

We are not just rather like animals; we are animals. Our difference from other species may be striking, but comparisons with them have always been, and must be, crucial to our view of ourselves.

-Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human and Nature* (1979), XXI

Human and animal relationships have undergone recent scrutiny because of the philosophical tenets of posthumanism. Scholars such as Mary Midgley, Cary Wolfe, and Steve Baker, among others, have argued that the established patterns of humanist thinking regarding the hierarchy of living things be reconsidered. In such distinct but linked institutions as natural history museums and zoos, in what can be understood as pet culture, and in the growing attention to the impact of humans on the natural world, human-animal relationships are sites of unprecedented contention. This contention is evident in the examination of different institutional, theoretical and social spaces. Collections of animal taxidermy, for example, which have been repurposed and displayed in order to educate publics on the conservation and protection of the natural world, are demonstrative of the contradictions perpetuated by these spaces. Such practices of animal display are the focuses of my thesis research and are engaged with by the artists and the artworks exhibited in the exhibition *Proximity to Animals*.

The exhibition *Proximity to Animals* and the accompanying catalogue critically explores the varying degrees of proximity humans share with animals through the investigation of taxonomy and natural history collections, taxidermy, zoos, John Berger's assertion of the disappearing animal, posthumanism, framing, and contemporary art. The catalogue essay references these numerous disciplines,

institutions and theories, to structure the curatorial premise surrounding the exhibition, the aim being to untangle and make visible the multiple and complex degrees of proximity animals share with humans socially, culturally and theoretically. This essay will look at the animal through a historical and theoretical lens by navigating shifting aspects of animal representation and display. The exhibition, as an extension of the essay, explores how contemporary art practices have allowed artists to exercise agency as cultural producers who question, critique, and provide a discursive space in which to investigate these complex issues. Therefore demonstrating how theoretical reflection and artistic creation are linked through the curatorial process.

Focusing on practices in North America and Europe, the exhibition and essay explore how animals have been simultaneously collected and discarded for the purposes of exhibiting specimens in both natural history museums and zoos, consumed of as food, and eradicated as varmints, disease-carriers, or feral populations. Humans have continuously domesticated the animals around them, keeping them physically close through the practices of animal husbandry, the domestication of pets, and for objects of scientific study. This physical closeness, however, fosters a reciprocal dependence of animals on humans. Consequently, John Berger would assert that captive or displayed animals lose a vital aspect of their animality. These animal displays aim to perpetuate the illusion of nature but in fact demonstrate a paradox: the physically close, yet conceptually distant animal.

Historically natural history museums were vehicles to educate people about animals and the natural world around them.¹ Although natural history museums serve as educational institutions, it is now evident that they encourage contradictory relationships with the natural world, despite their mandate to conserve and protect animals. Thus, an important aspect of this essay is the examination of how natural history museums reinforce notions of the emblemized animal, the sensationalized animal, the commodified animal, and the objectified animal, concepts which are explored further in the section *Framed Animals*. In addition, the essay explores how certain practices reinforce and project themes of dominance, hierarchy, consumption and human narrative onto the natural world. Within natural history museums, the meanings of objects, more specifically animal bodies, are not inherent but rather socially and theoretically constructed. Animals are therefore continuously defined by humans.

Taxonomy

Nature was associated with wonder but man's experience with the natural world in the 15th and 16th century lacked order or continuity. This lack of order is precisely what taxonomy aimed to remedy. Therefore taxonomic systems were established in order to organize the chaotic and seemingly fragmented natural world. Taxonomy is derived from two Greek words: *taxis*, meaning arrangement,

¹ Today we see an overlap in education and entertainment. The hybrid term edutainment is often associated with natural history museums.

and *nomos*, meaning law.² Today these systems are often referred to as meaning-making machines³ and were established to create order through naming and ranked classification. These hierarchical systems, which ranked humans over animals either socially, culturally or scientifically influenced the ideas of theorists, philosophers and scientists such as Carl Linnaeus (1701-78).⁴ Linnaeus, a botanist and zoologist, introduced a taxonomic system organized into three kingdoms: plant; animal; mineral, with sub-categories in each kingdom of class, order, family, genus, and species. He also introduced binomial nomenclature or the two part Latin scientific name.⁵

Taxonomists were faced with the challenge of classifying what appeared at first glance to be a fractured, diverse and complex world of organisms “into the laws of rectilinear movement”⁶ and sought to understand an animal or plant through the deconstruction of its parts, elements and organs (habitat, generation, movements, form, and reproduction process). Through the comparison and contrasting of these elements or organs taxonomists developed an intricate system of subdivisions and arrangement (class, family, and genus) based on the empirical observation of exhibited similarities or differences. In the 18th century taxonomy

² Stephen Asma, *Stuffed Animals & Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), IX-113.

³ *Ibid*, 76.

⁴ Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Animals as Domesticates: A Worldview Through History*, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2012),1.

⁵ Ranked classification systems are associated even earlier with Aristotle and Plato.

⁶ Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (Random House Inc.: New York, 2002),139.

began to articulate the continuity of nature,⁷ thus projecting a linear narrative onto the natural world. Rather than asserting that nature was perfect and unchanging, Charles Bonnet, an 18th century naturalist supposed that “there will be a continual and more or less slow progress of all species towards a superior perfection.”⁸ Bonnet’s supposition would later be elaborated upon by Charles Darwin in his theory of evolution presented in *The Origin of Species* (1859). After Darwin, taxonomists classified organisms based on the characterization of evolutionary relationships (i.e. common ancestors) thereby narrating the progression of life.⁹ Not surprisingly, the classification systems developed by taxonomists in the 18th and 19th centuries were influential in the ways that nature was presented in cabinets of curiosity and museums of natural history

Museums: Dead Animal Collections

Natural history museums represent the cultural phenomenon of collecting. Early collections of natural objects and animal bodies were accumulated by the wealthy and displayed in cabinets of curiosities or *wunderkammern*. Popular in aristocratic circles in the late 16th early 17th century, the contents of these collections, displayed in rooms and cabinets, were eclectic and random, often reflecting the prevailing perception of nature. While collections understandably varied from connoisseur to connoisseur, it is possible to identify two common features of these particular and influential types of collections. First, collectors

⁷ Variable of time was introduced into taxonomy

⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 150.

⁹ Asma. 19.

went to great lengths to acquire objects which were exotic, grotesque or bizarre, or that were known to be rare, and secondly, their collections were often formed so as to represent ideas about speculation, observation and entertainment.¹⁰

According to Jean Baudrillard, the French social and cultural theorist, what he identifies as “collecting” and the taxonomic and spatial placement of objects “is itself an exertion of power or dominance, [and] one that is remarkably successful when compared to our attempts to dominate and control living things.”¹¹

Early collections were organized to reflect creationist theories that attributed the wonders of nature to Divine construction.¹² In the hierarchy of the animal kingdom, and because man was created in the image of God, humans were ranked as the most advanced and most privileged of all living things. Named by Adam, saved by Noah, and given over to man by God, animals always held an important but lesser place in the ranking of created things. As explained in Genesis 1:26, hierarchy and power were ordained:

and God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.¹³

¹⁰ Marjean Purinton, *George Colman's The Iron Chest and Blue Beard and the Pseudoscience of Curiosity Cabinets*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1953)DOI: 10.1353/vic.2007.0126 (accessed December 3, 2012), 250-257., 251

¹¹ Asma, 11.

¹² Taxonomic systems such as the great chain of being (*scala naturae*) are demonstrative of this type of organization. The great chain of being organizes nature in a hierarchical system, with God at the top and angels/demons, man, animals and plants arranged below.

¹³ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Genesis 1:26.

Early curiosity cabinets reflected this divine ordering of life. As stated by Stephan Asma, the author of *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*, “curiosity cabinets had a purpose, an underlying but persistent agenda: to show that God is prolific, prodigious, and ingenious.”¹⁴ Objects of natural wonder demonstrated God’s diversity, and power. Grotesque specimens, oddities such as two-headed pigs and disfigured human forms, were collected in order to exhibited divine power and retribution. The organization of these objects, therefore, dictated a religious narrative serving to reinforce Christian belief systems, specifically of God’s omnipotence.¹⁵

As private collections were transformed into public institutions the role of the objects displayed shifted.¹⁶ In the 19th century European and American museums focused on educating the public, particularly about the theory of evolution.¹⁷ Consequently, natural history museums shifted the meaning of these objects. No longer did such institutions and taxonomic systems strictly reflect the power and wrath of God, rather, scientific museology illustrated the connectivity between all living organisms. However, while the animal objects contained in the museum collections rarely changed their meanings were under constant revision and re-configuration. Taxonomic systems, like the meanings behind them, frequently shift, as systems are edited and modified in order to include or exclude

¹⁴ Asma, 78.

¹⁵ Asma, 91.

¹⁶ Many private collections became public in the mid 18th century, however public natural history museums are claimed to have existed as early as the 17th century.

¹⁷ Asma, *Stuffed Animals & Pickled Heads*,154.

objects based on changing attitudes and scientific research. New evidence could up-root one specimen from its kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, or species or perhaps challenge a system entirely. As noted by Stephen Asma: “to follow the development of modern museum collecting is to follow the evolution of European classification”¹⁸ systems and the changing cultural climate.

Today many natural history museums focus on the conservation and protection of the natural world and the animals within it. As natural history collections are historically linked to colonialism and imperialism, natural history museums have been heavily criticized for their collection practices and display of natural objects. In addition to these critiques, natural history collections also face the possibility of irrelevance in light of international travel and new technological advancements in film, television, and the Internet,¹⁹ which afford new forms of animal representation and proximity.

Recently, a number of natural history museums have re-marketed themselves, re-designing old displays and re-purposing old mounts as vehicles to expand upon ecological awareness. For example, the Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto, renovated its animal hall creating the Life in Crisis: Schad Gallery of Biodiversity. This gallery is committed to “raising awareness regarding the

¹⁸ Ibid.,86.

¹⁹ For example, in 1960 natural history collections (taxidermy specifically) were deemed ‘out dated’ and ‘irrelevant’ by the Saffon Walden Museum in England which burned the museum’s collection of old-fashioned 19th century taxidermy specimens. The specimens were destroyed because the curator of the Saffon Walden Museum (at the time) believed children learned more from zoos and documentaries, deeming taxidermy inconsequential.

significant challenges facing the conservation, diversity, and survival of life on earth, and working with [their] partners and the public to find new ways to make a difference.”²⁰ The re-designed gallery – with the three part title - *Life is Diverse. Life is interconnected. Life is at Risk*,²¹ aims to demonstrate the diversity of life and the interconnectedness of all living things while foregrounding the growing risk of an ecological world in crisis.

