



Hare (Animal)

Simon Carnell

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Colourfully described by early natural historians as the ‘fastest, hairiest, most lascivious, and most melancholy’ of mammals, the hare is no less remarkable for its actual behaviour and capacities than for the intriguing ways in which it has been imagined and exploited throughout history. Hare examines how this animal has been described, symbolized and visually depicted, as well as utilized for its fur, flesh and exceptional speed.

Tracking the hare from ancient Egypt, where a hieroglyph of the animal signified existence itself, to the serial hare works of artist Joseph Beuys, who once notoriously declared that ‘I am not a human being, I am a hare’, Hare finds its subject in many surprising places and forms: from Crucifixion scenes, Buddhist lore and Algonquin creation myths, to witch trials, treatises on logic, contemporary poetry and an art installation in a Dutch brothel. It is the principal subject of the first ever hunting treatise, ‘king of all venery’, for Renaissance theorists of the hunt; and it appears in the first known description of a still-life painting, in the first signed and dated picture of a single animal, and in early medicine, where it was credited with having the most curative properties of any ‘beaste’.

The first monograph on the subject for 35 years, and richly illustrated, Hare combines the most recent natural history with an eclectic account of the animal’s symbolic values. Hare will be of interest to art historians and literary critics; to those for and opposed to hunting; and to both the general and the lagophile reader alike.

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