

Significant Otherness

Exhibition
and
Thesis Paper
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by
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Preface

My exhibition titled *Significant Otherness* takes place on unceded Mi'kmaq territory in the Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax. The work in this exhibition consists a video work showing the archive of images that are the source of a series of several pen and ink drawings, digitally altered photomontages, and three collaborative sculptures realized with Chloe Kinsella. The overarching theme is of observing various interactions among animal individuals and their surroundings. In this supporting paper, I will explain how I am not the only author of my work; it exists as a conversation and collaboration between myself and other creatures, acknowledging that each other has bodily awareness and agency. Stories of personal encounters with animals are included, which are vital in thinking about my relationships with these significant others. I will be arguing that deception and the flux between certainty, uncertainty, and unknowing casts animals with intention that heightens their moral standing.

INTRODUCTION

“And say the animal responded?” - Derrida

I was in Jasper in July of 2018 camping with my partner Chloe. It had been raining for days, but we decided to venture on a hike even though we had no proper rain gear. Arriving at Pyramid Lake, we began trekking up the trail with our hoods up as the relentless rain distorted sounds in the forest. About an hour in something caught my ear, and I whipped around. I was hopeful that the call I had just heard was from an owl, a barred owl. It called again and I listened to the intonation of the melodic phrase “who cooks for you? who cooks for you - all”. With hoods down, we could hear more clearly and tracked the creature off the trail a few meters. With hands cupped around my mouth, I did my best imitation back. A dialogue was opened. Calling back and forth we eventually found each other - well, I saw them, and they must have seen me long before.

The barred owl was a “lifer” (which in the birding community is a bird that is a once in a life time sight) for myself, and I had not seen one in the wild until this moment. Staring back at the creature’s deep black eyes, it seemed we were in a dance. The owl hopped from branch to branch 15 feet above us, cocking its head, holding its gaze and singing its song. I was not able to get a photo from this angle and had left my camera gear in the car, so we just perched together. It was a powerful moment of connection and seemingly direct conversation. I wasn’t sure what to say. Running through my mind all I could understand was the owl phonetically asking who prepares each other's food. Eventually, the conversation grew tiresome, and the owl flew away. My partner and I returned down the trail, still with hoods down, listening for any goodbyes from our newly formed owl companion.

My photographic practice requires the observation and meeting between myself and the animal; a dialogue is opened and relationships are formed, however brief the visit may be. We have an opportunity to engage. I would like to break with inherited Western thinking surrounding animals as object and open up a dialogue on animals as collaborators with an acknowledgment that my work is not auto-generative. The goal of my work is to embody otherworldly interspecies scenarios, creating a commentary on our current climate and the othering our animal counterparts.

Collaboration implies working with someone in order to produce something. The stories I will expand on in this piece are a small window into the interactions that fuel and contextualize my approach to working with representations of animals. Play, observation, documentation, and

presentation are all stages in the broader scope of my collaborations and image constructions. During the initial interactions and documentation, I often feel it selfish to call my practice collaborative; it is not until I return to the studio, build a narrative and polish my rendering that I feel that I have fulfilled my end of the collaboration.

LANGUAGE

“It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: ‘they do not think, and that is why they do not talk.’ But—they simply do not talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language—if we except the most primitive forms of language.—

Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.” - Wittgenstein, 128

To begin I will provide a rationale for the terminology I will be using going forward in conjunction with my discussion surrounding myself and animals. The word “creature” seems more appropriate than “animal” or “nonhuman” when describing the subjects of my work. Derrida describes the othering and connotations of the language surrounding creatures in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, “The animal, what a word! The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other” (23). The animal also has embedded hierarchies lending themselves to negative metaphors like, “killed like an animal”, “treated like an animal”, “worked like an animal”, which all connote disrespect and being degraded when taken in an anthropocentric context. Amongst theorists, it is also ubiquitous to use the term “nonhumans” to describe living things other than human beings, from plant life to animals.

I still am uncomfortable with the implied deficit of appearing nonhuman; the direct negative connotations of being less-than and lacking through our anthropocentric lens. However, I do appreciate that when theorist Donna Haraway writes about nonhuman animals and human animals, she uses language to set up a relationship between things, casting both animals and humans as being similar creatures of similar origins. I believe this is her way of levelling the hierarchy that I am discussing. In my rejection of anthropocentrism I borrow David Abrams coined term “more-than-human” animals which seems more appropriate in the distinction between us as humans and them as other living things, when a distinction must be made. In pursuit of adopting my own language of signifiers, I find solidarity in the term “creatures” and will be using this to describe both humans and more-than-humans when no other designation is necessary. A kinship in difference.