Taxidermy

While the first records of taxidermy date from the 15th century,²² public interest in taxidermy gained momentum in the 16th and 17th century as evidence of exploration.²³ The word taxidermy derives from the Greek roots *taxis* meaning arrangement and *derma* meaning skin.²⁴ Taxidermy is the attachment of the skin of an animal onto a form or armature.²⁵ The resulting assembled product is referred to as a mount.²⁶ As noted by Jane Eastoe, the author of *The Art of Taxidermy*, in an age before photography, early “taxidermy principally developed as a scientific and educational tool, a way of identifying and characterizing a

²⁰ “Life in Crisis: Shad Gallery of Biodiversity,” Royal Ontario Museum, accessed January 4th, 2014, <http://www.rom.on.ca/en/exhibitions-galleries/galleries/natural-history/life-crisis-schad-gallery-biodiversity>

²¹ Ibid

²² Asma, 22.

²³ Jane Eastoe, *The Art of Taxidermy*, (London: Pavilion Books 2012), 18.

²⁴ Eastoe, 10.

²⁵ Early taxidermy was frequently stuffed.

²⁶ Not technically taxidermy, other cases of preservation for scientific purposes include study skins, which is the hollowing out of a body, the resulting skin is typically not displayed or affixed, commonly used on birds, or wet preservation methods, which preserves the entire animal in formaldehyde.

species.”²⁷ In contrast, Modern taxidermy, seeks to generate an illusion of natural life. Accordingly, the mark of a good taxidermist in the 19th century and today is the ability to, as faithfully as possible, animate the mount and produce an illusion of nature.

Historically taxidermists viewed their field of work as a trade rather than an art form. However, taxidermists such as Carl Akeley (1864-1926), known for his contributions to institutions such as the Field Museum of Natural History and the American Museum of Natural History, made this distinction less discernable. Akeley revolutionized taxidermy by sculpting clay forms on which to mount animal skins, hand painting dioramas, and casting death masks. Akeley blurred the boundary between trade and art as these mounts became increasingly more realistic and the mounting process more involved.²⁸ Akeley was deeply invested in the process of producing a specimen; he often hunted, skinned, mounted and hand painted the exhibited dioramas. Thus, Akeley was extremely influential in the modernization of taxidermy display.

Rachel Poliquin, the author of *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, and the blog *Ravishing Beasts*, organizes taxidermy into eight categories: *Wonder*: includes monstrous, rare, or exotic specimens which elaborate upon the marvel of nature typically found in 16th-17th natural history collections. *Scientific Specimen*: commonly employed in natural history museums,

²⁷ Eastoe, 10.

²⁸ Dave Madden, *The Authentic Animal: Inside the Odd and Obsessive World of Taxidermy*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 94.

scientific specimens are mounts selected because they best characterize a species, typically a large male. *Trophy*: includes mounts which memorialize a hunt, typically a disembodied head mounted on a plaque. *Theatrical Taxidermy*: these anthropomorphized mounts are inspired by folklore or fables, taxidermist Walter Potter being the most notable contributor. *Rogue Taxidermy*: includes hybrid mounts created by piecing together different animal parts to create a fantastical creature. *Pets*: are sentimentalized and preserved domesticated animals. And *Fashion and Household*: is a gimmicky or purely aesthetic category of animals or animal parts used for decoration or as novelties.²⁹

Recently taxidermy is experiencing a resurgence, as artists have re-purposed taxidermy mounts and taken up the collection and display of animal bodies. Adopted as a medium by contemporary artists, taxidermy has infiltrated galleries and museums internationally in the artwork of Damien Hirst, Polly Morgan, Kate Clark, Iris Shieferstein, and Thomas Grunfeld.³⁰ Taxidermy in contemporary art blurs many of Poliquin's categories, typically drawing upon multiple genres at once. As Poliquin observes, while taxidermy can

²⁹ Poliquin, Rachel. Ravishing Beasts Exhibition, "Ravishing Beasts Taxidermy." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 20, 2013. <http://www.ravishingbeasts.com/>

³⁰ "In the fall of 2000 a group of Minnesota-based artists who were also animal rights advocates formed the Justice for Animals Arts Guild (JAAG). Alarmed at the manner in which living animals were used in certain art exhibitions...[the guild believed] that animals must be understood to be 'beings,' not 'ideas,' their immediate goal was to negotiate with the state arts organizations and funding agencies for the institution of policies that would prevent the cruel or degrading use of living animals by contemporary artists...[arguing] that an artist's intentions should not automatically overrule the interests of animals." *Steve Baker, Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), XXX.

symbolize human power and desire for control, the meaning of individual pieces of taxidermy [are] always framed by particular aesthetic, social, or ideological concerns, they expose different attitudes about what nature is and how it should be used. Whether for the sake of whimsy, pride, social commentary, or education, taxidermy reveals as much about our collective daydreams and desires as it does about death and domination.³¹

The presence of taxidermy in contemporary art represents an important shift in the use of animal bodies.

Animal bodies have reflected anthropomorphized or humanist ideals, as demonstrated in natural history museums where taxidermy is used as a vehicle to rationalize nature. In contemporary art, however, animal bodies can serve as a critical lens by which to explore our relationship with the natural world. Through the deconstruction and juxtaposition of different taxidermy genres in addition to the history associated with them, taxidermy in contemporary art practice serves as a culturally loaded media with which to explore our increasingly dynamic and contradictory relationship with individual animals and with nature in general.

Zoos: Live Animal Collections

Coinciding with the development of the natural history museum, zoos were established as sites of captivity, commerce and public observation.³² As

³¹ Poliquin, Ravishing Beasts, <http://www.ravishingbeasts.com/genres-explained/>

³² Zoos are linked to natural history museums by their history, mode of display, their desire to collect and display animals, their projection of an illusion of the natural world, how they frame animals, as well as their newfound motivation to promote ecological awareness. Zoos are also linked literally to natural history museums as they frequently donate their deceased animals to natural history museums to be displayed. Zoos are important aspect of the conversation surrounding natural history museums because they demonstrate how the treatment of dead animals is explicitly linked to the treatment of live animals. Themes of dominance, human narrative, consumption, and hierarchy are perpetuated by zoos in Western culture.

discussed by Randy Malamud in his book *An Introduction to Animals in Visual Culture*, “historically the zoo has presented itself as a scientific archive, a place where specimens are collected, preserved, and catalogued,”³³ essentially a living natural history museum for public viewing.

Full of contradictions, zoos present a peculiar blend of nature and culture. They bring the natural world under the control of human civilization; they are parks that constitute a middle ground between the wilderness and the city, specially constructed meeting places for wild animals and [humans].³⁴

Animals confined to zoos are often organized or curated similar to natural history museums, existing within artificial environments that mimic natural habitats, behind glass or bars, within a linear, contrived, categorized and narrative context. Zoos, like natural history museums, demonstrate mastery over nature, through possession, ordering, captivity and mode of display; they exert the power of culture over nature.³⁵ Zoos are also places where humans are drawn in order to see and be near animals. As stated by Elizabeth Hanson in *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos* “a trip to the zoo has long been presented as

³³ Randy Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture*, (New York: St Martin’s Press LLC, 2012), 123.

³⁴ Elizabeth Hanson. *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2.

³⁵ Natural history museums and zoos cross paths in more literal ways, such as in the acquisition and display of “Bull” a southern white rhino that is mounted at the entrance of the Schad Gallery of Biodiversity at the Royal Ontario Museum. “Bull” lived at the Toronto Zoo until his death in 2008. Bull symbolizes the endangered species of southern white rhinos, which as the ROM outlines “[were] brought back from the brink of extinction in the 1990’s, thus, demonstrating that zoos and natural history museums exercise similar motivations toward animal bodies. “Life in Crisis: Schad Gallery of Biodiversity.”

a journey into nature,”³⁶ thus perpetuating a simulated interaction with nature and animals.

Zoos reinforce a socio-historical and socio-cultural positioning that animals should be close to us, as the wild in many cases no longer exists. In spite of advancements such as the ecological movement, human animal studies, animal rights activists and a growing interest in the preservation and protection of the natural world, we continue to exercise “interspecies oppression [from] a human-centered perspective.”³⁷

The Disappearing Animal

The exhibition, *Proximity to Animals*, draws its title from the essay *Why Look at Animals?* (1980)³⁸ written by John Berger, a television producer, art critic and writer. In his text Berger focuses on the question of the disappearing animal. *Why Look at Animals?* is a humanist text which somewhat nostalgically sentimentalizes the roles of animals in our lives and asserts that animals are marginalized and being reduced to a spectacle, especially in relation to zoos. In the context of animality, Berger’s humanism constructs a hierarchical relationship between humans and the natural world, stationing humans at the top and thus, perpetuating binary relationships such as man versus animal. These binaries are

³⁶ Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions*, 2.

³⁷ Yvette Watt, “Making animals Matter: Why the Art World needs to Rethink the Representation of Animals,” in *Considering Animals: Contemporary Studies in Human-Animal Relations*, ed. Carol Freeman, Elizabeth Leane and Yvette Watt et al. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 121.

³⁸ John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?,” *About Looking*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

constructed based on arguments which are grounded in the rational human ability to reason, speak, and respond, unlike animals which simply react to their environment.³⁹

Berger speaks of the phenomenon of the gradually disappearing animal which coincides with the western preoccupation of collecting animal bodies both alive and dead. The disappearing animal refers to a socio-cultural paradox where animals have been removed from our daily lives, and we have been removed from the daily lives of animals.⁴⁰ As people moved into more urban and industrialized spaces, animals have become increasingly absent from our lives. Yet, simultaneously children and modern publics in the western world are surrounded by an oversaturation of animal imagery: toys, cartoons, pictures, decorations, documentaries, calendars, websites, and postcards. Berger's disappearing animal is re-enforced today by the scientific fact that the diversity of life is continuously decreasing with roughly 27,000 species lost a year.⁴¹

Displayed or domesticated animals are frequently in a state of confinement. Cages, fences, pens and pools fix the animal in an artificial landscape. Although these spaces attempt to mimic the animal's natural habitat, they are actually used by humans to control, supervise, and look at animals. Glass enclosures are utilized by natural history museums and zoos and even pet shops as

³⁹ Humanism, since the 16th century has had many different aspects and interpretations but is mainly seen as a secular, rational, and philosophical position which explores human nature.

⁴⁰John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*,9.

