

# Introduction

## Annabel Lucas

A sleuth of bears has escaped and temporarily roams the gallery environment. Though its physical attributes and behavioural characteristics are distinctive, this species has not been previously identified. The bears have a black fleece, sharp pointed ears and a small upturned snout. They are agile climbers and fast-movers. Confident on their hind legs, their preferred habitat provides tree-top vantage points, away from observers, where they can survey their environ. The bears usually live in small communities of between 7 and 12 members. These are rarely a family group, but a collection of same-generation, same-sized creatures. They are curious animals that confidently explore and inhabit new territories and objects. Although their behaviour is at times unpredictable and threatening, their cute appearance is appealing.

Over three decades, Permendar's work has consistently explored the human condition, who we are and where we belong. Her signature polar-fleece sculptures combine the innocence of cuddly toys with an underlying threat or vulnerability. These creatures 'stand in' for us replicating the behaviours, emotions, fears, thrills and instincts with which we negotiate our lives.

Permendar's last major exhibition *Hiding Out* (Djanogly Gallery, 2014) presented a new series of varied and patterned soft sculptures. Moving away from the human form, she created reticent creatures that hid, and were camouflaged by their varied backgrounds. They were imbued with a sense of caution and defensiveness, protected by copper claws or spears. Now, in *Interlopers*, Permendar introduces a single species that emerges with increased confidence. Her black, faceless teddies are climbing, travelling and exploring, perhaps even considering escape. Where copper elements were once weapons of defence, they now aid movement and have become the tools of control and even invasion.

The emerging themes of travel, migration and the threshold between one place and another chime with the disrupted global experience of the refugee. In the face of fear, helplessness and dislocation, the mobile bear community are taking control of their lives.

The individual sculptural works within *Interlopers* were developed during an intensive residency within the School of Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire. We are grateful to the school for supporting Permendar's access to research, new materials and techniques, and crucially her immersion in its student and staff population. Our gratitude is extended to Richard Cork for his insightful survey of Permendar's recent work. We would like to thank Professor Barbara Brownie for her text proposing the sculptures' independence and agency, and for her dynamic blog series that charted the evolution of this remarkable new species and the survival of its fittest.

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