

The background of the entire cover is a rich, detailed still life painting. It features a variety of flowers, including tulips with orange and white stripes, pink peonies, white hydrangeas, and yellow daisies. Interspersed among the flowers are several vegetables: a corn cob, green peas in their pods, and small round fruits. The composition is dense and vibrant, set against a dark, almost black background that makes the colors of the flora and fauna stand out. The overall style is reminiscent of 17th-century Dutch still life painting.

MICHAEL PETRY

NATURE MORTE

*Contemporary artists reinvigorate
the Still-Life tradition*

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Nature Morte

Contemporary Artists Reinvigorate the Still Life

Michael Petry

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Thought-provoking and richly visual, **Nature Morte** brings together, for the first time, the poignant, provocative re-imaginings of the traditional still life by over 180 international contemporary artists. This visually stunning and timely book reveals how leading artists of the 21st century are reinvigorating the still life, a genre previously synonymous with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Old Masters.

Michael Petry's careful selection celebrates works by emerging and established artists alike, from all over the globe, including John Currin, Elmgreen & Dragset, Robert Gober, Renata Hegyi, Damien Hirst, David Hockney, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas, Beatriz Milhazes, Gabriel Orozco, Elizabeth Peyton, Marc Quinn, Gerhard Richter, Sam Taylor-Wood and Ai Wei Wei. Short and compelling introductions begin each chapter and are followed by dramatic, visually led spreads that pair each work with a perceptive reading of its significance to the still-life tradition.

Petry's engaging, provocative text reveals how contemporary practitioners are revisiting the major motifs of the still life and translating them for the modern world. Petry explores the timeless themes of life, death and the irrevocable passing of time in these new works for our modern world; artworks that invite us to pause and reconsider what it means to be human.

Nature Morte is designed by Barnbrook, a leading London studio at the cutting edge of graphic design. The cover is lenticular.

Contents:

Introduction • Chapter 1: Flora • Chapter 2: Food • Chapter 3: House & Home • Chapter 4: Fauna • Chapter 5: Death

Author

Michael Petry is an artist, curator, Doctor of Arts and Director of Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), London. He is the author of *Installation Art*, *Installation in the New Millennium* and *The Art of Not Making*, all published by Thames & Hudson.



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Rebecca Scott in her *Meat* series investigates notions of ‘the romantic’ and ‘the real’. These paintings revisit illustrations of meat taken from traditional cookbooks aimed at urban dwellers, who are physically and emotionally disconnected from the raising and slaughtering of animals for food. Scott juxtaposes these slabs of meat with rural landscapes.

