



A Geography of Blue

a bookwork by Kate Foster and Hayden Lorimer

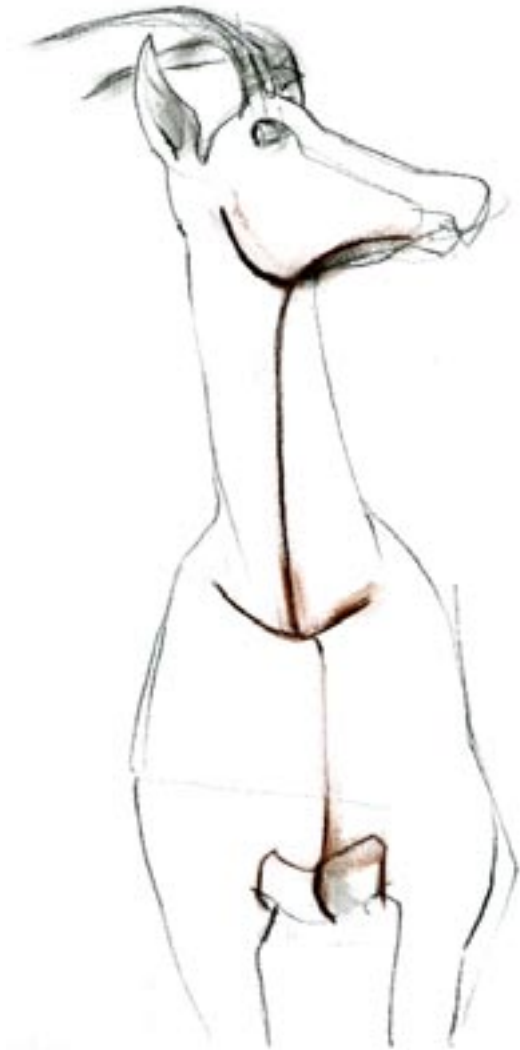


Photograph G Steven 1967
© Hunterian Museum at Glasgow University

Lacking any immediate family, today's blue antelopes live in solitude. Theirs is a hushed and unruffled world without daylight or changes in climate. Curators are their keepers. Visits are regulated. Travel is restricted. Even the shortest of journeys must be carefully planned.

Photographs of the Museum's skull suggest, in their composition, an airless habitat of clean edges and velvet backcloths, where dust will not settle and shadows do not cast. Held captive in monochrome – like so many icons before her – she finally sits at bay.

What unfolds in this series of images is a kind of quietness, a stilling after long pursuit. It speaks volumes. No longer thriving, not quite charmed, but resilient all the same.



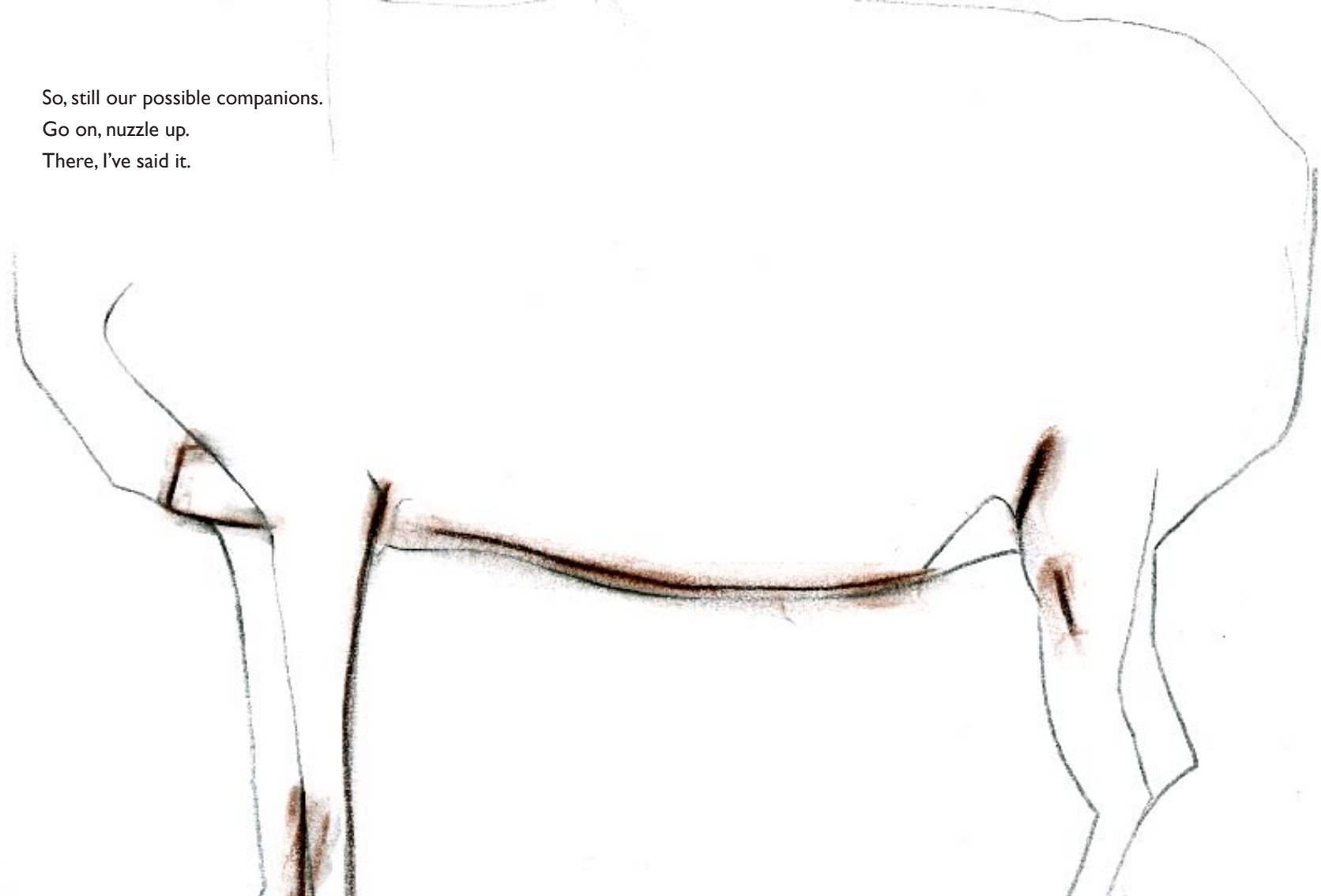
There is nothing untouched about a blue antelope. In their time, they have been thoroughly manhandled. What remains of them is full of intention: pieces gone skew whiff, skin stiffened, seaming scars stretched wide, ageing needlework standing proud and vivid.

