

Brilliant Absence

Pursuing the Kingfisher in the work of Hans Waanders

Ross Hair

On an October day in 1982 the Dutch artist Hans Waanders witnessed a kingfisher flying across a small pond near the river Maas. This singular moment prompted an extended quest for the elusive bird that persisted for the remaining nineteen years of his life.

Waanders' pursuit of the kingfisher became an expansive endeavour that both adopted and subverted methods of archiving, classification, mapping, and etymology. Taking a global approach to the identification and knowledge of the species, Waanders collected and gathered specimens of all varieties, producing printed documentation in the form of books, cards, and stamps, as well as installations and interventions, in order to focus in on the nature and culture of the kingfisher and its place in our world.

In a series of thematic essays, Ross Hair examines Waanders' work in close detail—from the commonality of the kingfisher, to its broader context in art and literature, and the species' associations with colour and reverie, and time and space.

Illustrated in black and white (and some blue).

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