Queensland College of Art and the Australian Animal Studies Group are uniting for the 4th Biennial Australian Animal Studies Group Conference 2011, Griffith University, South Bank campus, Brisbane. Between 10 -13 July, the conference brings together animal theorists and scientists from a broad range of academic disciplines to examine the inter-relationships between human and non human animals.

A joint exhibition in the Queensland College of Art Galleries.

POP GALLERY
12 Ipswich Road, Woolloongabba
3 – 23 July

PROJECT GALLERY
Lower Level Webb Centre
QCA 226 Grey Street, South Bank
4 – 22 July

Griffith UNIVERSITY
Queensland College of Art

POP

4th Biennial Australian Animal Studies Group Conference

animals, people – a shared environment. . .

AN EXHIBITION

The recent explosion of art related to the interaction of humans, animals and the environment highlights a renewed interest in the interconnectedness of all aspects of the natural world, and particularly, in the sentient beings that make up the so-called animal kingdom. This is hardly a new topic for artists. Even before the beginning of recorded history, the relationship between human and nonhuman animals was of fundamental concern to art. In fact, across time and cultures, art may be used as a barometer of the complex construction of animality and the status of humans within it. It might even be argued that, in western culture at least, the contested status of humans—situated in a natural world mostly populated by nonhuman otherness—triggered imaginative, secular art. For, the first sustained production of inventive drawing and painting in Europe was in the form of medieval bestiaries, those illustrated compendiums of beasts.[1] All the bestiaries that occupied much of the illuminated-book production in European monasteries from the eleventh to fourteenth century were derived entirely or partially from the *Physiologus*. This second-century Christian treatise used animal stories collected from classical writers to embody virtue and vice.[2] The dog-headed cynocephali and other fanciful hybrids, as depicted within the moralising tales of medieval bestiaries, are species that never become extinct. For example, the unicorn, centaur, cyclops, siren, and mermaid each continue their transmogrification in the memory of succeeding generations, being conjured forth in new hybrid forms by artists' imaginations.[3] However pervasive the influence of the *Physiologus*, it was the earlier writing of Aristotle, particularly his *Historia Animalium and De Anima*, that had a far more profound, sustained, and often devastating impact on creating such a rigid divide between humans and other animals that *animality* became a defining mechanism for the oppression of humans and the exploitation of nonhuman animals.[4]

From the period when the human sciences began to be developed in fifteenth-century Europe, artists played a key role in realising the potential for physiognomic signs to differentiate the extensive continuum of living beings. Because of the power of images, physiognomy would become a defining marker of similarities and differences between humans and other animals. Giambattista della Porta's sixteenth-century text *On Human Physiognomy* was largely a rehash of widely circulated adaptations of *Physiognomy*, a text presumed to be written by Aristotle. Della Porta's book would no doubt have disappeared from history but for the numerous woodcuts of human/animal comparisons, which had an inestimable influence on art and science. Over the following centuries, these images were increasingly refined, most notably in the seventeenth-century by the Director of the French Academy, Charles Le Brun.

During the age of exploration, artists and scientists were drawn into a closer coalition to record previously unimagined animals, such as the giraffe and kangaroo, or manifestations of long-imagined wild brutes, such as the gorilla. In the eighteenth century, animals became central subjects for painting—as exotic wonders, game, property, or scientific specimens. By the nineteenth century, artists or animaliers, such as Antoine-Louis Barye, specialised in virtually nothing but depictions of animals, usually in dramatic combat, as in Barye's case. Edwin Landseer in England and Rosa Bonheur in France built formidable reputations, that reached to the new world and new money of the United States, by applying their prodigious skills to anthropomorphize exotic and domestic animals. Because physiognomical differentiation was the touchstone of many nineteenth-century artists, as it was for anthropologists, such anthropomorphism was commonplace across Europe, the United States and Australia. Anthropomorphism is one side of an animal/human coin that became the elementary currency of the physiognomic paradigm that dominated art and science in the nineteenth century. The reverse side is zoomorphism, the projection of animal characteristics, usually brutishness, onto depictions of humans. In the second half of the nineteenth century, every viewer knew what a simianized depiction of a human represented; the closer the depiction to an anthropoid ape, the nearer the individual was to the brute.