Human - Equal to myself
More-than-human animals - Greater than
Creatures - Us

Attempting a non-hegemonic, non-anthropocentric language system in this essay is difficult to traverse as I tell the stories of the many voiced landscapes and biologically diverse areas I often find myself in. The discussion that I put forth is from my subjective point of view, recalling creaturely encounters and poetically filling in their side of the dialogue. It is not my intention to speak for creatures or overly impose my narrative on them. Humans have the capacity of metalinguistics or the ability to communicate that we are communicating, which does not mean that other creatures do not speak. More-than-human animals do communicate, “their supposed muteness is more a problem for us than it is to them” (Wolfe 3).

It is also important to note that some of my work could be seen as changing orientation from human, to embodying the more-than-human. It is important to acknowledge there are many other traditional and indigenous ways of knowing. The melding of species and channeling of animalistic energies could be seen as shamanistic, however I view my attempted understanding of other creatures explored through my images as empathy. I would not claim to understand their will or embody their personas. If escaping the privatization of human essentialism becomes too abstract of an idea, perhaps it highlights how separate we have become. I enact mysticism and chimerical ways of knowing in the fantastical constructions in my images. Simply using imagination, I believe we can traverse over creaturely boundaries, as I do in my work.

COLLABORATION

As I have described, I am trying to remove hierarchies and divisions between species and an essential point in moving towards more reciprocal interactions and understandings is in acknowledging the agency of the subjects in my photographs and, at times, casting them as collaborators. I do believe that there is a two-way observation that takes place during times in nature that reflect the intimate moments captured and recreated. What excites me is that the creature standing in front of me can react and respond to me and I often hypothesize that they may be reacting to me differently than another human they may have encountered - they are reading me as well. The reason that I describe encounters with more-than-humans as collaborations, is that from the moment we acknowledge one another we both have the choice to reject or continue in a nonverbal dialogue. This choice is a way of performing a symbiotic relationship, a mutual look exchanged with the choice to stay.

The concept of symbiosis implies a relationship in which you can find a primary beneficiary. Donna Haraway’s term “symptoiesis” acknowledges that we are “creating-with”, void of finding

who may be disadvantaged (Haraway, “Trouble” 58). In most of my initial happenings upon creatures, it is difficult to pinpoint who has engaged who. This uncertainty opens up a shift in our cultural hierarchy as we use seeing as a way of displaying power and understanding. But what if they saw us first? Without going too much into the gaze I will say that it is often seen as one sided, however, more-than-humans do look back at us and do have a viewpoint.

I have seen a shy lynx, a curious lynx, and a scared lynx this past summer alone and I believe this relates to how agency should be understood; it is more than how physical attributes differ from the creature species counterparts and relates to repeatable behavioural tendencies that show a level of individuality and acknowledge all sensorial bodies. This is something that author Peter Singer writes about in his research and animal rights activism on moral standing and ethics, stating that environmentalists, among others, only worry about the future of species as a whole, not the individual (Singer 55). This animal as an individual agent is something that I try to employ in my photographs, hopefully to give room for the unspecified and living (Paré 4). The result of this work is the fruit of a collaboration in which more-than-humans must be considered as active agents and not as objects. I have been drawing inspiration from artist Roni Horn’s photo series *Birds*, depicting ten different species of taxidermied birds shot from behind, neck up, in pairs of two (fig 1). This series showcased their differences in plumage, proportion, stance etc. casting them as individuals without the depiction of a face. To be aware of differences one just has to be told to look closely enough.

