

- FINE TAXIDERMY -

DARWIN  
SINKE  
van  
TONGEREN

- OUR FIRST BOOK -



Words by Helen Chislett



OUR  
FIRST  
BOOK

DEAR  
FERR  
c/o  
DARWIN'S  
BURGWAL  
2011 BE  
THERLANDS

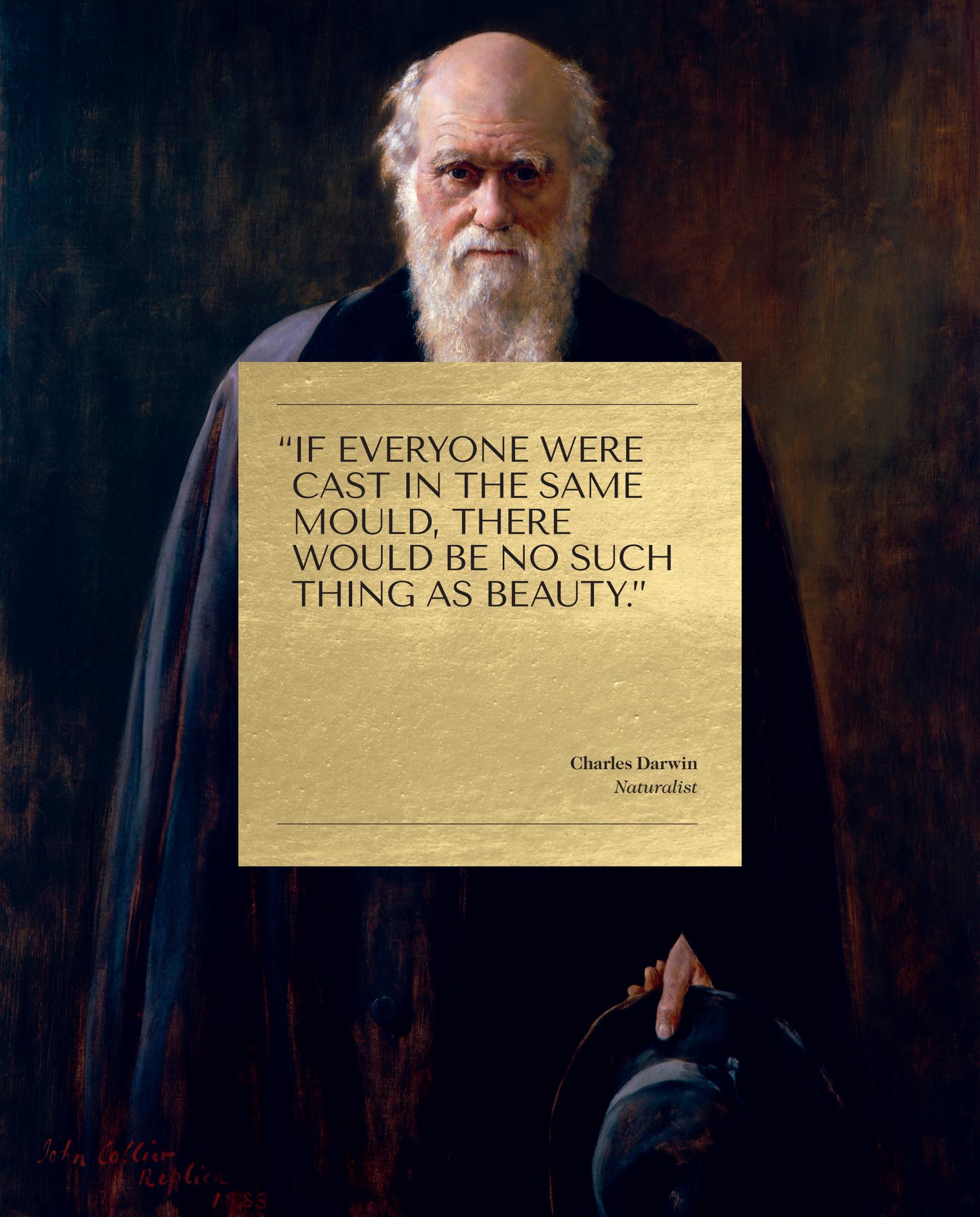
Dear Sirs,  
It fills me with great pleasure  
to have my name added to that  
of you two fine gentlemen.  
Seldom has my name been  
mentioned in a better context.  
Striving endlessly to create  
something better with each  
work on which you embark  
is in the true spirit of my  
natural selection theory.  
Your pieces of art are as  
good as twice refined gold.  
Yours truly  
Charles Darwin  
P.S. My assistant R. Fitzroy will contact  
you to discuss the financial  
implications of having my good name