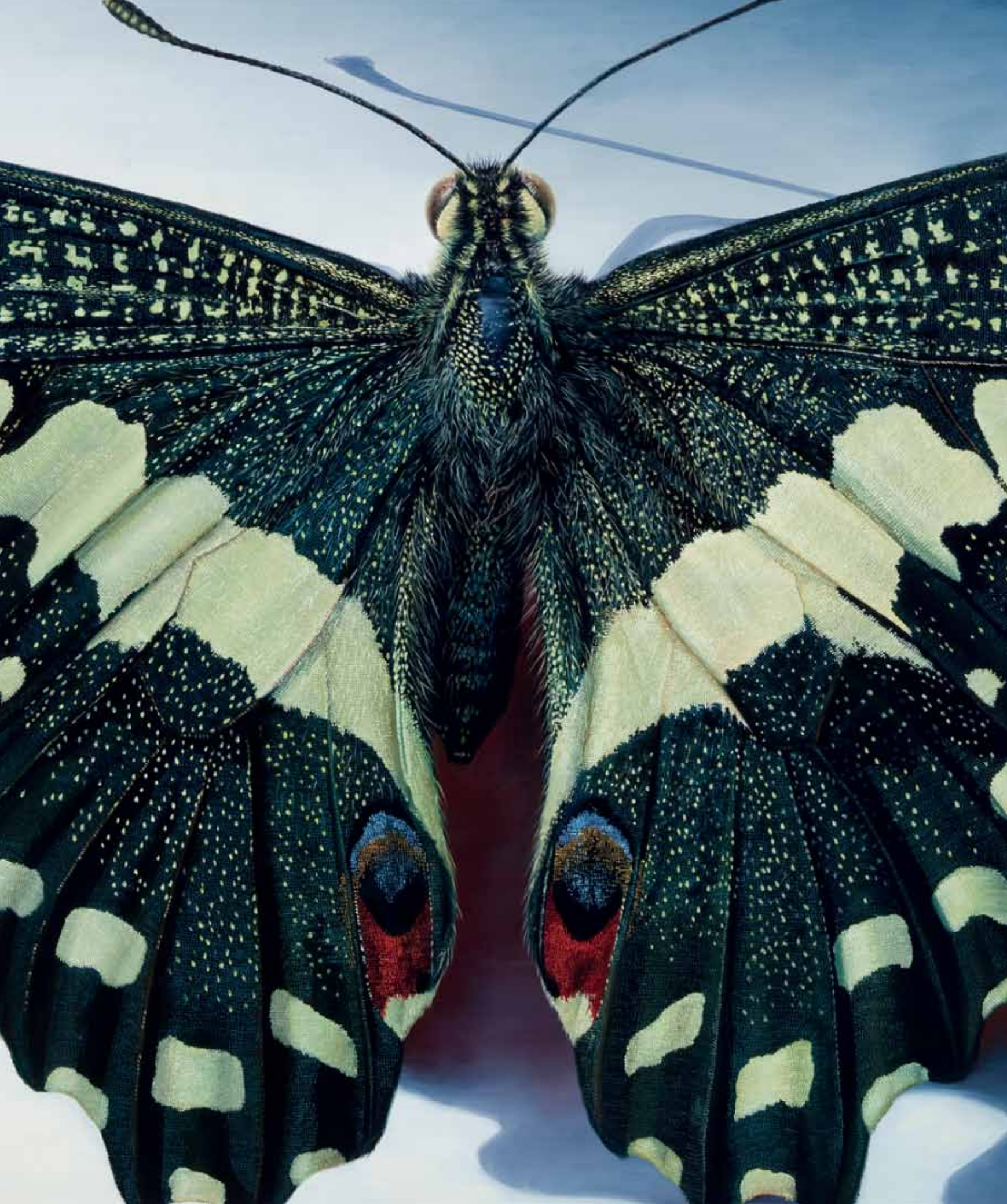
Cindy Wright’s paintings of foodstuffs confront viewers with the reality that eating meat and fish comes at a real cost, the death of once living creatures. Her large painting *Baconsquare*, at over two by two metres in size, details the moist, uncooked flesh of the pig that provides this daily breakfast food. The bloody, gutted fish coiled within a goldfish bowl in *Nature Morte 2* stares out of the frame in an accusatory fashion. The fluted bowl sits atop a delicate doily, adding to the pathos of the image.



ABOVE · Rebecca Scott · *Red in Tooth and Claw*, 2008 · oil on canvas

RIGHT · Cindy Wright · *Baconsquare*, 2008 · oil on canvas

OPPOSITE · Cindy Wright *Nature Morte 2*, 2010 · oil on linen



Section Four

FAUNA

Gabriel Orozco considers his work *Dark Wave* to be essentially ‘a drawing’. To create the massive sculpture, a twenty-strong team at the Factum Arte studio in Madrid first made casts of the bones of a real whale found on the south-west coast of Spain and then reassembled these into a life-size duplicate. A grid-like pattern was then drawn onto the casts, marking out the topographical detail of this substituted version of a fourteen-metre-long Fin whale (common rorqual). A creature of awe and fear due to its imposing size, the whale has appeared in many guises, from the story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale in the Bible (a scene replayed by Disney and Hollywood) to Herman Melville’s murderous sperm whale in *Moby Dick*. In Renaissance paintings, whales are often depicted as monsters of the deep and symbols of the devil, their huge mouths acting as the entrance to hell.