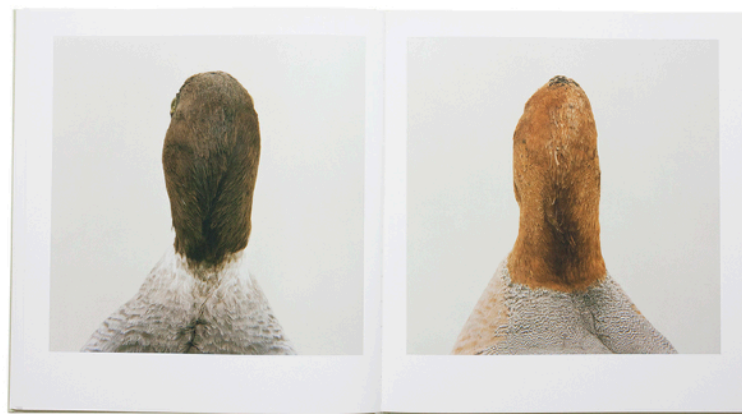


Fig 1. Horne, Roni “Birds” <<https://www.hauserwirth.com/publications/9296-roni-horn-bird>> Accessed March 22, 2019.

PLAY

“What if work and play, and not just pity, open up when the possibility of mutual response, without names, is taken seriously as an everyday practice available to philosophy and to science?” - (Haraway, “Companion” 22)

Continuing with more-than-human anecdotes surrounding coded behaviour and speculation, a couple of stories come to mind during my observation of foxes over the past couple of years. Foxes amaze me, they are curious, rambunctious, very social, and are found nearly everywhere on Earth. I have had the privilege of watching two large dens of foxes for several days in both the Yukon, in Tombstone Territorial Park, and Newfoundland, in English Harbour. In both cases, most activity was during the evening, consisting of running around, pouncing, biting, and, for lack of a better word, playing. It was easy for me to feel empathy and find parallels with them coming from a family of three boys and one girl. I had flashbacks to times we would be play fighting, testing each other's limits only to find out that pushing your sibling off a couch may result in a broken collar bone. I wondered what limits the foxes are aware of when they play. They need to find out how strong they are, in times of play and in times of prey, in the same way we do for survival and fulfilment. During this time of observation, I saw differences in posturing that seemingly indicated when they were inviting play and when they were asserting dominance and standing their ground.

When I situate myself in nature, beginning my observation of majestic creatures, I have come to recognize play as being prevalent in interactions amongst themselves and at times with me as well. This rambunctiousness and opportunity to build connections often translates to how the creatures are depicted in my renderings and the exaggerated postures I am able to capture. In the case of the foxes mentioned above, when they were pouncing on one and other, I was able to document this exchange and the contorted forms that showed more personality and ability of the body than the standard wildlife shot. I am approaching the term “play” pertaining to actions where goals or results are not immediately evident and carrying connotations of joy and self-fulfillment.

Play is a complex term in the animal kingdom where instinct is often used to explain behaviours that appear to have no immediate function; they are just developing motor functions, muscle development, and reflexes they will need to survive into maturity. Inner states are very hard to ascertain. I do not dispute behavioural sciences but I am proposing that play, in some of the contexts, is indeed as it appears, - moments of uninhibited play that transcend species. In this analysis and observation of creatures, there are definite overtones of scientific classification, this others the subjects and keeps us at a distance in a position of rational

dominance. The verb of playing is also laden with anthropocentric ideologies which stop imaginative thinking in the tracks of the human, centralizing humanity as gatekeepers on a multitude of behaviours and emotions. Grief, (the near antitheses of play) usually approached as a human condition, has presented in multiple species from elephants to crows in mourning (Keim 64). Just as humans express grief in different ways, speculatively so do deer, foxes, rabbits, and creatures. I believe these same concepts and individual expressions can also be applied to play. The following stories describe finding creatures in the act of play and at times casting them as playmates, bringing a more dimensional understanding to cognitive and emotional capacities in all creatures, and the moments of communication later represented in my work.

On the Yukon River one foggy morning this past summer, my partner Chloe and I woke up to a thud on the roof of our tent, then another, then another. Slowly we got out of the tent not sure if the sky was falling or not, upon looking up we heard a laughing squirrel. The squirrel stopped, and we proceeded with making our breakfast. Moments later he started throwing pine cones again, with one nearly hitting me. Squirrels are very smart in the way that they gather food. I learned in the Yukon that squirrels are either left handed or right handed and will pick pine cones methodically as each pine tree will either have pine cones that all spiral clock-wise or all spiral counter-clockwise, and one of these will be easier for the squirrel to open, depending on their dominant hand. They stick with that tree and avoid others that would require too much effort. This squirrel was at least 50ft up and had to throw the pine cones out far enough so that they made it to the ground and did not get caught in the bows. As the squirrel continued his harvesting, I joined in and began trying to catch the projectiles, lunging and creating a pile for them. Unintentionally and unexpectedly we were engaged in what felt like a form of play.

