

BEASTS OF BURDEN II. Curator 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 exhibit *Beasts of Burden II* with its fourteen 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 II* 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. The work of Gedas Paskauskas delves into the world where animals reside in nature without the direct influence of humans. Creatures struggle to exist with the vulnerability of birth and survival, yet the spirit of hope prevails.

The work of **Jo-Anne McArthur**, **Julia Oldham** 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*. In the animated piece *Laika's Lullaby*, video artist Julia Oldham works with musician Lindsay Keast to tell the tragic story of the Soviet space dog Laika, who in 1957 became one of the first animals to be launched into

space, her small form orbiting the earth for only a few hours before her death. 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 and **Adonna Khare** 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. Working almost entirely black and white, Adonna Khare creates elaborately detailed drawings that belie the work's psychological nuances, pensive moods, and frequently ominous narratives, exhibiting that to allegorize animals as avatars of human psychological or spiritual conditions is a powerful strategy for storytelling.

Karen Fiorito and **Moira McLaughlin** explore animals within the spiritual realm. Through her art works Karen Fiorito strives to make the viewer feel that all beings are sacred, magical and worthy of our love and respect, that they are an integral and interconnected part of our ecosystem. As ancient cultures once worshipped and respected nature and the laws of the universe and lived in harmony with them, Fiorito feels through art and meditation on nature and its creatures that we can experience that connection with all beings. Moira McLaughlin's 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.

The work of **Nancy Diessner** manipulates our living world to explore the mysterious relationship between humans and animals. Nancy Diessner's work begins with her photographic images of taxidermied animal trophies killed by a big game hunter. Those images are then transformed through drawing, painting and printmaking to be expressive of their original freedom and connection to nature, as well as their abrupt disconnection from the natural world, giving these specimens a new world in which to exist. **Moby** is known globally for his music, by many for his veganism and support of animal rights, and in recent years for his photography. In Moby's *Innocents* series his work addresses yet another aspect of our complex relationship with animals. These photographs with their cloaked figures with animal heads take the human-animal relationship to an existential imagining which have viewers questioning our current and future impact by and to - and as - animals.

Celebrating the portrayal of dogs in the history of art **Moira McLaughlin** will also 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 II* 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 II* :

Tony Bevilacqua, Ariel Bordeaux, Nancy Diessner, Karen Fiorito, Raul Gonzalez III, Adonna Khare, Wendy Klemperer, Denise Lindquist, Jo-Anne McArthur, Moira McLaughlin, Moby, Jane O'Hara, Julia Oldham, and Gedas Paskauskas.