⁴¹ Geoff D' Eon dir. "Zoo Revolution." Doc Zone. CBC Television: 3, Oct 2013. Television.

invisible boundaries⁴². These invisible boundaries allow the viewer constant visual access to the animal by limiting the animals range of movement. Additionally, glass cabinets in natural history museums display untouchable objects, thus, the audience is only able to visually consume the animal body. Clearly linked by mode of display, zoos and natural history museums attempt to recreate a ‘natural habitat’ in practices such as dioramas, and glass pens, literally perpetuating the human animal divide through the construction of physical barriers.⁴³

Looking, like naming, as demonstrated by the natural history museum, is a position of power. Zoos and natural history museums equally privilege the observer over the observed, where viewing equals power over the object. Similarly, Berger notes “animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance.”⁴⁴ The philosopher Jaques Derrida writes in his essay *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, about the experience of finding himself in a position of nakedness gazed upon by his pet cat. The vantage point of observer vs. observed is reversed, yet, he notices, the power dynamic remained the same. As Berger comments, animals are:

⁴² Brita Brenna “The Frames of Specimens: Glass Cases in Bergen Museum Around 1900,” in *Animals on Display the Creaturely in Museums, Zoos and Natural History*, ed. Liv Emma Thorsen, Karen A. Rader and Adam Dodd et al. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 38

⁴³ Animal documentaries could also be viewed as glass barriers since the frame of the TV we watch them on, and the camera lens are made of glass, thus this barrier is manifested in a different way.

⁴⁴ Berger, *Why Look at Animals*, 14.

...objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away they are.⁴⁵

Although animals physically penetrate our spaces, conceptually we continue to define them as less-than-human, asserting what they are not and their varying degrees of proximity from the human.

Posthumanism

Since the 1970's posthumanism has evolved as a new philosophical position in reference to both animals and technologies. Posthumanism evolved out of humanism as a theory which does not transcend or reject humanism but rather generates a framework which embraces difference and promotes inclusiveness and pluralism. In relation to animals, posthumanism is not about how humans perceive the world, but rather how occupants of the same world interact and inhabit similar environments. The animal begins to enter a realm of public consciousness in which we understand the animal as existing, but experiencing and interacting with the world in a different way. As Giovanni Aloj states in his book *Art & Animals*:

Discounting the abilities of animals as 'programmed' and 'unconscious' is something ingrained in Western culture; to force specific human abilities onto animals in order to relentlessly produce skewed evidence of human superiority is a typical anthropocentric disease. Famously, in order to confirm animals' inferiority, Descartes argued that their behavior is instinctive, that they lack adaptability and of course language. Similarly Heidegger's idea that animals are 'poor in the world' saw them lacking the ability to conceive of an object as something more than a functional entity, while we are seen as world forming.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Berger, *Why Look at Animals*, 14.

⁴⁶ Giovanni Aloj, *Art & Animals*, (London: I.B. Tauris Et Co. Ltd, 2012), xix.

Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, in reference to animals asked: “the question is not, can they *reason*? Nor, can they *talk*? But can they *suffer*. ”⁴⁷ What posthumanism aims to do is not undermine or devalue human existence, but rather “ to call into question the universal ethics, assumed rationality and species-specific self-determination of humanism ”⁴⁸ and to find a common ground by which to relate to other life forms through the deconstruction of binaries such as human versus animal. As Mary Midgley states in *Beast and Man*

We are not just rather like animals; we are animals. Our difference from other species may be striking, but comparisons with them have always been, and must be, crucial to our view of ourselves.⁴⁹

This argument which acknowledges the differences and similarities humans and animals share and supposes that by evaluating these similarities and differences we may be able to ethically re-evaluate the way we treat animals.

Framing Animals

In exploring the paradox of the physically close yet conceptually distant animal, *Proximity to Animals* also poses questions about the location and categorization of animals in social and cultural terms. Domesticated pets live in close proximity to humans in our homes and typically function as companions.

⁴⁷ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 63.

⁴⁸ Sorina Higgins, *What is Posthumanism?*, CURATOR (2010): <http://www.curatormagazine.com/sorinahiggins/what-is-posthumanism>. Accessed April 22nd, 2014.

⁴⁹ Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), XXI.

Meanwhile, mice, stray dogs and raccoons, invade our urban or suburban spaces and are regarded as annoying or destructive pests. Animals designated as livestock are located in rural communities. While animals designated as wild exist on the fringes of human civilization. Location can dictate how a certain species should be categorized and acted upon. Other theorists have grappled with this position, for example:

As the anthropologist Edmund Leach argues, [animals] are categorized into areas of social space in terms of distance from the human. Leach separated animals into the categories of self, pet, livestock, game and wild animal. The closest in social space (pet) being the most privileged. Deleuze and Guattari classify animals by three categories: “demonic animals” or animals which operate at the greatest distance from humans, ‘state’ animals or animals which serve exclusively human interest and ‘individuate animals” or animal with sentimental value such as pets.⁵⁰

Randy Malamud in his book *“An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture”* defines animal spaces which have boundaries and are curated as frames. Animals that are displaced or transplanted from their natural context into a human context are referred to as framed animals.⁵¹ Zoos and natural history museums are examples of frames because they contextualize the animal through human framing in habitat or diorama displays, and physically place an animal into an enclosed and non-natural habitat/space. As observed by Randy Malamud

Framing delineates a boundary that defines the realm in which we allow the framed creature to exist. This framing privileges the space inside the

⁵⁰ Steve Baker, “Leopards in the Temple,” in *The Postmodern Animal*, (London: Reaktion Book Ltd., 2000), 102.

⁵¹ Randy Malamud, “Introduction Framed Animals,” in *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press LLC, 2012), 2

frame...it signifies that someone has organized and curated these [animals] into a coherent collection.

The frame guides the interpretation of the animal and often positions animals as “disempowered, delimited and found guilty (guilty perhaps of being wild or dumb or simply not human.)”⁵² This framing takes place in a variety of ways demonstrated through categories such as the sensationalized animal, the emblemized animal, the objectified animal, the animal made object, and the commodified animal.⁵³

The sensationalized animal represents or stands in for an entire species such as the case of Tilikum,⁵⁴ the orca whale who became an iconic case for the release of orca whales from captivity. Sensationalized animals are often posted on SPCA commercials, or dramatized in the media (dogs rescued from Sochi) in order to evoke sympathy, demonize the species (such as in cases of invasive species), or generate awareness. What is distinct about this category is that the animals in it are individualized, they are differentiated from the other animals in their species, and the viewer becomes invested in them as individuals.

The emblemized animal is a category of animal identified by its use value in cultural, political, marketing, or other socio-cultural situations, where the animal embodies a brand or message which has no relationship to its natural

⁵² Malamud, *Introduction: Framed Animals*, 6.

⁵³ Noticing the different ways in which animals were framed, I generated categories by which to discuss my observations after reading Malamud’s text.

⁵⁴ Associated with Orlando Florida’s Sea World accident, where trainer Dawn Brancheau was killed by Tilikum, a large male killer whale, in 2010.

disposition, habitat or character. Some examples of the emblemized animal are the gecko lizard in Gieco advertisements or the polar bear in Coca Cola commercials. The sensationalized animal and the emblemized animal are often subjected to anthropomorphic inclinations, or the projection of human tendencies or characteristics onto the animal. As Malamud states:

When human prejudices, fantasies, fetishes and misconceptions are inscribed on animals' characters, they reconfigure attention we might direct toward their natural characters and nature.⁵⁵

The objectified animal is living but treated as an object, something to be possessed or obtained. For example:

Contemporary culture resituates animals by positing that they belong anywhere, which is to say, they belong nowhere. They go where people put them: "go" not in the sense of having agency or active volition in the process, but as one might say, a lamp "goes" nicely with a particular style of drapery-as an accouterment, a prop.⁵⁶

In this portrayal, animals are not treated as sentient or self-interested beings with agency, but rather as objects which need to be protected, cared for, and maintained. The animal-as-object perpetuates this possession of animals even after death. These objects are made from dead animals, such as, elephant footstools, hunting furniture, taxidermy or hide rugs. The categories of the objectified animal and the animal-as-object are evidence of how easily animals are consumed in our culture.

⁵⁵ Malamud, *Introduction Framed Animals*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

Animals are readily consumed both physically and visually; the original purpose for domesticating animals was to make them easier to slaughter for food.⁵⁷ Animals are also repurposed in many products and consumed as furniture, harvested for transplant organs, used as research specimens, for clothing, and taxidermy skins. Therefore, as we seek out a more pluralistic and inclusive relationship with animals, we simultaneously objectify, anthropomorphize and consume them.

Animals in Contemporary Art

The exhibition *Proximity to Animals* critically explores the varying and complex proximities between animals and humans across numerous historical, cultural, institutional and theoretical disciplines. It features four contemporary artists who engage with natural history museum aesthetics as a form of presentation but evoke what the natural history museum often conceals: themes of dominance, consumption hierarchy, and human narrative. *Proximity to Animals* poses the question: when the illusion of nature, exemplified in the natural history museum, is lifted, what are we really saying about our relationship with and to the natural world?

Animals have been represented in cave paintings since the Paleolithic period⁵⁸ and animal bodies have been common subjects in art ever since.

⁵⁷ Linda Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007), 26.

⁵⁸ Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History*, 2.

So it is important to pose the question: what makes these contemporary works different? What is the difference between viewing a taxidermy mount in a natural history museum or one in an art gallery or museum? As Steve Baker responds in his essay *Contemporary Art and Animal Rights*, to the question “what does art add?”

might be answered by saying that artists generally understand and acknowledge something both of the messiness of the world and the messiness of their work, especially in terms of the precariousness of trying to get the latter to impact the former in any secure or “consistent” or “coherent” manner.⁵⁹

In *Animals on Display: The Creaturely in Museums, Zoos, and Natural History* a collection of essays which reflect on Berger’s disappearing animal, the editors see “ways of representing animals as crucial to ways of thinking about and ultimately interacting with animals themselves.”⁶⁰ Animals in our culture are objects first, subjects second and always representations. Therefore, art gallery exhibitions serve as vehicles which allow viewers to engage with animals at a new proximity. As Ron Broglio observes in his book *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals in Art*,

No longer are we keeping the animal at a safe and objective distance for artistic representation and natural history observation; knowledge comes instead from [their] displacement.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, 28.

⁶⁰ Adam Dodd, Karen A. Rader and Liv Emma Thorsen, “Introduction: Making Animals Visible,” in *Animals on Display the Creaturely in Museums, Zoos and Natural History*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 1.

⁶¹ Ron Broglio, *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals in Art*, (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2011). 69.

