

BEASTS OF BURDEN I curatorial statement by Jane O'Hara

Humans have hunted and bred animals for food, feared them as predators, revered them as spiritual beings, enlisted them as laborers, sacrificed them in scientific experiments, and prized them as pampered pets. Their beauty and otherness have inspired multiple reactions, ranging from pure appreciation and fascination, to the desire to own them, mold them, steal their horns and hides, and train them to entertain us in unnatural ways. The first *Beasts of Burden* exhibition with its thirteen artists working in diverse media examines our complicated connections to these creatures and the many ways they are entwined into our lives and psyches. *Beasts of Burden I* finds its place securely in the art world as well as the world of animal welfare. It will awaken viewers to see animals' predicament from every angle as shown by these unique artists. The timing is crucial to take advantage of the momentum of the animal movement and to continue to shake up our perceptions in fun, disturbing and poignant ways that only the artist can do.

Animals take on anthropomorphic roles, participating in emotionally and psychologically charged vignettes in the work of **Ariel Bordeaux** and **Raul Gonzalez III**. Utilizing the powerful graphic imagery and humor inherent in comic book art, Bordeaux explores issues of trauma, personal guilt, and anxiety in relation to animals. Exploring cultural and political conflict, works on paper by Raul Gonzalez III enlist animals as stand-ins for a spectrum of human emotion and experience, from hyper-machismo, weapon-wielding roosters to poor, helpless, and abused flea bitten mongrels.

The work of **Gedas Paskauskas**, **Wendy Klemperer** and **Tony Bevilacqua** delves into the relationship of hunters and prey. Bevilacqua questions the sport of trophy hunting. Painting creatures from taxidermy, he is disturbed by the notion of these proudly displayed dead animals, yet transported by their morbid beauty. Delving into the emotional world of animals, sculptor Wendy Klemperer creates both large-scale and smaller scaled steel works. Investigating animals' body language while celebrating the magnificence of their physicality, her bold gestural forms translate motion into emotion. Gedas Paskauskas expressionistically captures the world of hunter and prey. We sense chance encounters, confrontation, and a struggle for survival.

The work of **Jo-Anne McArthur** and **Jane O'Hara** investigates the duality of a cultural value system that holds animals in high esteem, yet routinely subjects them to suffering at the hands of the science, clothing and food industries. Photographer Jo-Anne McArthur aims to break down the barriers we have built which allow us to treat animals as objects as opposed to sentient beings. Her deeply empathic photographic images document the plight of animals across global industries. Her book, *We Animals*, features a decade of her work, and she is the subject of the documentary film, *The Ghosts in Our Machine*. Painter Jane O'Hara finds the duality in our relationships with animals both disturbing and intriguing. She problematizes our bestowal of human traits upon coveted pets, versus our insensitivity and cruelty to other animals by presenting her subjects in unexpected settings.

Denise Lindquist, Shannon Wright and Sterling Mulbry position animals in fantastic, whimsical settings, and within the realm of dreams. Sculptor Lindquist's quirky soft vinyl octopuses hover above the viewer. In an upside-down world, she wonders if these creatures might command the skies as heroically as they navigate the ocean depths. Sterling Mulbry's lush paintings cover subjects she often revisits: piles of books on the edge of a shelf, swimming pools, and landscapes viewed through shutters, many with birds completing the narrative or theatrical set somewhere between dream and reality. Shannon Wright creates delicate narrative wall displays of birds and animals using branches and found objects, while her large paper sculpture of a bear takes center stage in the gallery nearby.

Moira McLaughlin explores animals within the spiritual realm. Her brush and ink renderings of her deceased dachshund are painted on the pages of a Buddhist text. Invoking both an ancient artistic tradition, as well as the philosophical and spiritual practice of Zen Buddhism, she probes themes of detachment, grief, and impermanence.

Rebecca Doughty's small works encompass the animals of her childhood, both real and imagined. Serving as confidants, comforters, clowns and heroes, they stood by and stood in for her. In these paintings and drawings the creatures serve as stand-ins for all of us, still navigating life's comedies and tragedies, bearing the weight of our anxious world. A photographic print of a child with a lamb is overlaid with bands of text in a **Jo Tyler** collage piece. The text exposes what goes on behind the nostalgic scene represented with random comments from slaughterhouse workers and those treating animals as commodities.

Celebrating the portrayal of dogs in the history of art, **Moira McLaughlin** will screen *Dogs in Art*. The video is a tribute to sixty artists, working over a period of five thousand years, who have found inspiration in their canine muses. *Dogs in Art* is viewed through the mouth of Denise Lindquist's furry soft sculpture *DogMac*, a transformed iMac G-4. The exhibition also features an additional video display. Narrated by **James Cromwell, Mercy For Animals'** short documentary *Farm to Fridge* is hidden and displayed behind **Jane O'Hara's** painted screen *Sacrifice*, bringing into focus our ability to turn a blind eye to the injustice to these animals who exist in dark captivity and are victim to the mechanical process that turns their anonymous lives into meat.

The artists of *Beasts of Burden I* encompass so many aspects of the human-animal bond with their artworks. As we humans share our time on earth with these creatures, we affect every aspect of each other's lives. We have become numb to the animals' presence and influence, making it easier to make decisions that not only hurt them but ourselves, as we are interconnected.

Artists of Beasts of Burden I :

Tony Bevilacqua, Ariel Bordeaux, Rebecca Doughty, Raul Gonzalez III, Wendy Klemperer, Denise Lindquist, Jo-Anne McArthur, Moira McLaughlin, Sterling Mulbry, Jane O'Hara, Gedas Paskauskas, Jo Tyler and Shannon Wright.