Another instance where creatures performed, and I played witness was with a couple of polar bears, also in July 2018, on an artist residency sailing aboard a ship in Svalbard, Norway. When making my way up to the Arctic I had some expectations in a land that is still relatively unknown. I knew what I wanted to see and what I could see because of documentation from explorers. After my trip I was pleasantly surprised to find many instances where my knowledge was challenged. Two polar bears, a sow and a cub, appeared as yellow dots traversing ocean shores in the distance. We were lucky enough to sail parallel to them, observing their movements for three hours and nearly 100 miles. At one point they swam across a fjord and performed an act that I did not expect. Making their way on to land they shook off the bulk of water that their fur had been saturated with, then proceeded to slide in the snow, making a series of interwoven paths as they rolled around.

The scale is hard to judge in Svalbard as there are no trees or other signifiers of scale present. The mountain revealed its size as the bears climbed over boulders and scaled the icy slopes. Rubbing their faces into the ground then slid down on their backs, they rolled around assuming every position imaginable and leaving unusual traces as evidence in the snow. They genuinely seemed to be performing play. A few members of my cohort on the ship, the rationalists, insisted that the guides explain this behaviour as surely it could not just be for fun. On our travels we had seen these slide marks before, not knowing what caused them. An answer reluctantly given was that this may be a way of squeezing out the water remaining in their fur, transferring it into the loose top layer of snow. It was an interesting moment of conflicting emotions as we all internalized this proposition and I questioned again if everything has to have such a practical motivation. The way that I had observed these creatures bound and slide in tandem for hours embodied play and fun in the face of their harsh climate. I took many photos as these events unfolded and as many more channels were plowed into the mountainside. This form of drawing, mark making, brought on by a state of play, still lingers in my mind, and I fantasize about if that was some form of communication. A message sent and received.



Fig 2. Kanwischer, Philip. "Intent" 36x64", 2019, Archival Pigment Print

DECEPTION, (MISCOMMUNICATION) & MYSTICISM

NSCAD instructor and artist, Steve Higgins, pointed out that
“...if you suspend belief that Philip is the creator of these images,
the agency shifts back to the animal.”

I find it difficult to argue that more-than-human animals set out to deceive other creatures, although it may be true. Camouflage and other defence mechanisms occur naturally and in the hunt between predator and prey, deception implies intention. In order for deceptions to be considered at least one animal must misinterpret another animal's behaviour. In addition the animal that produces the misinterpreted behaviour must benefit from the misinterpretation (Kuczaj 163). Perhaps the reason I am so drawn to deception is that if we are unwittingly deceived that means that the more-than-human animal has won in a battle of minds. I am speculating on the different ways we encounter and enact deception through interspecies encounters and modes of representation.

I see a parallel between unknown intentions and deception. During encounters, creatures' intentions are opaque and there is a period of time needed in order to understand the coded behaviour and body language hinting at what the other is thinking. Here a distinction could be drawn between reacting and responding. In the period of trust building, I remind myself that I could break that trust and vice versa - it is a cautious form of communication. One has to be acutely aware of the way all creatures move. It is not the creature's inability of knowing what they will do, as a polar bear understands the message it is emitting, I believe that creatures understand the actions that they are performing - the fish knows it is moving.

Then there is misleading. This is perhaps a form of deception but one that is not loaded with malicious intent. Lacan proposes that “[an] idea of an animal characterized by an incapacity to pretend to pretend or to erase its traces.” (Derrida “Responded” 122) This proposition really resonated with me and painted a vivid picture of an animal erasing its tracks, projecting pretending to pretend, intentionally sweeping its traces away. Tracks are fascinating and I always look forward to winter so that I may be able to read the patterns of movement of the forest's inhabitants. This idea of misleading, literally in the sense of a false trail, and hidden intentions inspired my piece titled *Intent* (fig 2.), a photomontage depicting two polar bears on the side of a mountain amongst a myriad of tracks, slipping and sliding with seemingly no purpose or direction. I want to harness both the idea of play and deception in my representation of more-than-humans, applying more meaning and narrative to their natural movements and the subtlety of their communication.

