

MARVELLOUS TRANSFORMATIONS
CHURCHILL COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE Jock Colville Hall
January 25 – February 01 2015 09.00 – 17.00 daily

An exhibition of 3D digital artwork, video, physical sculpture and wall panels by **MARIANNE SELSJORD** (1955 – 2014), inspired by the work of Maria Sybilla Merian, artist and naturalist (1647 –1717).

Norwegian artist Marianne Selsjord, a painter who trained as a conservator, started to work with the computer as medium in the mid-1990s. She specialised in the innovative use of 3D games-software both as an original 'dynamic painting' medium and as a tool for exploring the techniques, styles and subject matter of 16th- and 17th- century artists. In **MARVELLOUS TRANSFORMATIONS** her fluency and assured visual style in this 21st-century medium create a unique and intriguing exhibition - a new kind of gallery experience, where visitors can explore her luminous 3-dimensional works, which vividly develop modern digital aesthetics to give exuberant life to Maria Sybilla Merian's extraordinary painting.

Merian (1647 –1717), born in Frankfurt, an accomplished draftswoman, engraver and painter, studied plant and insect life with a serious scientific sensibility and was the first naturalist to observe and record the entire butterfly life-cycle closely, from nature - she has been called the first ecologist. Merian developed a unique style of painting, sensuous and intricate, to include, simultaneously, not only all stages of the marvellous transformation from caterpillar to butterfly, but also the development of the plants on which each insect lived, in vibrant, compelling images.

From 1699 – 1701, Maria Sybilla Merian (52) undertook a 'long dreamed of journey' to Surinam (accompanied by her daughter, 21) to explore and record insect and plant life - especially how caterpillars transform through the chrysalis stage to become butterflies. In 1705, she published her observations as *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium (Metamorphosis of the Insects of Surinam)*.

In 2013, Marianne Selsjord travelled to the rainforest of Borneo, accompanied by her husband, geographer and photographer Dr. David Scott Silverberg, to experience first-hand its plant and insect life today. In this exhibition, her contemporary 3D art explores the full potential of Merian's extraordinary pictures, dynamising time and motion, and adding atmosphere from her own travels and observations, to carry out her own **Marvellous Transformations**.

*Plants, flowers and fruits of the Surinam rainforest of 1700,
transformed by Marianne Selsjord into an explorable 3D world ©Selsjord 2014.*

*Above: original watercolour paintings by Maria Sybilla Merian
Below: explorable 3D digital paintings by Marianne Selsjord*

The exhibition contains two suites of Selsjord's large UV prints, 'Nocturnes' and 'Aubades' (for sale individually or as sets), made from her virtual 3D Surinam Rainforest, also screened as fly-throughs, where the artist interprets and brings together a variety of plants and insects from Merian's work. Merian's own words, as part of a dramatisation by Maureen Thomas commissioned by Selsjord, with original sound and musicscape composed and performed by Kariina Gretere, accompany the exhibits.

Selsjord captured stereo video, and Silverberg took still photographs, from Kinabalu National Park Rainforest, Borneo, for the exhibition in addition to the 3D computer-generated material - Selsjord wanted to reveal the vulnerability of the endangered rainforest environment today. To this end she also designed 3D-printed sculptures of some plants and insects from the virtual rainforest, in brittle, fragile material, for display inside glass bell-jars - like the ones Merian saw in Amsterdam, housing specimens brought back from Surinam. The skeletal sculpted plants are memories of forms, some of which are gone forever. They complement Selsjord's vibrant 3D navigable Virtual Surinam Rainforest of colourful plants and insects, preserved in the chrysalis of Maria Sybilla Merian's paintings for three hundred years. Many are vanished now from their native habitat, but Marianne Selsjord's 21st-century artistry quickens them all into vibrant virtual life and motion.

These ***Marvellous Transformations*** are Marianne Selsjord's last work: she died in Spring 2014, of multiple myeloma. Her husband and colleagues have completed the preparations for this exhibition at Churchill College, Cambridge, originally planned for 2013; and, following her original plan, now present this exhibition in her memory.

David Scott Silverberg wishes particularly to thank Jørn Lambertsen, Stan Finney, Professor François Penz, Kariina Gretere, Dr. Phillip Prager and Maureen Thomas for their help and support.