In the twentieth century, during what is characterised as the modern or machine age, the animal was largely excluded from art. Franz Marc's prominence as an artist who exemplified animals in modern art is the result of his singularity. In his book *The Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker notes the lack of animals in modernism and chronicles how the animal has returned as a concern in postmodern art.[5] This brings us to the situation today and the current exhibition where the works indicate a range of attitudes by artists that can be summarised as rejecting the rigid speciesism of the past. Having had the privilege of reading the exhibiting artists' statements of intention, I am reluctant to make any global claims, given their multiple individual motivations. Nevertheless, a resounding commonality is that the boundaries of any ethical, moral, and intellectual sphere reach well beyond humans. Many artists here are motivated by their activist involvement with animal rights, others by environmental concerns, and yet others by philosophical or ethical positions derived from Peter Singer's pragmatism, Jacques Derrida's situational ethics or Donna Haraway's studies of companion species, to name a few prominent sources. Since the nineteen-eighties, when the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari triggered discussion on overcoming existing metaphysical humanism and anthropocentrism by "becoming animal", there has been a significant shift towards this post-human condition. Indeed, our engagement with bio-technology suggests we are becoming "vegetable, mineral and machine as well".[6] Anthropomorphism remains a problematic issue for artists, especially those using photography and film. Nevertheless, there is developing recognition of the role anthropomorphism can play in a positive transformation of attitudes to other animals.[7]

Given the complex nature of contemporary attitudes to animal/human identity, it is unsurprising that a number of the artists in this exhibition are also presenting papers at the conference. These papers revolve on critical, ethical, or philosophical issues around the theme of animals and people: a shared environment.

artists or animaliers, such as Antoine-Louis Barye, specialised in virtually nothing but depictions of animals, usually in dramatic combat, as in Barye's case. Edwin Landseer in England and Rosa Bonheur in France built formidable reputations, that reached to the new world and new money of the United States, by applying their prodigious skills to anthropomorphize exotic and domestic animals. Because physiognomical differentiation was the touchstone of many nineteenth-century artists, as it was for anthropologists, such anthropomorphism was commonplace across Europe, the United States and Australia. Anthropomorphism is one side of an animal/human coin that became the elementary currency of the physiognomic paradigm that dominated art and science in the nineteenth century. The reverse side is zoomorphism, the projection of animal characteristics, usually brutishness, onto depictions of humans. In the second half of the nineteenth century, every viewer knew what a simianized depiction of a human represented; the closer the depiction to an anthropoid ape, the nearer the individual was to the brute.

In the twentieth century, during what is characterised as the modern or machine age, the animal was largely excluded from art. Franz Marc's prominence as an artist who exemplified animals in modern art is the result of his singularity. In his book *The Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker notes the lack of animals in modernism and chronicles how the animal has returned as a concern in postmodern art.[5] This brings us to the situation today and the current exhibition where the works indicate a range of attitudes by artists that can be summarised as rejecting the rigid speciesism of the past. Having had the privilege of reading the exhibiting artists' statements of intention, I am reluctant to make any global claims, given their multiple individual motivations. Nevertheless, a resounding commonality is that the boundaries of any ethical, moral, and intellectual sphere reach well beyond humans. Many artists here are motivated by their activist involvement with animal rights, others by environmental concerns, and yet others by philosophical or ethical positions derived from Peter Singer's pragmatism, Jacques Derrida's situational ethics or Donna Haraway's studies of companion species, to name a few prominent sources. Since the nineteen-eighties, when the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari triggered discussion on overcoming existing metaphysical humanism and anthropocentrism by "becoming animal", there has been a significant shift towards this post-human condition. Indeed, our engagement with bio-technology suggests we are becoming "vegetable, mineral and machine as well".[6] Anthropomorphism remains a problematic issue for artists, especially those using photography and film. Nevertheless, there is developing recognition of the role anthropomorphism can play in a positive transformation of attitudes to other animals.[7]

Given the complex nature of contemporary attitudes to animal/human identity, it is unsurprising that a number of the artists in this exhibition are also presenting papers at the conference. These papers revolve on critical, ethical, or philosophical issues around the theme of animals and people: a shared environment.