“The mouse who covers its tracks has been eaten.” - Philip

I often go out looking for animals hoping to find something unexpected and perhaps to be unwittingly deceived. I do not wish to see a bear in the given scenarios of the diorama and the Discovery channel or a bear as I would see it if I googled stock photos. I look for the unexpected, individual and inherently natural ways that animals move and position themselves in front of me. Posturing as a form of communication - just as a pheasant fluffs up before me, trying to seem larger than it really is - thought to be an evolutionary protective device to deceive and deter predators. I watch in wonder as this plays out in front of me. Deception implies intention, and I don't want a tidy division between humans and animals. Our boundaries should be sticky, entangled, and matted.

One on one meetings with creatures differ significantly from collective viewings. This past summer in Haines Alaska I was able to witness brown bears fish for salmon along the Chilkoot River. There were moments where seven bears would be in the same field of view, providing ample photographic opportunities as they would glance up at us from time to time. Caught up in this spectacular feeling of being noticed by these creatures I felt this was a 1:1 encounter. Returning my attention to my camera for a second I become acutely aware that there is an audience of humans standing right beside me; connections become diluted during moments of collective viewings. A humbling moment when observing brown bears perhaps hinting that I am not as unique as I think I am, John Berger rings in my ears with "the animal sees me as he sees his surroundings." (Berger 16) Perhaps no unique look is reserved for me, and perhaps I am part of the general tourist backdrop that encroaches on the habitat of these creatures. Although this may seem pragmatically true - and has gone on to influence my ethical dilemmas about wildlife photography - it did not discourage me from speculating on possibilities for communication and connection with wild creatures. I do believe I approach bears in a way that is perhaps less threatening and more mindful of boundaries than the emphatic tourist, but this may be me deceiving myself.

In a more domestic setting, I am also fascinated by reading the body language of my companion dog, Pucko, and how similar postures seem to translate between species, both playfully and confrontationally. In this case, myself and Pucko have “worlded” together, meaning we have lived together and have “become with” each other for the past 9 years (Haraway 16). I like to think I know who I touch when I touch my dog which varies greatly to the touch of an undomesticated creature. My dog Pucko is particularly adept in picking up cues in our language game, the reading goes both ways; he has begun to pick up on my posturing

when I attempt to scare my partner Chloe. I hunch over and take slow exaggerated steps, moving towards her. He instantly becomes confrontational, standing tall and puffing out his chest and barks at me, alerting Chloe to the impending “threat”, yet wagging his tail. We have played this game enough times where we have recognized two variables that bring out a response, one being the speed I walk and the other being posture. During our co-existing together there are hints that both of us creatures notice, and gesture to unspoken and spoken communication that may be overlooked by a typical stranger. Pucko, in a way is de-coding my secrets and hidden intentions of pretending to be a threat.

PHOTOGRAPHY

“Photography is a deceptive medium itself. Rooted in our minds as an indexical copy of our surroundings, photos exclude the creator and what the creator does not want us to see. I began to see parallels between the photographic medium, myself and the creature.” - Philip

Without context, the photograph does not give away the more-than-human subject’s status, making the viewer unaware if it is wild, domesticated, or dead. As seen in photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto’s photographs titled *Diorama* (fig. 3) the documentation disguises whether or not the creatures are alive, taxidermied, or frozen. This is an example of the photograph’s inability to speak to if the animal is alive or not. In many early photographs, more-than-human animals would have been dead and staged due to the limitations of technologies and shutter speeds. It may also be important to note that perhaps the opposite can happen when the viewer is told a creature is dead when in reality it may be alive.



Fig 3. Sugimoto, Hiroshi “Hyena - Jackal - Vulture” <<https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/new-page-54>> Accessed March 22, 2019.

Along with the medium's secrets comes a flattening of plains. I believe conventional photography flattens animals both conceptually and physically and I am very interested in this reductive representation. The digital photographic process takes light and produces a two-dimensional rendering of what is presented in front of the lens. I see a parallel between straight photography of more-than-humans and early illustrations that rendered both empirical and fantastical representations of animal life for the purpose of study. Botanical studies and biological renderings as seen in *Historiæ Animalivm*, traditionally view the animals from a side view, in a way that has one foot in front of the other, metaphorically and effectively displaying “both sides” of the animal (Fig. 4).