DOWN,  
BECKENHAM, KENT.  
RAILWAY STATION  
ORPINGTON, S.E.R.

Posteitaliane  
08.01.2010 15.55  
Euro 00,50

NATUURLIJKE HIST  
DE AL  
EN BYZ  
DERE





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"IF EVERYONE WERE  
CAST IN THE SAME  
MOULD, THERE  
WOULD BE NO SUCH  
THING AS BEAUTY."

Charles Darwin  
*Naturalist*

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John Collier  
Replica  
1883

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# CONTENTS

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Foreword by Martyn Lawrence Bullard	p. 14–15
Introduction by Helen Chislett	p. 16–19
A matter of death ... and life   Essay on DS&vT's work	p. 22–29
Our First Preface	p. 32–33
Our Birth	p. 36–37
Our First Love	p. 38–47
Our First Creatures	p. 52–59
Our First Fortress	p. 62–79
Our First Collection	p. 80–83
Our First Sale	p. 84–85
Our First Show	p. 86–119
Our First Patrons	p. 122–127

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OUR  
FIRST  
GOLDEN  
RULE

None of our animals have been  
taken from the wild. All animals  
died of natural causes.

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Our First Collector	p. 130–131
Our First Unknown Pose	p. 134–171
Our First Relocation	p. 174–179
Our First Insights	p. 180–211
Our First Second Show	p. 216–231
Our First Guest Curatorship	p. 234–245
Our First Museum	p. 248–277
Les Peintures des Taxidermistes	p. 280–289
Our First Retrospective Moment	p. 292–293
Interview Sinke & van Tongeren	p. 294–303
Credits & Colophon	p. 304



# MARTYN LAWRENCE BULLARD

*Multi-Award winning Interior Designer*

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“It is rare in today’s world to be surprised by Art. In almost every form we have been there, seen that, bought the T-shirt ... yet Jaap Sinke and Ferry van Tongeren have managed to take Nature’s most beautiful work and reinvent it as art that is as entrancing as a Picasso portrait or a Tiepolo ceiling. They have taken a controversial subject, taxidermy, that has been out of decorative fashion for a hundred years or more and made it mesmerising. The beauty of the specimens and the poses they adopt—perching, lounging or coiling upon fabulous, unique objects—allow us to see taxidermy in an entirely fresh way, a direct line from the Old Masters. The extraordinary and exotic compositions that they create with their highly skilled hands are at once breathtaking and powerful. They are also provocative works, but by using specimens that have died naturally, they take away our social guilt and leave us with the joy of seeing these beautiful creatures captured in DS&vT’s imagination for eternity.

I have had the pleasure of incorporating their works into recent projects of mine around the world from an Irish country house to an ocean-side retreat in Rhode Island. Recently, we incorporated a wild composition of an alligator and snake engaged in a rollicking fight to be mounted on a vaulted ceiling, twenty-feet high, in a historic Meisner villa in Palm Beach for the wonderfully adventurous and highly discerning collectors, John and Heather Picerne.

These are artworks that unfailingly add moments of drama to interiors, an ingredient that I regard as vital. They also manage to capture an old world romance with the natural world combined with a signature of delicious and abandoned whimsy. Pure enchantment!”