PAGE 176
Cindy Wright
Poisonous wave, 2007
(detail) · oil on canvas

RIGHT
Gabriel Orozco
Dark Wave, 2006
calcium carbonate and
resin with graphite





Polly Morgan uses taxidermy animals as the source material for her sculptures. The swarm of dismembered bird heads that makes up *Feed Me* seems to pour up and out of a vase barely able to contain its occupants desire for sustenance and life. Morgan named her 2010 ‘Psychopomps’ exhibition, and its four suspended taxidermy sculptures, after the mythical beings said to guide the human soul to the underworld after death. In Classical mythology these guides were often represented as domesticated animals (dogs, horses) or wild birds.

Cindy Wright’s painting of a dead *Koolmeesje*, or Great Tit, is a delicate and touching work. These small, non-migratory birds have successfully adapted to urban settings and are well known to gardeners throughout Europe. While birds have appeared in art as messengers for the gods, or as one aspect of a god’s physical form (Ra, the Egyptian sun god, had the head of a falcon and the body of a man), Wright’s bird, dead on the unforgiving pavement, serves as a poignant reminder of mortality.

While out walking, **Daniel Gustav Cramer** found a dead cat frozen in rigor mortis but looking like it was still alive and playful. He photographed the animal; by chance, on his return to the spot the next day, the cat was covered in snow, so he photographed it again. The resulting work, *Cat*, consists of both photographs and a short description of the incident. It highlights how in the digital age an image can easily deceive us, asking us to question at all times what it is we are looking at and to investigate our response to nature, the ‘natural’ and to death.

Cai Guo-Qiang’s *Head On* evokes not only the infamous Berlin Wall (the work was first exhibited in Berlin) and society’s collective ability to hurl itself towards disaster – be it through ideology (Communism, Nazism) or mass hysteria – but also man’s ability to recover from such destructive acts of hubris. Cai’s installation of ninety-nine wolves charging headlong into a glass wall reminds us that, like wolves, humans are very much pack animals and can work together, for better or for worse.



OPPOSITE TOP
Polly Morgan · *Feed Me*, 2010
taxidermy, steel, metal vase,
clay and glass

OPPOSITE BOTTOM
Cindy Wright · *Koolmeesje*,
2010 · oil on linen

RIGHT AND BELOW
Daniel Gustav Cramer
Cat, 2002/11 · 2 C-prints,
1 framed text

NEXT PAGE
Cai Guo-Qiang · *Head On*,
2006 · 99 life-sized replicas
of wolves (gauze, resin and
painted hide) and glass wall



On December 31, I walked up a hill with three friends in Thüringen, near Ilmenau. We found a dead cat lying on its back. Her position seemed as if death caught her by surprise in a moment of joy and play. In the night, we lightened firecrackers. It started snowing. The following morning we decided to walk up the hill again.





ABOVE
Klara Kristalova
A fly on your floor, 2010
glazed stoneware

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT
Lisa Sweeney
Fly, 2009
pencil on gesso board

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT
Cindy Wright
Spaceinvaders, 2008
oil on canvas

OPPOSITE BOTTOM
Maryam Amiryani
Fly, White Plate, 2008
oil on linen

Klara Kristalova's *A fly on your floor* recalls the 1958 film *The Fly* (and its 1986 remake) in which a mad scientist accidentally turns himself into a human fly and proceeds to cause terror and havoc. Kristalova uses traditional Meissen porcelain techniques to create intimate sculptures that speak of death and possible destruction. Flies have long appeared in art as carriers of disease and their inclusion in traditional still lifes was intended to remind viewers of their mortality.