Author Ron Broglio stipulated in *Speculative Taxidermy* by Giovanni Aloï that “animals are understood as lacking depth of being - the very quality that allows man to be self-reflexive and therefore cogitate becoming wholly accessible to man, but only on a surface level”(87). This again is relating to a divide between human creatures and more-than-human creatures on the basis of cognition, intention etc. I agree that on this surface level of representation is where conventional photography tends to sit. Photography flattens the planes which can add to the confusion, bringing what's back towards you and blending with what is in front, and I often utilize this in creating work that disrupts the isolation of the subject seen in my piece titled *Synthesis* (Fig 5).



Fig. 4 Gessner, Conrad “*Historiæ Animalivm*” <https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010867691/page/n131> Accessed March 15, 2019.



Fig 5. Kanwischer, Philip. "Synthesis" 40x40", 2018, Archival Pigment Print

PHOTOBONDING

“My photographic work is intentionally executed as convincingly as possible, photography being a historically indexical medium and still clinging to connotations of residual truth of the image. I see my process of constructing situations and compositions that cannot and should not be fully understood. By employing a sense of realism, I want my photographs to be a loaded way of unknowing.” - Philip

From the initial encounter and capture as I have described above, I then enact manipulations using Photoshop as a tool. I have loathed the connotations of this tool and program, finding that it turns off the possibilities of artist hands being associated with the final product. In actuality, there is very little difference between the action of creating my drawings and the acts of photoshopping. Each one either holding a stylus or a pen performing short strokes to build up information leading to representation. My drawings are precursors to my photomontages. The drawings reference images I have taken and are used as a way of understanding what an image could look like. I bend bodies and render light into fantastical shapes and scenarios. I find this process is a way of quickly adding poetics, then taking the time to understand what it is that the creature will be saying and if the act can realistically be accomplished.

There is a link between Photoshop, drawing, needle felting and other meditative tasks coupled with that of therapy and animals. Most time spent in photoshop is spent petting the hairs of animals in order to separate them from the context of where they were situated. Tying back to my qualms with language surrounding human/animal dynamics and in relation to my work, I am proposing to abandon the term Photoshop and its connotations of overworked, oversaturated and processed imagery. The images I create are made to be convincingly deceiving, utilizing light and colour to make them real. The term I have adopted to describe my process of work and analyzing through photographs and manipulations is ‘photobonding’. Photo ‘bonding’ relates to the bonding between two materials being joined or adhered together (digitally) as well as the ‘bonding’, kinship, trust or rapport that I feel between myself and the creatures in my images. As I pour over their details and gain an understanding of their posture, attitude and looks I feel that I am creating meaningful and informed digital assemblages, bonding parts of similar animals together to create optimal forms for my desired message and compositions. This is also a play on words with the contemporary idea of ‘photobombing’, as the practice of unexpectedly entering the frame. I see this as symbolizing actions going on outside of the frame casting my images as part of a larger environmental context, serendipitously caught. Concisely, ‘photobonding’ is also another way of bringing multiple photographs together, but with further care and intention, within a program such as photoshop.

Another piece in my exhibition *Significant Otherness* titled *Blue - Good Feet* is the other side of the photobonding experience. This piece is a video of a screen-recording of me scrolling through thousands of images to give the viewer context of how my final pieces came to fruition. Animals move in and out of the frame, behind bushes through water, and become animated. The etymology of animal comes from “anima” to breathe and to have spirit, to be animate is to be alive, to move, to be inanimate is to be still (Buller 142). During the stop motion video I stop on images that catch my eye. I then zoom in to reveal the hidden details and textures that are captured often focusing on the eyes. The cursor is the only thing that reveals that a computer is providing the process. I also use the cursor as a tool to tell the viewer where to look, identifying the point that is of my interest using the mouse. If the photograph is out of focus, it will receive a yellow label. If the photograph receives red, it symbolizes an animal in a position that is aesthetically pleasing, in focus and representing how an animal *should* look. Green represents an image that I am very drawn to and displays a feeling or action that is out of the ordinary or fraught with potential that can be revealed with little work on my end. The last colour, blue, is given when one of the most masked areas of an animal is revealed, the feet. I am fascinated with feet, hands, paws, hooves, and talons. I see the action of holding these sensitive areas and viewing them a sign of trust. There is also the implication of concept that animals can only grasp, and the thought that they cannot give. Joseph Beuys would perhaps agree that I am giving the gift of my hands that carry connotations of creativity (Baker 151). I want to challenge that their gift is maybe more hidden than the act of receiving a product willingly from a creature.