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# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

*by Helen Chislett*

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On 25 March 2014, a press release popped up in my Inbox entitled “Seventeenth Century Luxury” and sub-titled “Dutch Artists Reinvent Taxidermy Craftsmanship”. It went on to explain that Darwin, Sinke and van Tongeren were pleased to present their first collection, *La Vie de l’Eden*, a new type of taxidermy art, “Dutch 17th-century painters and sculptors inspired them to shape their animals in an extravagant and flamboyant way. For these unusual and often impossible poses they used techniques from hundreds of years ago.”

Reader, I ignored it.

Three weeks later, on 18 April, I received a second email:

“Dear Ms Chislett,  
In order not to take away too much of your time, I will keep it short. My name is Ferry van Tongeren, I am a fine taxidermy artist from the Netherlands. Together with my partner Jaap Sinke, we create flamboyant taxidermy objects inspired by seventeenth-century European painters like Weenix and d’Hondecoeter. Our work is created for a very small target group that can appreciate and afford it. So far it is going pretty good, but what we really need is some help and/or advice to get us known. I’m not sure if we fit in with what you normally do, but that’s why they invented enquiries.”

Sometimes you just have to trust your gut instincts. I liked the simplicity of that email and the dry wit running through the final few words. To be honest, I was ambivalent about taxidermy as a potential subject because there were rather too many skin-your-own-mouse-in-Hoxton articles doing the rounds at the time. I also knew next to nothing about Weenix or d’Hondecoeter, but the only way I would know for sure whether there was a potential story here was a face-to-face meeting. I replied saying I would be happy to meet them were they to come to London. We agreed to meet twelve days later on 30 April, 4 pm at the Wolseley on Piccadilly. Jaap and Ferry were arriving that day at 11 am and had to be on the

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# OUR FIRST CREATURES

Funnily enough, journalists always ask where we get our animals from—apparently they think their readers are mistrustful of what we do, although our collectors have no such suspicion. So, we would like to assure you, our reader, collector or fan, that we never kill or harm animals for our work. In the Netherlands, there are more than 32 million animals kept as pets, most of them cats and dogs, but also an enormous amount of birds. We hate to spoil your day, but the truth is that all of these animals will die one day. What we do is intercept before rare and beautiful animals from zoos, breeders, traders and hobbyists end up in the garbage can or incinerator. The fact is that we both love, respect and value the animal world. When we first examine a dead creature, we discover so much beauty hidden in its lifeless body and so much potential to bring that beauty back to life. This was Ferry's first insight when he was learning the craft of taxidermy that it is possible to find striking poses for each individual creature, rather than simply mount each one in a ubiquitous way.

When we started to build our first collection, the very first thing we needed was a big freezer. We decided to begin with birds, so we had to let the world of bird breeders know to not necessarily dispose of their dead specimens. We made leaflets to share at the biggest bird trade shows in Europe, like the one in Zwolle, and we advertised on bird forums and online trade sites. Bird by bird, we began to fill our freezer: our first owl, first parrot, first honeycreeper. Like undertakers, we would drive thousands of miles to collect such beauties and every time we got our hands on something really special, we were incredibly excited. Once we drove to Denmark for a penguin, another time to Germany for a couple of rollers and once to the UK for a coolbox full of softbills. Before too long, we had to rent a truck to pick up our second freezer.











"DUTCH ARTISTS  
BREATHE  
NEW LIFE INTO  
TAXIDERMISTRY."

*The New York Times*

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# OUR FIRST UNKNOWN POSE

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People often seem under the impression that skinning an animal means opening it up and spooning out the insides—that would be a disgusting job. In fact, skinning a creature means carefully taking off the outside coat with a surgeon's scalpel. It is not dissimilar to taking off the skin of a chicken before cooking it, except in our case it is the skin that is of value. After taking off the skin, we tan it to preserve it. This means first carefully washing a skin, in the case of a bird with all of its feathers in place. We soak it in a soapy substance to make sure it is thoroughly cleaned.