Proximity to Animals features four contemporary artists: Nader Hasan, Rob MacInnis, Amy Swartz and Janice Wright Cheney, whose artworks utilize animal representations and animals as objects to critically explore the themes of dominance, consumption, hierarchy and human narrative exercised in natural history museums. These artists employ one of the four categories or roles of animals defined as: pest, pets, food or wild, outlined earlier in this essay. Most of the artists exhibit animals that are local native species such as pets, urban wildlife, livestock, and bugs, and therefore are familiar to the viewer. These artworks display dead animal bodies to bring animals in closer proximity and generate an intimate experience for the viewer, which is more personal and less spectral.⁶²

Nader Hasan, an artist originally from Montreal and currently living and working in Toronto, uses the remains of dead animals found in the city and displays them as taxidermied anatomical specimens on suspended glass shelves. His work is controversial because it includes familiar animals such as dead cats, squirrels and birds.⁶³ Exhibiting these remains gathered from urban environments, including animal bodies and garbage, Hasan poses questions about what we ignore and what we deem valuable.

⁶² This is in contrast to zoos and natural history museums which traditionally collect animals which are seen as unique, rare or exotic specimens

⁶³ Nader Hasan Interview, Appendix A: Most of the remains are road kill gathered from Montreal by Hasan personally, but some bodies have been given to him by people familiar with his practice. Hasan does not, in the strict sense, consider the materials that he exhibits to be “art”, but rather, material remains. As an aside all of the cats displayed, apart from his pet, are feral, they are predominately male and not castrated and therefore probably not household pets.

Hasan sees himself as an urban anthropologist, gathering and studying the objects and dead animals found in the city. These animal objects explore a cultural disconnect between people and what they perceive to be waste which includes the animal bodies he displays. Hasan states in his interview that his practice investigates:

... the point of the invisibility of the animal body as subject in the history of humanity, and the history of art, it is obvious that dead animals permeate every aspect of human life, to the point where we would be better to ask, when are we not wrapped up in the death of other beings? [I do] not seek to solve these issues or conclusively speak about them, but rather, to humbly create a limited form of access to the possibility of having such conversations, which, in our society, there is little to no space for.⁶⁴

Thus, Hasan, in his practice engages with the physicality of death and the passive role we play in these animals' deaths.⁶⁵ In cities we encounter many dead animals: mice in traps, frozen meat, and roadkill on the highway. Shockingly "[globally] fifty billion land animals are killed yearly,"⁶⁶ many of which, in cities, are killed on the roads or put down by animal shelters and go unnoticed. By making the invisible urban animal visible -- and by elevating these dead animal bodies as art objects -- Hasan encourages audiences to reflect on the animals we

⁶⁴ Nader Hasan Interview, Appendix A.

⁶⁶ Carol Freeman, Elizabeth Leane and Yvette Watt, "Introduction," in *Considering Animals: Contemporary Studies in Human-Animal Relations*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011),7.

are surrounded by and to explore our complexly affectionate, disproportionate and hypocritical relationship we have with both pests and pets.⁶⁷

Animal pests exist in our cities and are considered vermin, passing in and out of our lives unnoticed. Hasan implicitly explores these hierarchical systems of animals, demonstrated by geographical fixations, where certain animals such as cats, dogs and specific birds are privileged as household pets. He creates a framework for audiences to engage with this prejudice, where levels of responsibility are directly influenced by stewardship, ownership and human affection. Hasan displays stray and domestic cats, one of which was his personal pet, alongside one another. His former pet and the other exhibited animals are not marked or distinguished from one another, and therefore the viewer is unaware of this juxtaposition. Through the intersection of the two categories: pet and pest, Hasan deconstructs hierarchical animal relationships where pets are individualized and sentimentalized by their association with humans and pests are ignored. Through this juxtaposition Hasan makes visible our contradictory relationships with pests and pets, where one category begins and the other ends becomes difficult to discern in his display.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ It is interesting to observe the way language plays a role in how we think and ultimately treat animals. Pest and Pets have nearly identical spelling with only one letter inverted however we are distinctly less emotionally invested and take less social responsibility towards pests.

⁶⁸ Hasan Employs Rachel Poliquin's taxidermic categories of the scientific specimen and the pet. By using glass shelving which closely resemble those utilized in natural history museums and preservation techniques associated with study skins and other scientific specimens, Hasan visually references scientific specimens. In addition Hasan uses domesticated animals, most notably cats.

Hasan's work visually refers to taxonomic systems utilized in natural history museum displays through the employment of glass, in addition to the stratified positioning of the shelves. While aesthetically embracing natural history tropes, Hasan rejects the illusion of nature typically acted out in natural history museums, as most of the animals exhibited are dead and decomposing and embrace the natural processes of death. In contrast natural history museums seek out and display perfect taxidermied specimens appearing to re-animate the dead. Hasan does not use traditional taxidermy methods. Most of the bodies displayed still contain skeletons and are dehydrated. He also displays parts of animal bodies such as organs and preserved wet specimens. He exhibits some animals, such as mice, in the traps which killed them. Rather than simply project nature as idealized and perfect like natural history museums, Hasan makes visible the ugliness of many animals' lives and deaths.⁶⁹

In addition, although he visually references taxonomic or hierarchical structures, Hasan does not arrange the animal bodies hierarchically, but rather positions the animals based on personal aesthetic choices, thus rejecting the order and categorization imposed upon the natural world. By embracing natural history aesthetics but rejecting the illusion of nature and life, taxonomic systems and hierarchy, Hasan deconstructs our everyday animal practices

⁶⁹ In natural history museums most displays and dioramas show the animal in a green lush environment, and attempt to hide the way in which the animal died. In addition they animals are displayed in nuclear family groups with large protective males looking over nurturing mothers and their children as demonstrated in Carl Akeley's Hall of African Mammals.

Bentham's proto posthumanist question of 'can the animal suffer?'⁷⁰ is evoked in Hasan's project through the vulnerable and traumatized remains of the displayed animals which implicitly promote the ethical consideration of animals. Hasan, in his display, presents the animals as objects alongside items such as coins and trash, troubling the categories between human, non-human, and waste, raising questions about the intersection these categories.

In *CoyWolves*, Janice Wright Cheney, a New Brunswick-based artist, explores the "complicated relationship we have with nature, a relationship that is constantly shifting as we are continuously re-examining what it means to be both part of and apart from nature."⁷¹ Using coyote taxidermy forms, ordered from a taxidermy supply company, Wright Cheney upholsters the skeletal armatures in recycled fabric, and accessorizes them with coyote furs. By accessorizing the form in the skin of the animal, Wright Cheney acknowledges the tradition of taxidermy (the fixation of skin onto a form) while also playfully re-imagining the practice, thus, literally transforming taxidermy into an art form.

Staged in an interior space alongside curtains, a chair, carpet, plant and still life painting, *Coywolves* are curated in a diorama which frames the works within a domestic space. The diorama, while referential of natural history museums, here serves as a critique. Traditionally dioramas aim to display animals in their natural habitat; however, the *Coywolves* diorama serves to deconstruct the illusion of nature and embraces the de-naturalized animal, an animal located in

⁷⁰ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism*, 63.

⁷¹ Janice Wright Cheney Interview, Appendix B

human environments similar to domestic objects or accessories in our home. Framing *Coywolves* in staged interior, comments on the history of domesticating wild animals and draws parallels between the categorical fixations and geographical proximities, of the domesticated and wild animal.⁷² In addition, the diorama acknowledges and makes visible how we think about domestic pets, as pets are often anthropomorphized.⁷³

Specifically, Wright Cheney's work explores the local politics and history of wolves and their sister coyote. The title *Coywolf* refers to a new hybrid species of wolf which has successfully bred with coyotes to populate the New Brunswick area.⁷⁴ In the 19th century wolf populations were greatly affected by eradication legislation as "wildlife, [more specifically] predators [were destroyed] in order to domesticate the environment."⁷⁵ Intriguingly, the characteristic of cunning and resilience imposed on the wolf in human narratives is reflected in the wolf/coyotes canny ability to survive throughout history. Wright Cheney comments "What interests me is the concept that the wolf, supposedly long vanished from our region, has actually returned *in the disguise of a coyote.*"⁷⁶

In *Coywolves*, Wright Cheney investigates notions of animal objecthood and the animal made object, as wolves and coyotes have been objectified by their

⁷² The still life is meant to be ironic, referencing the domestication of nature.

⁷³ Humans sentimentalize and endow their pets with human qualities or characteristics.

⁷⁴ Janice Wright Cheney, Interview, Appendix B

⁷⁵ Isenberg, *The Moral Ecology of Wildlife*, 51.

⁷⁶ Janice Wright Cheney, Interview, Appendix B

history which is linked to the fur trade and species eradication.⁷⁷ Wright Cheney, through the subversion and combination of the two categories, explores narrative (historically and culturally) in relation to wolves and coyotes in North America. Her work evolved out of notions of disguise in common folklore and contemporary popular culture such as cartoons. By cloaking the *Coywolves* in wolf furs she eludes to the masking of an object as an animal, a play on a wolf in sheep clothing, or the wolf from “Little Red Riding Hood” who masks himself as the grandmother. In addition, wolves which are seen as symbols of the Wild West embody resilience, cunning, and wit. Lobo, a wolf and main character in Ernest Thompson Seton’s 19th century anthropomorphized story in *Animals I Have Known*, is the epitome of these characteristics. Lobo (the protagonist) and his pack effectively avoid traps, guns, and all other efforts aimed at killing them.⁷⁸

This narrative component demonstrates how humans have shaped the

⁷⁷ The war on wolves had devastating effects on wolves and coyotes in both Canada and the United States. Beginning in the 19th century because of the impact these predators were having on colonial livestock and game, the eradication of ‘varmints.’” The Bureau of Biological Survey, created, like the Forest Service, in 1905, had as one of its mandates the destruction of varmints. By 1907, the Bureau was responsible for the deaths of 1,800 wolves and 23,000 coyotes in the National Forests. By 1931, three-quarters of the Bureau’s budget went to the professional hunters in the predator-control program. Between 1915 and 1942 hunters killed over 24,000 wolves. Under the auspices of the program, hunters killed the last wolf in Yellowstone Park in 1926, and the last in southwestern Montana in 1941.” Wolves were not a protected species until 1973. Andrew Isenberg, “The Moral Ecology of Wildlife,” in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels at el., (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 49.

“The Wolf That Changed America; Wolf Wars: America’s Campaign to Eradicate the Wolf,” PBS, accessed January 21st, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/the-wolf-that-changed-america/wolf-wars-america-campaign-to-eradicate-the-wolf/4312/>

⁷⁸ Isenberg, *The Moral Ecology of Wildlife*, 51.

interpretation of the wolf and coyote throughout time, as cunning and deceptive, an anthropomorphic tendency exercised in order to characterize a species.⁷⁹

Wolves, which were demonized throughout European and North American folklore and are feared in real life, are characterized as wild tricksters, predators and pests. Wolves are exemplary of the emblemized animal, which cannot be divorced from the cultural projection of a species and thus become defined by it.