In the piece titled *Beguiled* (Fig. 6) the body of the fox was folded in on itself in a way that lent it to being cradled around a form, my head. Unfortunately the nose, the feet, and the tail in the initial photograph were masked by obstructing flora. Without giving too much away, I had to scroll through my archive, as expressed in my stop motion piece, to find parts from a similarly colour phased fox and composite it all together. This sort of digital construction is evident in almost all of my images and my archive of straight photographs has proven an invaluable resource despite rarely being seen by anyone but me.

For myself it is not a dissection of parts but a recalling of times spent and moments shared.



Fig 6. Kanwischer, Philip. "Beguiled" 2019, 40x40", Archival Pigment Print

This animated piece displays a reminiscence of times that I lean on for material in my work. I often cycle through my images finding moments that I can respond to in various ways. However, I find the process of finding and sorting by colour coding, at some points, problematic. I worry that this mode of categorization and ranking does harm to those individuals that do not make the cut due to certain things that I can not see. In this archiving of imaging I am setting a “threshold of description finding the minimum importance a piece of information must have to be worthy of archiving.” (Ernst 141). Working backwards where they again enter a field of knowledge as general categories, as a species, not as singular individuals (Ernst 142). I want this piece to root my work in lived experiences and I feel very obligated to show and use the animal selves that I photograph.

SCULPTURE

“With sculpture I had to concern myself with what was inside the creature.” - Philip

I have grappled with trying different ways of moving away from more-than-human animal encounters because of ethical reasons, being wary of impact despite loving interactions. Being very critical of the desire to move closer in attempts to “get the shot” photographically, I began experimenting with sculpture as one avenue of escaping these potentially problematic encounters in situ. I wanted to bring my photographic approach into a dimensional form. This transition in mediums has not been without its challenges; however, embracing trial and error and working in a more tactile way did lend itself to my sensibilities and opened up new possibilities for collaboration.

Last year I needle felted a cross fox and a barred owl in attempts at creating soft, humble surrogates for the creaturely-selves to satisfy my urge to find wild companions. Benton, the barred owl, was made before I had seen one of his kind in the wild. In the gallery Benton hides or at least is not immediately visible, mirroring his disposition in nature; a watchful eye. In the gallery installation he is positioned behind the video piece *Blue - Good Feet*, deliberately flipping the role of the human voyeur. I have found moments can become more profound and confrontational when executed in three dimensions.

Working in sculpture also differed in that I had to find what was inside of the creatures; how the legs move, where the muscles join, to produce a rendering that mimicked the sense of reality that I was trying capture. I then began to inspect and proverbially dissect the bodies in terms of anatomy, posturing, and texture, to name a few attributes examined. I did miss the interaction and moments of observation between myself and the creature; however mundane they may

have seemed. This break from photography and removal of myself from the equation of creaturely documenter and habitat encroacher was partly due to an ethical reevaluation of my practice and partly to do with living in urban Nova Scotia for the time being. As I grappled with ways of refining my craft and obtaining a closer sense of realism I made several trips to the Natural History Museum where I studied, sketched and measured specimens that aided the realization of my sculptural forms.

Several collaborative sculptures made with Chloe Kinsella inhabit the gallery, a sandhill crane and ungulate both with exposed legs and shrouded bodies. We were working on the collaborative pieces as an expression and manifestation of our joint experiences and encounters with more-than-humans. Chloe and I created intricately printed and dyed yardages to mimic photographic backdrops, isolating and enveloping our subjects. This figure-ground dynamic is then challenged by the inclusion of the same fabric wrapped around the creatures, a form of imposed camouflage that causes the bodies to recede into this allotted backdrop. These pieces also tie back to previously mentioned themes of flattening of space, mysticism and deception as the viewer must suspend disbelief in what is under the fabric, and lastly also a rejection of the viewer and voyeurism.

I am fascinated with the unknown. Within the unknown lie our relations with more-than-human animals. We understand creatures through the sum of their parts and partially through their movements, still creatures hold secrets. Coming into this program I was very open and actively seeking out ways in which I could change the way I worked. The opportunities for exploration and play with my practice yielded results that I would not have expected. More-than-human animals explore the world just as any creature; through listening with ears, touching with skin, seeing with eyes, tasting with tongues, and smelling with noses. I want to acknowledge this in my work and in my encounters.



Fig 7. Kanwischer, Philip. "Reticent" 2017, 40x40", Archival Pigment Print

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