

Desmond Morris (1928-2026)

16 September - 24 October 2026

Press Release

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Desmond Morris with an African Bambara Tribe figure from Mali, Oxford 1999.

The Redfern Gallery is delighted to present *Desmond Morris (1928-2026)*. This exhibition celebrates the life and work of Desmond Morris, bringing together works from across an extraordinary artistic career spanning eight decades. The exhibition coincides with the publication and launch of Morris's final book, *The Surrealist Menagerie: Strange Beasts and Fantastic Visions*, published by Thames & Hudson.

Artist, zoologist and author, Morris occupied a unique position within British Surrealism. His artistic and scientific lives developed in parallel, united by an enduring fascination with behaviour, instinct and the forms of the natural world. From his earliest experiments in the 1940s, Morris developed a distinctive visual language populated by biomorphic forms: strange, mutable creatures inhabiting imagined landscapes.

The origins of this private world can be traced to *Over the Wall* (1946), painted when Morris was eighteen. As Silvano Levy, author and academic specialising in the Surrealist movement, writes in *The Rationale of the Irrational*, it was with this

work that Morris first entered a "private fantasy world", beginning an exploration of biomorphic imagery that would recur, evolve and transform throughout his life.

Central to the exhibition is *The Gathering* (2004), Morris's monumental multi-panelled *magnum opus*. Created over three months, the work gathers together figures and motifs drawn from across his oeuvre within five painted surfaces. Levy describes how Morris conceived the work both as a culmination of his biomorphic world and in homage to Hieronymus Bosch, whose altarpieces he had long admired. With figures from earlier paintings reappearing alongside newly imagined forms, *The Gathering* becomes, in Levy's words, "a grandiose and cacophonous orchestration of the emotions."

Morris continued to paint and write until the final days of his life. His final book, *The Surrealist Menagerie: Strange Beasts and Fantastic Visions*, provides a particularly fitting counterpart to the exhibition. Turning his attention to the strange beasts and fantastic creatures that populate Surrealist art, Morris considers a subject closely connected to his own lifelong creation of imagined organisms and biomorphic worlds.



Desmond Morris, *The Gathering*, 2004, Oil on five panels, framed and assembled as a hinged triptych, 146 x 268 cm

The exhibition and publication together offer an opportunity to reflect upon the remarkable breadth of Morris's creative life and his enduring commitment to Surrealism. Moving between zoological observation and private fantasy, the rational and irrational, Morris built a world entirely his own — one which, until the end, remained a source of continual invention.

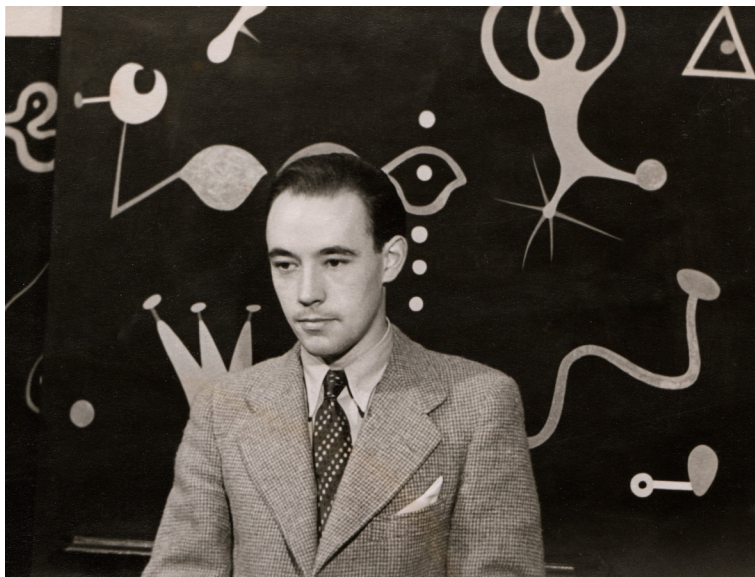
Read more about the evolution of Desmond Morris's practice and the development of his remarkable oeuvre in the accompanying catalogue essay, *The Rationale of the Irrational*, by Silvano Levy:



"A grandiose and cacophonous
orchestration of the emotions"
- Silvano Levy



Desmond Morris, *The Comforter*, 1952,
Oil on board, 81 x 66 cm



Desmond Morris in his black bedroom, covered in mural images. 1948.



Desmond Morris, *Progeniture*, 2024, Oil on board, 50.5 x 92 cm

About The Redfern Gallery

Founded in Old Bond Street in September 1923, The Redfern Gallery is one of the longest-established dealers of Modern British and Contemporary art in London. Today, The Redfern Gallery represents over 30 contemporary artists and artists' estates.

Now situated on Pall Mall, spread across two floors, the gallery regularly stages major exhibitions with accompanying catalogues.

For many artists and collectors, The Redfern has been a trusted and innovative contributor to the art world for over 100 years.

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