them with a surreal quality. “The images don’t look real, but could *almost* be real. It’s about keeping them right on the edge [of reality],” he says. The intention is to reflect humanity’s rose-tinted view of nature—and our refusal to engage with the growing environmental crisis.

A committed vegan, Naughten says Eremozoic, which has been around four years in the making, is undoubtedly his most important project to date.

“Eremozoic is very different to my previous works, which were much more whimsical. I’m attempting to raise awareness of the biodiversity crisis, which is every bit as important and alarming as the climate crisis,” he says. “I’ve felt like I’ve been in a very small echo chamber for a long time, but people are now beginning to wake up. You suddenly think, ‘I’m not alone’”. **Delle Chan** [jimnaughten.com](http://jimnaughten.com)



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Naughten also draws inspiration from the wealth of preserved zoological specimens commonly found in museum collections, as seen here in *Sea Urchin*