Coywolves, as an art work engages with issues of anthropomorphism and human narrative, as demonstrated through their anthropomorphized scarves and jewelry, references to folklore and fables, and the culturally projected notion of disguise and deception frequently associated with species of wolf and coyote.

Wright Cheney from a humanist perspective explores the displacement and de-naturalization of animals. By framing *Coywolves* in a domestic interior, integrating Rachel Poliquin's multiple genres of taxidermy,⁸⁰ and the fixations of domestic and wild, she exposes our contradictory relationships with animals.

Rob MacInnis, a Brooklyn-based artist, creates large panoramic color photographs of farm animals. These group portraits utilize the photographic tradition of extended family groups, community organizations, and sports team photos common in the early 20th century and today. Photographed in a row the animals are clearly positioned to take advantage of the horizontal format. The

⁷⁹ In the popular cartoon *Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner*, the main character Wile E. gets into all types of shenanigans attempting to trap the roadrunner.

⁸⁰ *Coywolves* integrate Rachel Poliquin's various taxidermy categories mentioned earlier such as: Trophy (uses forms ordered from a taxidermy supply company), Scientific Specimen (linked to the history of taxidermy), theatrical taxidermy (link to folklore and anthropomorphism), pets, and rogue (construction of hybrid animal; coywolves).

animals are framed by barn doors, windows, farm equipment, hay and other farm detritus, evoking the geographical, social and cultural frame of agriculture and farming, which inevitably defines the animals photographed as food. In one photograph, *Opening Night*, the animals are photographed on a stage with lighting equipment and other theatrical props anthropomorphizing them as entertainers and endowing them with human qualities such as the ability to act.

MacInnis' believes his works create a parallel universe which "presents animals as sentient beings and portrays an alternate world in which animals exist not as human possessions, but rather as individuals living within their own communities."⁸¹ Reminiscent of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the works are both sentimental and utopian. MacInnis describes his animal subjects as "the blue collar workers of animal society"⁸² that are intrinsically connected to our culture. These animals are depicted as laborers but in real life they are literally consumed as food. While these images do not touch on the violence of the animal subjects' lives, their purpose is implied by the farm setting of the photographs.

MacInnis' view of his animal subjects as self-interested beings is problematic. While attempting to address issues of posthumanism through the assertion of animals as free agents,⁸³ MacInnis does not liberate the animal from its cultural frame of commodity and food but rather reinforces it. Additionally,

⁸¹ MacInnis Interview Appendix C

⁸² MacInnis Interview Appendix C

⁸³ Animals are legally defined as human property, they only have monetary value. Richard A. Epstein, "Animals as Objects, Or Subjects of Rights" in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, ed. Cass Sustein and Martha Nussbaum et. al.

MacInnis continuously defines the animal by projecting human tendencies, traditions and spaces onto it, for example, making reference to farm animals as blue collar workers.⁸⁴ Moreover, these images, which are photoshopped, allow MacInnis to literally place or organize the animals however he pleases, therefore he maintains his agency over the animals representations.

These images are both romantic and nostalgic by evoking the past in their attempt to address the history of animal husbandry. Today farming is an extremely mechanized industry, where animals are processed into food. People are increasingly removed from the process of growing, harvesting or raising and killing animals or plants for their own consumption. Factory farming, which is a highly mechanized process, conceals these operations from our daily lives. What results is a culture which does not engage with the life (or death) of the animals we consume. Consequently, our language reflects this distance between the farm and table: cattle become beef, pigs become pork, animals become meat and grocery stores sell pre-packaged skinless boneless products which bear no resemblance to the animal from which they are made. In his photographs, MacInnis attempts to re-associate the farm and table and reminisce about family farms, where he nostalgically asserts in his photographs that animals have names, communities and personalities instead of bar codes.

⁸⁴ MacInnis' attempt to relate farm animals to blue collar workers is problematic because although we do use farm animals as tools and labor, we more commonly use farm animals as food. We do not eat blue collar workers. Therefore there is a proximity of human animal relationships which is being ignored.

Therefore, in regards to Rob MacInnis' photographs, it isn't so much about what he does not make visible - the use and consumption of animals - but rather the illusion he attempts to construct - a utopian scenario where animals exist as sentient beings without agency. While MacInnis does not engage with the tropes of natural history museums directly, he utilizes illusion in order to sentimentalize the animals portrayed, thus engaging the audience with the lives of the animals we consume readily and daily, evoking empathy and suggesting the re-consideration of the ethical treatment of animals designated as food.

Amy Swartz is a Toronto-based artist who creates modified bug boxes. Combining the disciplines of science and art, Swartz's work utilizes the tradition of collecting animals for the purpose of scientific study. Mounted in entomological glass cases the bugs are pieced together using real bug bodies and collaged with tiny plastic toys. The insects, which include butterflies, dragonflies, flies, bees and beetles, were collected by Swartz or donated to her by third parties. Combining the insects with objects such as toy soldiers, and plastic animal parts, these bug boxes are reminiscent of Frankenstein and the creations of Dr. Moreau in the fantastical hybrid of human and insect, as where the animal begins and the toy human ends become hard to determine.⁸⁵ In the work *Pest*, she draws upon a long standing tradition of creating hybrid animal bodies. This practice is demonstrated in paintings such as Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1504) and Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Last Judgment* (1558).

⁸⁵ There are only two kingdoms of living things: the plant and animal kingdom, therefore insects are considered animals.

Pest is also similar to rouge taxidermy which often combines parts of different animals in order to create a fantastical creature, such as in the construction of the Fiji mermaid, a historic fraudulent taxidermy specimen, which combined the head of a monkey with the body of a fish.⁸⁶ These hybrid mythical or monstrous creatures evoke early cabinets of curiosity specimens. Similar to Rachel Poliquin's category of wonder, where animals resemble a sideshow rather than scientific way of looking at the natural world, Swartz's bug boxes focus more on spectacle than accuracy. Like Hasan, Swartz juxtaposes tropes of natural history museums by exhibiting her monstrous, hybrid animals in entomological glass cases, she reflects on the history of natural history museums, where science, nature and wonder converge.

Insects are typically regarded as pests, especially in reference to our homes which can be invaded by moths, ants, and cockroaches. Insects, in their sheer numbers and evolutionary abilities coupled with their invasiveness and persistence are perceived as infestations and associated with plagues.⁸⁷ Interestingly, we never think of ourselves as pests, despite our invasiveness, persistence and destructive relationship with the natural world.

Swartz, generates a similar narrative in her work by referencing aerial views of demonstrations, political events and historic moments such as the Royal

⁸⁶ Jane Eastoe, *The Art of Taxidermy*, 21.

⁸⁷ "in the world, some 900 thousand different kinds of living insects are known. This representation approximates 80 percent of the world's species." National Museum of Natural History Department of Systemic Biology, "Numbers of Insects: Species and Individuals," http://www.si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/nmnh/buginfo/bugnos.htm. Accessed April 25th, 2014.

Wedding. She uses aerial images of these types of events in order to compose the scenes in her bug boxes, inspired by the fact that “these gatherings look like tiny colonies of insects.”⁸⁸ Therefore, through her utilization of human scenes and scenarios as a way to arrange her compositions the pest-like behavior of humans becomes evident.⁸⁹ Posthumanist theory examines common features shared by humans and non-humans; therefore, by modeling insect bodies form images of humans swarming, Swartz composes humans and insects shared patterns in the natural world.

Her drawings use a similar aesthetic of hybrid forms with an emphasis on detail. *My Mind is a lot Like a Hummingbird* combines plant, animal and insect anatomy to create a fantastical bird like creature. The drawings are reminiscent of early natural history illustrations which often included misrepresentations of animals, for example, Albert Durer’s *Rhinoceros* (1515) which was depicted as if it had body armor, as Durer was working strictly from a verbal rather than a visual account of the animal. Swartz integrates science and art in her two and three dimensional work and juxtaposes illusion and fantasy with scientific modes of display and collecting. Hybrid forms of sciences and speculative fiction appear in posthumanist theory as well as Swartz’s work in order to re-define the way we think about the natural world.

⁸⁸ Amy Swartz Interview Appendix D

⁸⁹ Amy Swartz Interview Appendix D

The exhibition *Proximity to Animals* served as a discursive space by which to consider these multiple and complex proximities. All of the artists acknowledge and make visible the messiness of the world especially in regards to our relationships with animals. Utilizing the natural history museum as a reference point the exhibited artists, through juxtaposition, subversion, and critical engagement, fostered a dialogical exploration of our seemingly confused relationship with animals and encouraged a more ecologically aware public.

To summarize, this essay and exhibition examined the history of taxidermic display specifically in natural history museums and related practices of animal representation, considered how recent theory has explored animal proximity and display in the works of Berger, Midgely, Baker, Malamud and Wolfe, researched and undertook the narration of an exhibition which is fundamentally a studio-based, discursive, social and institutional process including the selection, negotiation and installation, and finally outlined the oscillation and intersection of art and theory.

Exhibition Report: Proximity to Animals

This report will focus on the varying elements and processes undertaken in order to produce the exhibition *Proximity to Animals*. Outlining the theme, methodology, artists, space, installation, guest lecture, closing reception and de-installation, this report will elaborate on the technical aspects rather than the theoretical aspects of staging/curating an exhibition. Over the past year this exhibition has changed dramatically from its original conception. Consequently, the exhibition report will reflect on the evolution of *Proximity to Animals*, demonstrating how and why certain choices were made and explore how the trajectory of my research has influenced these choices in addition to how these choices ultimately effected the resulting exhibition. Concluding with the exhibition's general reception and my analysis of the overall success of the exhibition, the report will indicate how *Proximity to Animals* and the questions it poses are increasingly relevant in contemporary society.

THEME

Proximity to Animals developed out of my personal interest in taxidermy. Taxidermy, in many respects was becoming outdated, due to its connection to imperialism and colonialism, in addition to its association with hunters who use

stuffed dead animals and mounts to decorate their living spaces.⁹⁰ Taxidermy's seeming irrelevancy was heightened in light of new advancements in technology and our ability to document animals in the wild, combined with the booming tourist industry. For example, access to animals in national parks game reserves and zoos, deemed taxidermy nostalgic and unscientific. In some extreme instances museums were destroying their taxidermy mounts, as demonstrated in the case of the Saffron Walden Museum in Essex which burned their retired collections.⁹¹

In addition to the above mentioned changes, animal studies, posthumanism, green movements, and an overall growing ecological awareness resulted in the production of more articles, blogs, and a general increase in publicity and information about animals. For example blogs such as Rachel Poliquin's *RavishingBeasts*, documentaries like *My life as a Turkey* (Producer: David Allen),

⁹⁰ The taboo associated with hunting trophies evolved out of peoples misconceptions about hunting and its association with animal cruelty and the idea that taxidermy is tacky because of its association with the middle class.

