

fact AND fiction



Olivia Parker, *Mr. Johnston's Pull Toy*, 1994, digital image, courtesy of the artist.

# f riends and C ommodities

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MOST PEOPLE have a close animal friend in their life. Cats now outnumber dogs as companion animals in the United States, no doubt partly because more and more of us live in urban and suburban neighborhoods that don't take kindly to having dogs running loose. But whether that animal friend of ours is canine, feline, or none of the above, most of us have a mushy soft spot in our heart for animals.

THIS AFFECTION is remarkable for its selectivity. We would never dream of deliberately hurting or killing a companion animal, whether that animal sleeps and eats in our house or lives next door. And yet the great majority of Americans turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the deliberate hurting and killing of other animals. The plain fact is, most Americans eat animals, wear their skins, and use products that contain their parts (like the animal urine that frequently is used as a fixative in perfumes).

How is this selectivity possible? What explains how we can see the humor, wisdom, grace, craftiness, beauty, loyalty and other virtues in our animal friends and, at the same time, see other animals as consumable commodities, whose reason for being is that we like the taste of their flesh or the feel of their skin? No one seems to have a good answer. Many people aren't even aware that there is a question.

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS whose work is represented in this show don't belong to this group. Each photographer, in his or her particular way, knows this



© Joan Fontcuberta & Pere Formiguera, *Micostrium vulgaris*, 1982. Photographs and drawing from the publication *Fauna*, courtesy MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA.



Deborah Brackenbury, *Patent 1918*, 1992, toned gelatin silver print, courtesy of the artist.



Aida Laleian, *Into One*, 1991, hand-colored silver print, courtesy of the artist.

Cats always land on their feet and will go to any lengths to avoid water. Why not wire a cat up to a bomb, and sling both below a bomber? When flying over enemy ships, the explosive cat would be released. The cat would be so concerned to avoid the water that it could be virtually certain of guiding the bomb onto enemy ships. Experiments soon proved the cat would become unconscious long before Nazi decks seemed a likely landing place.

Marion Marrison, *Cats Always Land*, 1990/92, Fujichrome print, courtesy of the artist.



*Cross (Rabbit)*, 1992, from the installation *Vestiges*, silver prints on aluminum by Susan kae Grant, courtesy of the artist.



Jim Neel, *Aline McGlocklin and Blackphase Timber Rattler*, Jolo, West Virginia, 1992, gelatin silver print, courtesy of the artist.

question must be asked. And each also realizes that this question gives rise to another one about the nature of photography itself: "How can photography help us understand how we do, and how we might, see animals?"

NOT SURPRISINGLY, there are as many answers as there are photographers. At least this is true in one sense. In another sense, there is a sameness beneath the differences. Old ways of seeing animals will endure unless we are challenged to respond to new ways of seeing them.

THAT IS the unifying theme we find in the disparate work exhibited here: the challenge to see animals in new, sometimes fanciful, sometimes sometimes ambiguous, sometimes realistic ways.

PERHAPS AS VIEWERS, after having taken the journey these photographs invite, we might re-enter the world with eyes that now see flesh and blood animals differently than when we began. Art can illuminate the contours and contents of our daily life. And art can also change how we live it.

WHO KNOWS but that these photographs might lead us to ask whether slivers of dead animals really do belong between two slices of bread, or whether, more generally, animals who are not our friends really should be regarded as our commodities.

*Tom Regan teaches philosophy at North Carolina State University. Among his more than twenty books is The Case for Animal Rights (University of California Press), which defines the philosophy of the contemporary Animal Rights Movement.*

*The Culture & Animals Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt charity that offers support to artists whose work expresses positive concern for animals. For information concerning how you can help, write to CAF, 3509 Eden Croft Drive, Raleigh, NC 27612. Ph: 919-782-3739. Fax: 919-782-6464.*





Peter Beard, 1994. Gelatin silver print with ink writing and blood, courtesy of THE TIMJ IS ALWAYS NOW Gallery, New York.

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animal visions for the 21st century

October 6 - November 16, 1995

PETER BEARD • DEBORAH BRACKENBURY • JOAN FONTCUBERTA & PERE FORMIGUERA  
SUSAN KAE GRANT • AIDA LALEIAN • MARION MARRISON • JIM NEEL • OLIVIA PARKER

Opening Reception - Friday, October 6, 6-9pm

Gallery Talk by Susan kae Grant at 7pm

Opening Reception Catered by Talley's Green Grocer  
Handcrafted Beer provided by Dilworth Brewing Company

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We are located in the historic Park  
Elevator Building, at South  
Boulevard and Arlington Avenue.  
Gallery hours are 10am - 4pm  
Tuesday through Friday, 11am to  
4pm on Saturday. All events are  
free and open to the public.

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