Vulnerability is a plight that dead creatures wear on the outside. Soft underbelly exposed, they resist the comfortable distance science creates in 'specimen' status and instead appeal as individuals.

So, still our possible companions.

Go on, nuzzle up.

There, I've said it.

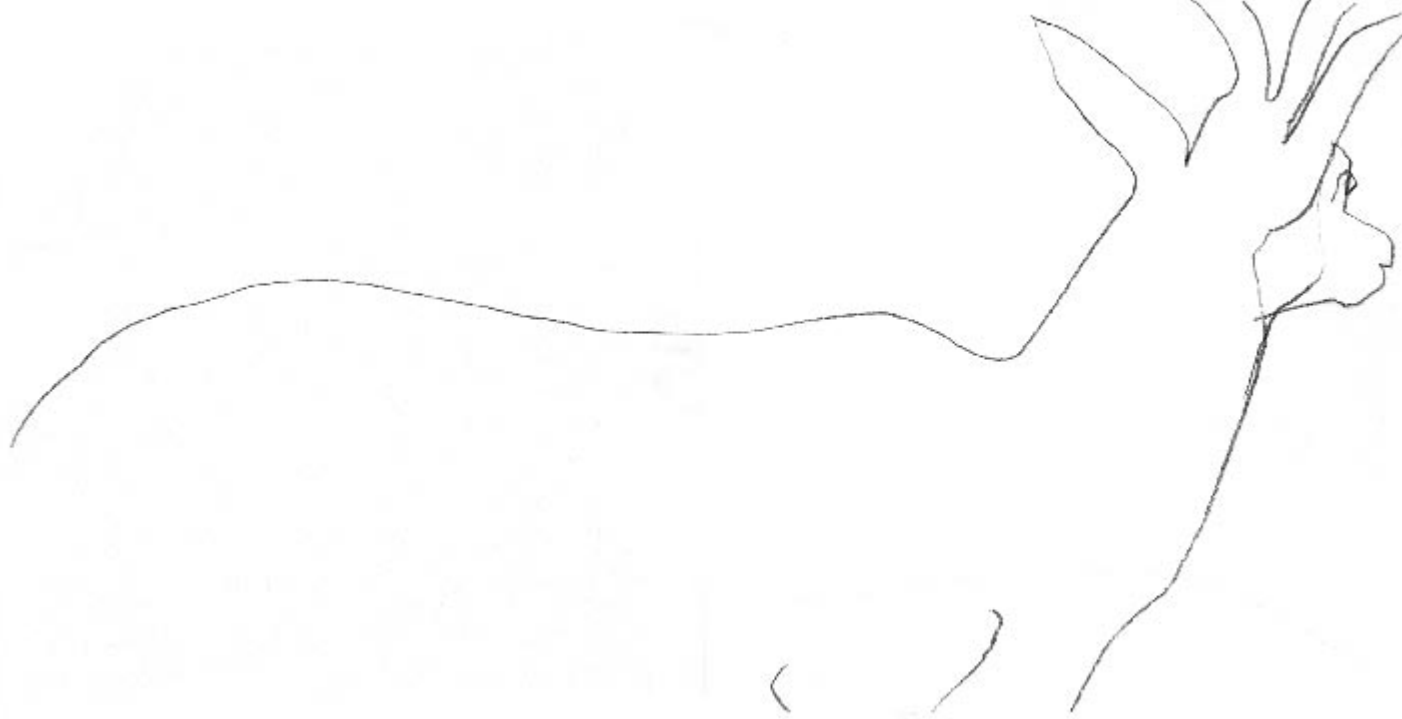




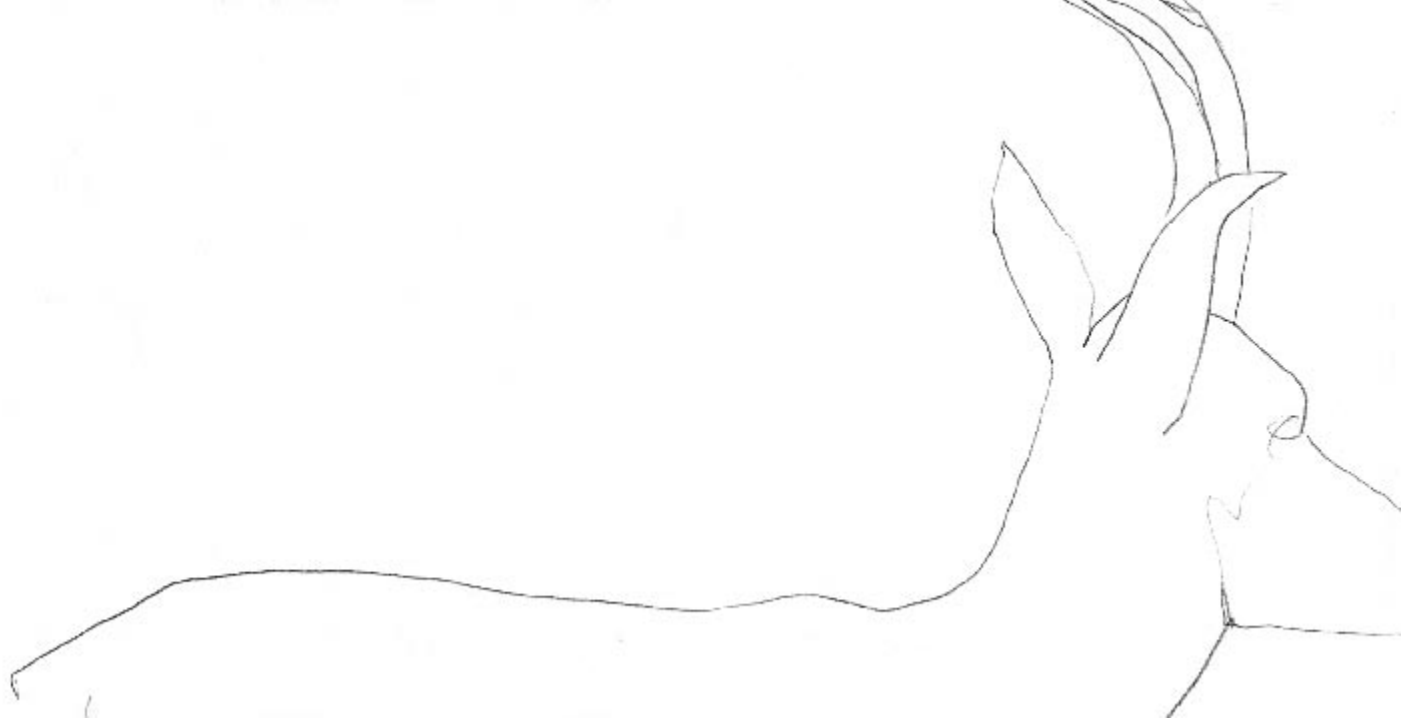
All of this is in the here-and-now. Animal afterlives sensed eye-to-eye. Though, these are matters of local position and story-telling that too neatly corner things off. What lies beyond is the there-and-then. Blue antelope prospects stretch out across more expansive geographies and reach back into longer histories.

These mappings of life and death promise satisfyingly circuitous routes to closeness. By which world should the Blue Antelope be known, by what territorial arrangement and according to whose voice? Perpetual exile from Southern Africa might elsewhere only be considered as a “limboland”. Do they yet await a final return?





Any distinction made between the spheres of the personal and the cartographic is, of course, a fiction. The relative positions of centres and peripheries in the blue antelope's biography are at once confirmed and unsettled by our collaborative actions of seeing and narrating.



Consider this then, a tender and emotional geography, where a sense of loss is what promises to travel. Being blue can be an imaginative kind of appreciation.

Consider this, not a dead end, and rather, a generative death.

Kate Foster is an artist and Hayden Lorimer is lecturer in Geography. This booklet was one outcome of an artist's residency in the Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences in the University of Glasgow, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The Blue Antelope project is a cross-disciplinary investigation of a rare specimen now displayed in the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow University. Merle Patchett (doctoral student) and Maggie Reilly (Curator of the Zoology Museum) were also involved. The drawings in this book were made at the Natural History Museum in Vienna. Thanks also to staff at Naturalis in Leiden and Michael van Beinum. Printed on recycled paper.

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