Although we had carried out this process hundreds of times, we began to experience a new kind of visual magic as the feathers and fur floated weightless, free and graceful. We wanted to capture this effect, so we began taking photos on our iPhones and exploring the potential of these mesmerising images.

Being art directors by our previous profession, it was natural to install a professional photography set-up to capture this serendipitous beauty, making compositions of the poses and feathers, creating something new and elegant. Our first series of these photos was called *Avis Oxi-Action*, a collection of strangely posed animals and birds fading away into the milky white of clean, soapy water as if they had been painted with watercolours. They reminded us of antiquarian Japanese prints. These formed a part of the thirty-nine pieces that Damien Hirst had invested in through Shapero, so they sold out pretty fast when they became public.

It was important to us that the quality of this series should be as high as the taxidermy compositions, so we chose to print on Giclée Fine Art Print in editions of ten. It was truly exciting to develop a new way of presenting beautiful birds and animals, never seen in this way before.



# CREDITS & COLOPHON

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Rijksmuseum: - *Animals and Plants*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, c. 1668, p. 2  
- *Hunting and Fruit Still Life*, Jan Weenix, 1714, p. 4  
- *Animals*, Anonymous, 1750–1850, p. 5  
- *Animals*, Anonymous, 1750–1850, p. 8  
- *Still Life with a Hare and other Game*, Jan Weenix, 1697, p. 9  
- *Water birds and a dog*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, 1646–1695, p. 21  
- *Two peacocks*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, 1646–1695, p. 30  
- *The Floating Feather*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, c. 1680, p. 38  
- *Birds in a Park*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, 1686, p. 42-43  
- *The Threatened Swan*, Jan Asselijn, c. 1650, p. 46-47  
- *Dead Birds*, Jan Vonck, 1640–1662, p. 48  
- *Still Life with Hare and a Black Rooster*, Cornelis Lelienbergh, 1659, p. 61  
- *The Menagerie*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, c. 1690, p. 92  
- *Willem III, Prince of Orange*, Godfried Schalcken, c. 1692 – c. 1697, p. 97  
- *Hunter's Bag on a Terrace*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, c. 1678, p. 121  
- *Two Exotic Birds*, Aert Schouman, 1762, p. 132  
- *Park with Country House*, Jan Weenix, 1670–1719, p. 173  
- Detail of: *Birds on a Balustrade*, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, c. 1680 – c. 1690, p. 213  
- *Fighting Birds*, Anonymous, c. 1655, p. 291  
- *Still Life with a gilded Beer Tankard*, Willem Claesz. Heda, 1634, p. 292

Other artworks: - *Charles Robert Darwin* by John Collier, © National Portrait Gallery, London, p. 11  
- *The Bird Concert* c. 1630/40, Frans Snyders, © The State Hermitage Museum | photo by Konstantin Sinyavsky, p. 40  
- *The Tiger Hunt*, Peter Paul Rubens, © akg-images, p. 44–45  
- *The cat and the fox*, Frans Snyders, © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado, p. 81  
- *Trompe-l'oeil plafondstuk met 'De raaf die beroofd wordt van de veren waarmee hij zich had getooid'*, Abraham Busschop 1708, © Dordrechts Museum, acquired with support of Vereniging Rembrandt and VSB Fund 2011, p. 105  
- *Dead Swan*, Jan Weenix 1716, © Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, p. 113  
- *Zwei junge Löwen verfolgen einen Rehbock*, Frans Snyders, © bpk | Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, p. 129  
- *Mr. Rockwell modeling large male giraffe*, © American Museum of Natural History p. 174  
- *The Taxidermist*, Joseph Schippers, courtesy of © Bonhams, p. 180  
- Detail of: *Der Hahnenkampf*, © bpk | Gemäldegalerie, SMB | Jörg P. Anders, p. 232  
- Plate 311 *American White Pelican*, John J. Audubon, © audubon.org p. 247  
- *An Allegory of Air*, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Private Collection | © Christie's Images | Bridgeman Images, p. 279