

I N M A N G A L L E R Y

Inman Gallery is pleased to present *Animal Crossing*, an online exhibition of paintings and sculpture organized by Dana Frankfort and Jackie Gendel. The exhibition will be online July 3 – August 29, 2020.

Human art has featured animals since the cave paintings of Lascaux. That simple statement might imply an equally simple distinction: between artist and subject, shepherd and flock, humans and everything else. But for longer than we've been painting animals we've been living with them, in a jumble of fascination, suspicion and dependency that collapses comfortable objective distance.

We eat animals. We steal from them. We press them into service. We displace them, flee them, fight them, emulate them, experiment on them, worship them, and keep them as companions. They monopolize our iconography and imaginative lives. Ask a child: G is for gorilla, not grass or Grandma or God. We learn moral lessons from animals in fancy dress. We name sports teams after predators; we put birds on currency. Their symbolic potency is ambiguous: we praise people by comparing them to animals, and we insult them the same way. Gods take animal form to help or seduce us, and so does the devil.

As befits this tangled relationship, *Animal Crossing* moves in many directions, by many routes. Duane Slick's coyote is an inscrutable icon, a deadpan trickster in an off-kilter geometric field. Lanecia Rouse Tinsley sets a Black cowboy roping a steer in a rust-red expanse, reclaiming and interrogating a foundational American archetype. Jiha Moon blends traditional ink painting, cartoons and folk art into a boisterous menagerie that spans continents and centuries. The teeth and claws on Hannah Barrett's monster transcend their animal origins to augment a compound, changeable body. Method and tone vary artist to artist and image to image: from monumental to kitschy, expressive to enigmatic, straightforward to fanciful.

As far afield as these artists travel, their animal subjects are still a few steps beyond. An animal's territory is at the hazy edge of human identity, equally empathetic and alien. We recognize animals because we are them. We also don't understand them, never will, and in failing to know them we brush against the limits of our self-knowledge. Animals are the exotic feathers and sharp claws that populate myths and story books; they're also the everyday blushes, flinches and impulses that betray our intentions, expose our fears and drive us forward. They're in our cells and glands and synapses, and the wilderness comes with them.

Artists in the exhibition are: Bill Adams, Sachiko Akiyama, Helen Altman, Polly Apfelbaum, Debra Barrera, Hannah Barrett, Richard Bosman, Natasha Bowdoin, Bridget Caramagna, Jennifer Coates, Jillian Conrad, Holly Coulis, Gilad Efrat, Jonathan Ehrenberg, Andre Ethier, Matthew F. Fisher, Kevin Ford, Walton Ford, Francesca Fuchs, Chie Fueki, Peter Gallo, Mark Thomas Gibson, Glenn Goldberg, Suzy Gonzalez, Karen Heagle, Fox Hysen, Vera Iliatova, Breehan James, Jules Buck Jones, Marina Kappos, Anna Mayer, Sarah McEaney, David McGee, Melissa Miller, Jiha Moon, Katrina Moorhead, Kristin Musgnug, Alexis Pye, Alan Reid, Adrienne Rubenstein, Zoe Pettijohn Schade, Judd Schiffman, Beth Secor, Duane Slick, Kyle Staver, Lanecia Rouse Tinsley, Jemima Wyman.

Bezoar stones, concretions of undigested food in animal stomachs, were once prized as poison antidotes. A goat bezoar hung around the neck was said to cure vertigo, headache and fear. Ox bezoars helped in child birth. Bezoars of congealed stag tears cured melancholy. Bezoars were worn as amulets and rings, filigreed with gold inlays, and displayed as conversation pieces across Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Eiji Nakatsu, engineer and bird-watcher, was tasked with dampening the thunderous booms Japanese bullet trains produced as they entered tunnels at 200 miles per hour. His solution was an ornithological chimera: he shaped the train's nose like a kingfisher's beak, and outfitted its leading edges with a noise-cancelling texture inspired by owl's feathers.

*Beatrix Potter started her career as a botanical artist. Her paper on the *Flammulina velutipes* mushroom was read at the Linnean Society of life sciences in London. Potter's subsequent children's books doubled as careful anatomical studies: dissected frogs and taxidermy rodents informed Jeremy Fisher and Squirrel Nutkin's allegories of bourgeois Victorian mores.*

Mayan howler monkey gods were the patrons of artists and artisans, scribes, metal-workers and singers. They sculpted mankind: depending on the telling, they either built humans as we know them today, or they made the failed, debased first draft. Their art either made us or mocked us.

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