⁹¹ " Between 1958 and 1960, Gillian Spencer, the curator of the Saffron Walden Museum in Essex, successfully urged the Saffron Walden District Council to expunge the relics from the museum's golden age of international collecting. In fact, she had been almost ordered to do so. Under the terms of the Carnegie Trust grant the museum had received for upgrades and improvements, Spencer was required to follow the advice of Dr. N. B. Marshall of the British Museum who stipulated that only the museum's British specimens and a superior collection of tropical birds were to be kept while the other foreign specimens were to be discarded. As Spencer explained in the Saffron Walden Museum Society's 1960 Annual Report, local museums must exhibit local nature not the haphazard remains of eccentric Victorian ramblings. The imperial history of the animals was an embarrassment and besides the animals were in a 'dreadful condition, many of them were more than a hundred years old, all very dirty and some very dilapidated. Most of them were so badly stuffed as to be mere caricatures of the creatures they were supposed to represent'"(Saffron Walden Museum Society 1960: 7). Rachel Poliquin, *The Matter and Meaning of Taxidermy*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2008), 123.

Blackfish (Director: Gabriela Cowperthwaite), *Zoos: Zoo Revolution* (Director: Geoff D'Eon) and *LifeLike* (Director: Eric D. Snider) in addition to articles like *Stuffed but not Suffy* (Baltimore Sun), *Cabinets of Curiosities are Back in Vogue with Curators and Artists*, *Discovers Philip Hoare* (The Guardian Weekly), and *Why I'm Never Going to the Zoo Again* (The Globe and Mail), demonstrate the growing public interest and ethical questions being raised about animals both alive and dead.

Simultaneously artists such as Damien Hirst, Polly Morgan and Iris Schieferstein⁹² were re-imagining taxidermy conceptually, elevating the craft from a trade to an art form. As taxidermy transformed the modes of display, venue and context of taxidermy shifted. For example, traditionally exhibited in natural history museums, taxidermy re-surfaced in contemporary galleries and museums, thus, reconfiguring taxidermy's cultural relevancy. We see this shift reflected in numerous ways. For example, in interior decorating taxidermy is growing in popularity. Being re-incorporated into home décor, antlers are reconfigured into lamps, chandeliers, tables and chairs. Throw blankets and pillows are made of faux fur, and cow hide rugs dapple the floor of high end apartments. Urban Outfitters (a trendy store whose demographic is aimed at indie chic twenty somethings) home section carries faux taxidermy mounts (vegan/vegetarian

⁹² Other artists who work with taxidermy include but are not limited to: Claire Morgan, Alexis Turner, Kate Clark, Thomas Grunfeld, Angela Singer, Nate Hill, Dan Taylor, Pascal Bernier, Maurizio Cattelan, Bryndis Snaebornsdottir and Mark Wilson.

friendly). Even restaurants have begun to reincorporate taxidermy as décor as the farm to table trend gains momentum

Nearly all the artworks and sources I reference were produced between the 1980's and today, with a large number of books published within the last decade focusing on taxidermy, natural history, art and animals, the history of animals, animal studies, and post-humanism. Animals, to put it simply, became quite suddenly a hot topic. Having noticed these coinciding trends I became interested in why taxidermy has become such an important and contentious medium in a world which is increasingly sensitive in regards to its treatment towards both animals and the natural world.

RESEARCH AREAS AND METHODOLOGY

I began exploring taxidermy throughout history: the process of doing it, pivotal figures, shifting definitions, creative profession versus skilled trade, etc. and since taxidermy is inexplicitly linked to natural history museums my research eventually encompassed the history of their collections. Consequently my research both broadened and became more theoretical, looking at animal bodies and how they have been manipulated throughout history, in addition to how the meanings imposed upon animals have evolved.⁹³ It was important to explore newer theoretical frameworks as they pushed beyond human centric philosophical positions, and required a re-oriented approach to thinking about the animal.

⁹³ This inevitably led me to explore numerous avenues of study, including animal rights, animal studies, the animal question, post-humanism, actor network theory (ANT), and object oriented ontology (OOO), which are outside the scope of this paper.

TAXIDERMY AND THE DIAROMA

My research on taxidermy focused on contributors such as Carl Akeley who modernized the way taxidermy was displayed through advancements such as painted displays, the casting of an animal's dead body after a kill (death masks) and using clay molds taken from the deceased animal to construct an armature on which to mount the animal skin. Akeley is most widely known for his contribution to the Akeley African Hall in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH).⁹⁴ These advancements in display and preservation techniques revolutionized the way taxidermy was perceived.

Often combining art and science, dioramas have become an integral part of natural history museum display aesthetics, used to generate an illusion of nature and contextualize the animal within a geographically and ecologically accurate space.⁹⁵ Thus, educating the viewer on not only the animal but its habitat, diet and the way in which it socializes. I observed that Akeley, while responsible for advancing and generating a realistic experience for the viewer, was equally responsible for misconceptions regarding the animal and its anthropomorphized lifestyle. Displaying animals in nuclear family groups comprised of specimens handpicked to generate a specific viewer experience, the displayed mounts typify traditional human gender roles - thus reinforcing a human centric and misrepresentation of actual animal family groupings and communities.

⁹⁴ Dave, Madden. *The Authentic Animal: Inside the Odd and Obsessive World of Taxidermy*. New York: St. Martins Press (2011). Pg(?).

⁹⁵ Stephen Quinn. *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History*. New York: Harry N. Abrams (2006).

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

Investigating natural history museums and their transformation from private to public collections clarified that the meanings of the animals shifted to suit their context. Natural history museums perpetuate an illusion of nature where the objective is to mimic life as accurately as possible. This is reinforced by taxidermy mounts and dioramas. Thus, many practices which sought to categorize and curate nature ultimately resulted in the de-contextualization of nature and animals. This is also demonstrated in such practices as nature parks and reserves, private yards, gardens, zoos, nature documentaries, Disney movies and television.⁹⁶ Therefore larger socio-cultural issues have become prevalent. These issues raised questions such as: is there such a thing as an authentic relationship with nature in the western world? Is there a way to explore the animal question without positioning a binary (human/animal, nature/culture, inauthentic/authentic)?

However, recently natural history museums have changed and adapted to reflect a more ecologically aware public as new museum mandates promote conservation and protection rather than consumption and imperialism. What interested me most in this shift was the ambiguity perpetuated by these institutions - for example promoting the conservation and protection of species with dead animals.

⁹⁶Jon Mooallem. *Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

ZOOS:

Zoos are to live animals what natural history museums are to dead animals. It was essential to include zoos in my research especially in regards to the controversies surrounding places such as Sea World's hunting and treatment of whales and dolphins, the giraffe and lion terminations at the Copenhagen zoo, and relocation of the Toronto Zoo elephants Thika, Toka and Iringa.

Zoos are seen as spaces by which to preserve these species, utilized as breeding facilities and for scientific research, zoos generate revenue which fund the protection of animals and their habitats. Although zoos have good intentions, they too contribute to our misconception of nature. It was important to acknowledge these institutions good intentions in order to prevent perpetuating a binary relationship: culture=bad, nature=good. ⁹⁷

ANIMALS AND THEIR RIGHTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Recent questions of animal agency and animal rights naturally evolved out of my research regarding zoos. The marginalization of animals is typified in these institutions where the animal is perceived as an object and not a subject.

Therefore when we think of animals as objects we deny them basic rights.

⁹⁷ Because zoos had entered the conversation it was suggested to me that I read John Berger's essay *Why Look at Animals* (1980) by my principal advisor Professor Rosemary Donegan. This essay is what inspired my exhibition and accompanying catalogue.

Animals are frequently regarded as property⁹⁸ and are denied agency by institutions of captivity such as zoos. Exploring animal rights became imperative to understanding the legislation and laws which essentially define how animals should be treated i.e. subjects vs. objects.

Historically, our conception of animals has evolved and shifted over time. Therefore, I also explored the historical trajectory of human animal relationships.⁹⁹ This helped me to understand the evolution of the human/animal relationship, one which is historically linked and intrinsically complicated.

ANIMALS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Looking at recent art practices I recognized that there has been an increase in animal representation, most noticeably in the manipulation and display of animal bodies either alive or dead. However, earlier art works do exist, for example, Walter Potter, an 18th century taxidermist, was known for his fable/folklore inspired dioramas or Robert Rauschenberg's *Canyon* (1959) and *Monogram* (1959) pieces, which integrate 3-dimensional animals into 2-dimensional paintings along with other found objects. The key difference, however, between these early works and contemporary art works is that animals in the former works were anthropomorphized or objectified as ready-mades, whereas in the more

⁹⁸ Richard Epstein "Animals as Objects or Subjects of Rights" in *Animal Rights Current Debates and New Directions*. Ed. Cass R. Sunstein and Martha Craven Nussbaum. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). 145.

⁹⁹ I researched animal husbandry, animal domestication, the introduction of species to new geographical areas, Greek and Roman games, and Paleolithic art.

recent art works, we see animal bodies serving as a critical lens by which to explore our relationship with the natural world.¹⁰⁰

CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY

New theoretical approaches such as Post-humanism, OOO, and ANT attempt to look at the world from outside human experience or agency. They treat objects and non-human animals as things which have the ability to act rather than things which are only acted upon. Recent thinkers, such as Heidegger, Derrida and Latour, deconstruct hierarchical systems which privilege humans and promote the equality of human and non-human, inanimate and animate, while seeking to expand our experience of the world. For example “OOO contends that nothing has special status, but that everything exists equally.”¹⁰¹ Thomas Nagel’s Bat Theory, examines the restrictions of the human mind by posing the question “what is it like to be a bat?” Nagel concludes with the argument that we humans will never know what it is like to be a bat because we lack bat anatomy, specifically sonar systems, and therefore can only ever speculate what it may be like.¹⁰² This is a simple deduction, however, profound because it recognizes an experience of the world outside human experience and positions animal experience as equally valid.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Please see Appendix A: Exhibitions and Catalogues

¹⁰¹ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What It’s Like to be a Thing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2012). 6.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰³ My original conception for the exhibition was to incorporate artists who were attempting to address the animal on the animals own terms. However, Posthumanist theory is problematic in regards to animal bodies such as taxidermy (Nader Hasan’s

ARTISTS

In my original research I relied heavily on social media, and the internet. I looked at blogs, artist databases, exhibitions, artist websites, upcoming shows, and articles. I was interested in finding artists practicing in Ontario because I wanted to exhibit taxidermy or 3-dimensional works and needed to keep shipping costs manageable. Some of the initial works and artists I was interested in were: Sarah Robertson, Lisa Dill, Sarah Hillock, Julia McNeely, Richard Ahnert, Christie Lau, May Wilson, Lisa Bagwell, Rebecca Clark and Tony Taylor. During my second round of research I discovered Sara Angelucci, Bill Burns, Brandon Vickerd, Rob MacInnis, Janice Wright Cheney, Stefan Thompson, Amy Swartz and Nader Hasan¹⁰⁴. By October 2013 I approached Rob MacInnis, Janice Wright Cheney, Stefan Thompson, Amy Swartz and Nader Hasan with an invitation to participate in my thesis exhibition *Proximity to Animals*. However, Thompson was difficult to keep in contact with as he did not have a cell phone, rarely checked his e-mail, and disregarded my Facebook messages; I therefore decided to focus on the other four artists as I foresaw issues regarding his availability and communication skills.

work) or live animals (Rob MacInnis works) because it is impossible to give the animal agency when the human is the one doing the manipulating (i.e. preserving the bodies, or positioning farm animals in family group portraits).