Lisa Sweeney's sketch of a single dead fly, **Cindy Wright's** oil painting of many dead flies and **Maryam Amiryani's** painting of a living fly all figure this insect as an example of nature invading the domestic environment. Sweeney explains that her work 'is concerned with the banal and everyday stuff that is sometimes overlooked and undervalued. Seeing the fragile beauty in something like a dead fly may make us realize that everything, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, has a value.' Amiryani is interested in the everyday and homes in on the quiet moments of life to create what she calls 'minimalist theatre'. Wright's collection of dead flies on graph paper implicates the viewer as a collector, or scientist, and most likely the cause of the insects' shortened lives. In all these works, the fragility of life comes under observation.





Cindy Wright's painting *Collector's Item* depicts a cache of human skulls suspended in string. That the skulls are strung together almost like fish on a line adds to the discomfort of the image. Who is the collector who would wish to display such a macabre hoard? They certainly look more like the bounty of some bloodthirsty warlord than specimens in a natural history museum – though with historical collecting practices of Western museums now under scrutiny, that distinction is no longer so clear.

Piotr Uklański was commissioned to create a portrait of a man using X-rays of his subject. The resulting work *Untitled (Monsieur François Pinault, President of Artemis)* transforms these medical images into a psychedelic skull and crossbones – a pirate emblem that stands in for the well-known billionaire and art patron.

Guillaume Paris's animation *Out of the Whale* is a complex digital work forever evolving in front of the viewer, from one minute to the next, from one exhibition to another. The still reproduced here is thus unique but it provides a sense of the overall work. A digitally rendered Pinocchio floats face down in a pool of water, a scene reminiscent of the original in the hand-drawn 1940 Disney film. Paris's work exists 'eternally', cheating death in a virtual domain.

'In this metaphysical desert, the "universe" is recalculated in real time at every instant: there will never be the same image twice, for all eternity....'

—GUILLAUME PARIS

ABOVE

Cindy Wright · *Collector's Item*, 2010
oil on linen

OPPOSITE TOP

Piotr Uklański · *Untitled (Monsieur François Pinault, President of Artemis)*, 2003 · colour photograph

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

Guillaume Paris · *Out of the Whale*, 2008 (film still)
real-time evolving permanent video, HD plasma screen,
computer; colour, silent





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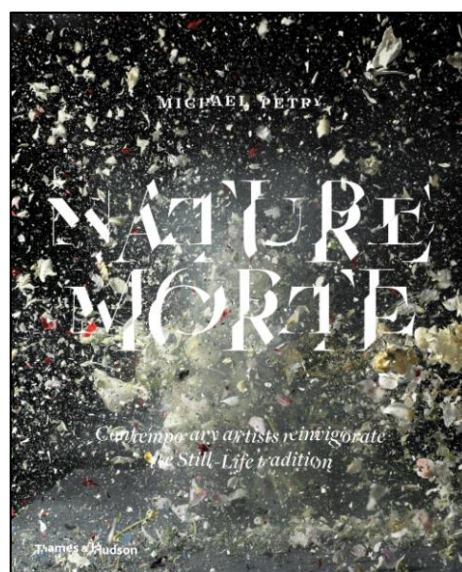


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Nature Morte

by Michael Petry

This richly rewarding book reveals how leading artists of the twenty-first century are reinvigorating the still life, a genre previously synonymous with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Old Masters. The audacious still lifes celebrated here challenge that historical supremacy and redefine what it means to be a work of nature morte, or “dead nature.” Whether through painting, drawing, sculpture, video, or other forms, contemporary artists have drawn on the tradition to create works of conceptual vivacity, beauty, and emotional poignancy.



Michael Petry has structured the book according to the classic categories of the still-life tradition—Flora, Food, House and Home, Fauna, and Death. Each chapter explores how the timeless symbolic resonance of the memento mori—a reminder of death, change, and the passing of time—has been rediscovered for a new millennium. Among the artists represented are John Currin, Saara Ekström, Elmgreen & Dragset, Renata Hegyi, Damien Hirst, David Hockney, Gary Hume, Jeff Koons, McDermott & McGough, Beatriz Milhazes, Gabriel Orozco, Marc Quinn, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Cy Twombly.

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