Notes

[1] Melanie Holcomb, *Pen and Parchment: Drawing in the Middle Ages* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art & Yale Univ. Press, 2009).
[2] Bestiary production peaked in the early-thirteenth century in Europe. See Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and Their uses in the Middle Ages* (London: Sutton Publishing & Courtauld Institute, 1998), 167.
[3] John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2000; originally published Harvard Univ. Press, 1981).
[4] See Mark S. Roberts, *The Mark of the Beast: Animality and Human Oppression* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Univ. Press, 2008).
[5] Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Press, 2000).
[6] Christopher Cox, "Of Humans, Animals, and Monsters," in *Becoming Animal: Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom,* ed. Nato Thompson (Mass.: MoCA Publications and MIT Press, 2005), 24.
[7] See Lorraine Daston & Gregg Mitman eds. *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005). For sustained arguments against anthropomorphism, see Robert W Mitchell et. al. eds. *Anthropomorphism, Anecdotes and Animals* (New York: State Univ. of New York, 1997).

Professor Ross Woodrow
July 2011

Acknowledgements

Firstly I want to thank my fellow curatorium members, Jo Diball and Yvette Watt. Also thanks to Yvette for allowing me to reproduce her work in the catalogue. Natalie Edwards and Leah Burns deserve particular acknowledgment for initiating the idea of an exhibition to support the Australian Animal Studies Group (AASG) Conference here at Griffith University. Along with Perdita Phillips, Natalie also put enormous effort into developing an online gallery, which is available at the AASG website: http://www.aasg.org.au/gallery. Artist's statements and work by many of the artists in the exhibition can also be found here.

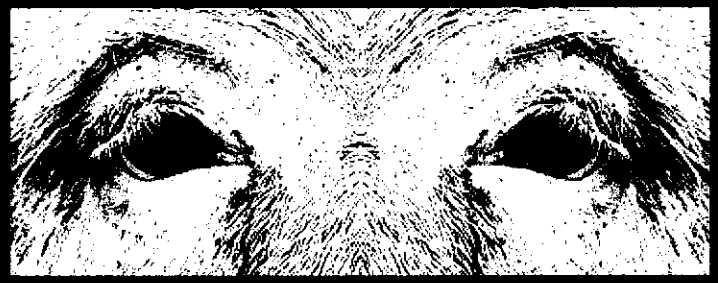
Last but far from least, the curatorium members would like to thank all the artists who submitted work for the exhibition here at QCA, Griffith University.

Curatorium: Jo Diball, Yvette Watt and Ross Woodrow
Catalogue design: Annette West-Bail
Editor: Evie Franzidis

Image: *The Eyes have It* (chicken, cow, pig, sheep), 2010, each work 59 x 23 cm, giclee print on photo rag paper.

Artists

Vanessa Barbay
Carla Bengtson
Iris Bergmann
Maria Fernanda Cardoso
Clair Chinnery
Catherine Clover
Lee Deigaard
Marian Drew
Simone Eisler
Barry Fitzpatrick
Kate Foster
Donna Franklin
Robyn Glade-Wright
Jan Harrison
Pat Hoffie
Helen Hopcroft
Angela Hughes
Kelly Hussey-Smith
Madeleine Kelly
Susan Lincoln
Geoff Overheu
Sonya Peters
Perdita Phillips
Zoe Porter
Justin Spiers
Amanda Stuart
Roslyn Taplin
Anne Taylor
Geoff Thompson
Sarah Waterson
Carolyn V Watson
Yvette Watt



Queensland College of Art and the Australian Animal Studies Group are uniting for the 4th Biennial Australian Animal Studies Group Conference 2011, Griffith University, South Bank campus, Brisbane. Between 10 -13 July, the conference brings together animal theorists and scientists from a broad range of academic disciplines to examine the inter-relationships between human and non human animals.

A joint exhibition in the Queensland College of Art Galleries.

POP GALLERY
12 Ipswich Road, Woolloongabba
3 – 23 July

PROJECT GALLERY
Lower Level Webb Centre
QCA 226 Grey Street, South Bank
4 – 22 July

Griffith UNIVERSITY
Queensland College of Art

POP

4th Biennial Australian Animal Studies Group Conference