¹⁰⁴ I had to contact the curator Art Gallery of York University in order to get in touch with Nader Hasan, he does not have an artist's website and was very difficult to track down. Thankfully the curator of the AGYU (Suzanne Carte) was able to put me in touch with him.

I conducted studio visits with both Amy Swartz and Nader Hasan. Due to their locations I was not able to do studio visits with Janice Wright Cheney who lives in New Brunswick or Rob MacInnis, who resides in New York. However, I was able to have meetings or phone conversations with all the artists in order to outline in more detail the shows premises, the space, and to introduce the other participating artists. Swartz showed me her work and we discussed at length the display concept and selected the quantity as well as specific art works that would be exhibited. Originally I had requested six to eight of Swartz's *Pest* boxes, however, a month before the exhibition Swartz was offered a solo show in Thunder Bay, and could only exhibit four cases. I therefore added some of her drawings such as the *My Mind is a Lot Like a Hummingbird* series. The *Pest* boxes focused on insects with wings (flies, butterflies, cicadas, dragonflies, etc.) and one box specifically references a bird through the composition of insects which visually tied the drawings to the insect displays.

I selected four of MacInnis' photographs based on scale as well as staging. For example, I liked the images with farm scenes however wanted to include a photograph of the animals on the stage - since I felt that the imagery was commenting on animal's performative relationship with humans. I also chose only group images because I felt that the individual portraits were not as visually stimulating.

Janice Cheney chose two of her *Coywolves* series without my involvement; however she notified me of the color in advance so I was able to

make decisions on the fabrics for the curtains and the carpet for the staged interior.

Nadar Hasan's work and installations are an organic process based primarily on personal aesthetic choices in response to the space. Because Hasan chooses the layout and objects for each installation during, rather than prior to the installation, it was difficult to determine or visualize the installation before its completion.

I conducted interviews with all of the artists via e-mail and the artists responded with written responses. Amy Swartz, however, requested an in person interview, and so I met with her to conduct an oral interview as per her request. It was difficult to get the interviews back from the artists, as it took over two months. However, the interviews were important because they helped to contextualize the works and provided a better understanding of how the works in the exhibition might connect with one another.

I originally adapted a standard gallery/artist contract from OCAD's risk management office. Artist contracts were not sent out until one month before the exhibition. Although this was not ideal, I was unable to circulate the contracts prior to that time due to some issues securing insurance for the work. There was some difficulty and back and forth regarding whether or not OCAD University would insure the works, therefore I waited until insurance was secured before distributing the contracts. While waiting for a response from OCAD I researched other insurance options. *Canfinse*, an insurance company affiliated with OCAD

University alumni, was my back up. However, after several meetings, numerous e-mails, and the assistance of Professor Prokopow, risk management committed to insuring the works in the exhibition. I was asked to supply a list of works with the accompanying values to Geeta Sharman, which exceeded the \$20,000 insurance cap originally agreed upon, after further negotiations the maximum increased and the contracts were distributed.

SPACE

I began looking for a space in May of 2013. Originally I was interested in showing at the Riverdale Farm located in Cabbagetown, Toronto because I was interested in the juxtaposition of the live farm animals in relation to the potential dead animal bodies.¹⁰⁵ I approached the Riverdale Farm with a proposal and they met as a board and turned me down. In addition I investigated Todmorden Mills, Colborne Lodge, the Campbell House Museum and the Hunt Club Gallery on College St.¹⁰⁶ I contacted all of the spaces with a proposal and was rejected or had no response. My principal advisor Professor Rosemary Donegan suggested the Glass Box Gallery as a potential venue (100 McCaul, Room 265, which is also referred to as the Anniversary Gallery). We went to see the space and we both agreed that it was ideal for what I was attempting to do with my exhibition. The space is divided into two areas, a central space (room 265) which is surrounded

¹⁰⁵ This juxtaposition would have grounded the integration of John Berger's text *Why Look at Animals?*

¹⁰⁶ I had also expressed interest in showing at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and the Riverdale Farm Fall Festival. However, I never followed up or contacted any of these events due to the timing which did not align with the time frame of our thesis guidelines.

by a glass enclosure on all four sides (room 265B). Apparently, the original conception of the space was to serve as a gallery, with the artworks protected by the glass partition. The room had track lighting and an OCAD University vinyl border along the top and bottom of the glass walls which served as a marker for the visually impaired.

Originally, securing the space was difficult, as I had to book both spaces (room 265 and 265B) for an entire week and Room Bookings was hesitant in allowing me to book the space for so long. I proposed various dates eventually settling on April 1st-April 6th for the exhibition with two days March 30th-31st to install and a day, April 7th to de-install. There was a lot of back and forth with room booking, eventually the Grad Studies office got involved and we were able to secure the space for the above mentioned dates.¹⁰⁷

INSTALLATION

The original installation conception was to install each artist into one of the four areas behind the glass wall with each artist having a defined wall area. I wanted the exhibition space to have the layered and packed feeling of objects to mimic the natural history/cabinet of curiosity aesthetic. Installing the exhibition took seven days. I spent the first two days removing the vinyl lettering from the four glass walls of the space. We also needed to construct an armature to suspend Nader Hasan's glass shelves and Rob MacInnis' photographs. Originally, I had planned to drill into the concrete ceiling; however, because drilling could have

¹⁰⁷ Because Amy Swartz had to install early due to her solo exhibition I was able to book the space from the 24th-31st of March which allowed us more time to install.

affected the structural integrity of the building, we had to come up with an alternative method for hanging the works. We hired a carpenter to build the hanging armature which took two days to complete the project.

Amy Swartz was the first to install. She and her husband transported the work personally, using their own vehicle on Monday March 24th. The work was unpacked and assembled on site. Swartz's husband, a carpenter, put together the tables and hung the framed drawings. This was a very straight forward installation and went smoothly.

Rob MacInnis hand delivered his work to 100 McCaul on Friday March 28th, as they were unframed photographs they were easy to transport and receive. I had constructed the frames using canvas stretchers in advance based off dimensions provided by MacInnis to mount the photographs on. When the photographs arrived they were different dimensions than what I was originally provided. Therefore I had to cut two of the images down to size and then needed to use black tape to secure the photographs to the frames to create a cleaner edge which helped unify the images and secure the images to the frames. The artist was not very concerned with the state of his work or framing so that was not a major issue.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ As the glassed in areas are linked to each other and can only be accessed through one door in the back of the space, each artist had to be installed in sequence. Therefore, in order to install MacInnis' work, I needed to crawl under Swartz's tables of pest boxes with the framed photographs to hang them. This was not an ideal installation situation, as this element made the space extremely difficult to work with.

Janice Wright Cheney's crated work was delivered on Friday March 28th by an art handling company. In order to pay for the crating and shipping of Wright Cheney's work I had to apply for a grant from OCAD University's Student Union which I was luckily awarded. The work was packed, crated and shipped from New Brunswick.¹⁰⁹ The crates which were 4 feet by 7 feet and needed to be laid flat in order to keep the sculptures secure. The works, because of their size could not be stored in the mail room and had to be kept in the larger space until they could be installed after Hasan's installation was finished. I stored the crates in room 265. Once the works were installed the crates were transported and stored in the LAS storage space for the remainder of the exhibition.

Janice Wright Cheney was able to travel from New Brunswick to Toronto to assist in installing her works. She dressed the *Coywolves* in furs, scarves and jewels and placed them in the space. Her install was fairly simple and straightforward and took about an hour. I had conceived the staging of the space to mimic a diorama. I created a habitat for the works, staging it as a domestic interior in order to reference the animal made object/objectified animal. Curtains were hung over the doorway to conceal the entrance to the space. The chair and plant were used to create a transition between the installations by Hasan and Swartz works. As I did not have an opportunity to see the actual *Coywolves* before the installation, I had to conceptualize the diorama space based on Wright Cheney's

¹⁰⁹ I applied for a grant from OCAD University Student Union in order to secure funding for the shipment of Janice Wright Cheney's work. It cost \$1,378 to ship the works. I was awarded a grant for \$1,500 and applied this money towards the shipping of *Coywolves*.

description of the animals in gold/brown tones, so I tried to work with jewel tones. Luckily, the curtains, carpet, painting, and chair worked well and the paisley wolf matched the curtains perfectly.

Nader Hasan's work was the longest to install and the last to be received into the space. The work was picked up at Hasan's studio by myself and Professor Rosemary Donegan and delivered to OCAD University on Sunday March 30th. Hasan's work took a lot of time, as he had to hire and work with the carpenter to mount the hanging armatures on the ceiling. Hasan oversaw the construction of the hanging system in order to make sure the location and spacing between shelves was accurately installed. The OCAD Sculpture/Installation woodshop generously gave us access to their work space to cut lumber on site. Hasan's installation process is very organic, as each install is different because of the actual space and the objects/animal bodies he includes; therefore it took 5 days to install.

Due to the content of Nader Hasan's installation which included found dead urban animals, squirrels, insects and cats, and a previous incident involving an OCAD student and the ROM, we notified OCAD administration ahead of time. Hasan's work has been perceived as controversial by both York University and the Whippersnapper Gallery. Due to the delicate and often taboo nature surrounding the practice of taxidermied domestic animals, Hasan has been investigated by the SPCA in connection to his show at the Whippersnapper. The investigation unfolded because the work was displayed in a gallery window

viewable from the street. Therefore, people walking past the exhibition saw his work without the contextualization of the gallery space, other exhibited artworks or the curatorial premise, and were concerned about the welfare of the exhibited animals. As there was some concern surrounding potential media or animal rights activists, a security plan was implemented with Louis Toromoreno in order to ensure safety for the works, artists, myself and the attending public.¹¹⁰ In addition to the security plan a notice was included on OCAD University's website, my Facebook event page, on the entrance to the gallery, and on a wall next to Hasan's work. Suzanne Carte, the curator of the Art Gallery of York University was very accommodating and provided us with a warning write-up which had been included at a previous exhibition of Hasan's work on York's campus.

Hasan and Swartz were installed across from one another because they both used glass in their installation, which helped to unify the exhibition while also breaking up the exhibition into sections. By separating the works which were most alike in technique or aesthetic I was attempting to generate a rhythm in the space. I included Rob MacInnis mainly because his work was 2-dimensional and I had wanted to represent different types of media. By suspending his works and Hasan's, the exhibition was more unified and the works retained a 3-dimensional quality while still supplying a different perspective/medium.

¹¹⁰The room is under video surveillance and the works were all protected behind glass so I did not need to gallery sit. Security opened and closed the space during operational gallery hours (12-5pm).

GUEST LECTURER

To accompany the exhibition, I programmed Morgan Mavis to speak on the opening day of the exhibition on April 1st from 1-3pm in room 187 at 100 McCaul. Morgan Mavis, the owner and director of The Contemporary Zoological Conservatory (The CZC) had attended OCAD University in addition to graduating with her Masters in Museum Studies at UofT. I had become familiar with her work through Rachel Palanquin's blog *Ravishing Beasts* which Mavis writes for, and through Rachel Poliquin's book *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* in which Mavis' collection was briefly featured. The Contemporary Zoological Conservatory, which I had visited, is located in downtown Toronto and focuses on the stories behind the mounts and objects collected rather than the objects themselves.¹¹¹

Morgan Mavis was an ideal speaker to mark the informal opening of the exhibition. The space was set up and the guest lecture began promptly at 1:00 pm. Roughly 13-15 people attended the lecture. Mavis' talk was well tailored to the

¹¹¹ "The CZC is not only displaying fascinating creatures, it is documenting the process of accretion, the obsessive desire to collect more species and the stories that complement each new work of art. The CZC wants to create an Ark of visual delights and dizzying proportions, a space that makes you question why and how? A place that overwhelms, crowds, confronts fascinates and titillates a person's sense of wonder. Mavis states: We are not a natural history museum you will not find displays of wildlife in their natural habitat. We are documenting the wild collections and stories of myself. Morgan Mavis is a collector, a curator and a visual artist. Mavis has a Masters of Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. As well, she holds a BFA with honours in Sculpture Installation from the Ontario College of Art and Design. Her thesis *Can You Love Me?* explored the nuances of approval and notoriety. In 2006 Mavis and her partner Christopher Bennell set out on a hitchhiking installation documenting stories and memories across Canada to the far North." Morgan Mavis, "About". *The Contemporary Zoological Conservatory*. November 2013. <http://theczc.com/about>.

exhibition and covered conservation, the history of natural history museums, the psychology of collectors, contemporary artists who incorporate animal bodies, and spoke about Janice Wright Cheney and Nader Hasan's works. Mavis did a great job of contextualizing the show and discussed various health and environmental safety issues in collecting historical taxidermy.

RECEPTION AND DE-INSTALLATION

The closing reception was held Saturday April 5th from 6-9 pm in the gallery space and the adjoining room 270, where tables were set up for food and alcohol. I was able to obtain a no sale SOP for both rooms for the public event, however, this meant two security guards were needed to secure the space. The reception was well attended with roughly 70-80 guests in all.¹¹²

De-install took place on Monday April 7th. We started with Janice Wright Cheney's work and de-installed and packed them into their crates so that I could access the other works. Next, Rob MacInnis' works were taken down. Nader Hasan disassembled his installation, which went much faster than the installation. I, along with my partner, Thomas Kable, de-installed both of the temporary armatures and patched the holes and painted the walls while waiting for Hasan to finish packing his work. Professor Donegan arrived around 4:00 pm to begin loading up works and materials to transport back to my apartment, and Hasan's studio. Amy Swartz was the last to de-install, as she and her husband arrived at

¹¹² I publicized the event through numerous outlets including Facebook, Akimbo, Posters, and OCAD University as well as my personal e-mail contacts which received a press release.

the space at 7:30pm to disassemble and pack up the cases and drawings. I helped her pack her work and transport it to her vehicle. The de-install was completed by 9:00pm on April 5th. Wright Cheney's work was picked up April 8th at 8:00 am by Total Transport. The de-install went very smoothly and the gallery space returned to its former state, however now with the black vinyl lettering removed, it is a much more useful exhibition space.

CONCLUSION

There are very few things that I would change about the installation. My one regret is not having the funds to professionally frame Rob MacInnis' works. In retrospect I think MacInnis' work was weak within the overall exhibition and I would rethink including a 2-dimensional artist in the show, as the space was not conducive to 2-dimensional works. Furthermore, I think it is important to see all the work in person before making a final selection of works (as it is unlikely that MacInnis' photographs would have been sent in the wrong dimensions if I had had the opportunity to measure them properly myself). Otherwise, the process of mounting an exhibition taught me a great deal about the various negotiations and challenges involved in curation. Creatively I learned a great deal, however, I also gained experience in art management having had the opportunity to work with departments such as security, risk management, shipping, and communications.

To conclude *Proximity to Animals* revealed and clarified questions surrounding the animal now. Additionally, the exhibition successfully explored and framed my thesis, by critically navigating the complex and varying degrees of

proximity humans share with animals, conceptually and physically. The exhibition generated an experience larger than any of the individual works. Generating a discursive space, a dialogue was realized through the curated works, one which elaborated on the critical frameworks of humanism, posthumanism, John Berger's 'disappearing animal' and reflected aesthetically and conceptually on institutions and practices such as taxidermy, collection, natural history museums and zoos. The exhibition focused and clarified my thinking on taxidermy and the shifting field of animal display as well as accounted for the changing location of animal bodies and representation in contemporary art practice. To summarize, the exhibition successfully investigated its topic, resonated with viewers and revealed aspects of material art installation that will be important to my future work as a curator.

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Appendix A: Nader Hasan Interview

Please describe your practice

I consider myself (especially with regards my practice) an anti-capitalist, practically, spiritually and in my ethos, in the sense that, when I decide to make a gesture, as a human on earth, I would rather have it come out more in that vain, as something with a degree of autonomy from the market, as resistant to it, rather than as a commodity, or a implement of professionalization. I do not want my work to advance a career.

In terms of practical questions about the materials, that the average person would associate with my practice, that are not those purely those based in the discursive or in social practice, most of it is what could be considered “*remains*”, and this is somewhat self-evident. However, there are some sorts of categories that we could, for the sake of doing so here, break down: **Remains of Biological material, necrological materials, remains of “synthetic” consumer material, remains of money** (as ideological and systemic carriers of exchange value, but also as materials such as the metallurgy of coins, symbolic poetic archetypes. etc. etc.) **remains of urban wildlife**, taken as an anthropology or sociology or even as an anti-humanist sociology, etc. **Remains, in the sense of garbage**, waste, in the most deep and conceptual sense i.e. that sense in which these are taken in our ideological context, where waste, or trash, is mostly understood conceptually, and as an operation of consumption. I speak of trash as a highly conceptual thing, because in an urban environment, humans tend to deal with trash in a conceptual manner (it goes into a “trash can,” that is “taken away”, “disposed of properly”, etc. and not truly confronted in empirical life, and especially not in a long term fashion.).

Some of the skill base this work has dawn on include a variety of tanning techniques, bone work, taxidermy, mummification, desiccation, controlled decay, petrification, organ preservation, decay retardation, gathering (in the hunter-gatherer sense, but without the hunting) and all sorts of ‘archaic’ bio-chemical mediations. All the bodies/corpses present in my exhibitions have been found/gathered in a state of being dead/decaying, and have been handled and worked with in an ethical and self-conscious manner.

Q: What does it mean to you to display, manipulate or position the animal body as a subject?

A: So, this is the type of body that we are talking about, *remains*, of a dead body, or many fragments. Furthermore, those species that are not human. Though obvious, this detail is important, because this is actually where the “base” level

interpretation, and sometimes controversy, which is implied in this question, originates. It is not only that a animal body is involved, but that said body is a dead body, of a non-human, and questions of agency immediately arise and are at once confused by the presence of a quasi-agency-less body, such as a dead one, in conjunction with the somewhat false idea of authorship associated with me, in having at the very least, put it on display. This question is somehow asking, what it means for a living body(me), to take up the dead body of, a once living, co-dwelling earthling, and why bring about such a relation, and focus to it as the “subject” of an exhibition practice.

This of course, is part of the whole practice and project of exhibition, to point to the invisibility of the animal body as subject in the history of humanity, and the history of Art. There is no classical painting, without the brushes made from animal hair, there is no dyes, without the use of plant, insect and animal bodies, and there is not egg based paint with the use of foetuses, less alone musical instruments, such as drums, bows, strings, etc.. And of course, I need not illustrate examples of the use of dead animal parts in day to day life, for it is so obvious that dead animals permeate every aspect of human life, to the point where we would be better to ask, when are we not in a process wrapped up in the death of other beings? We cannot even speak of being alive, or of having energy, without the death, harvest and intensive processing of living and dead bodies of every variety.

My work does not seek to solve these issues or conclusively speak about them, but rather, to humbly creative a limited form of access to the possibility of having such conversations, which, in our society, there is little to no space for.

The work is relatively static, but brings out the ideological preconceptions and sensibility, of the viewer, and compels them to reflect, question and react in the way that “art” is supposed to in the idealistic sense of “Art”, in the register of becoming a facilitator or manifestation of a space in which we can process our sense of the world in the some limited aspects of cognitive life, like death, garbage, our “way”, etc.

Q: Your work deals with death. How is this relevant to your practice?

A: All things cleanly “end”. However, remains, disrupt this clear-cut sense of death and life. It is in remains, traces, phantoms, trauma, failed ideas and failed exertions of willpower, that we come to understand both death, as a philosophical idea, as a practical way of dealing with the world, and as representative of the shortcomings and limitations of human intellect and its ability to see the world we live in for what it might be.

This sense, of access to death and life by way of remains, happens on many levels, at the material level, of what remains to be perceived through the senses, the trace of a whole life, of a whole genealogy of a given evolutionary species strain, as can be seen in perceiving that it is the skin of a once living cat, or the bones of a mouse, etc.

This relation of life and death through human culture holds many contradictions, but perhaps the most salient, is in tension between an anti-humanist or anti-life interpretation. Death is the ultimate resource, that is, as the total and absolute expenditure of life, for the sake of a human ego directed goal.

Q: Describe your process of art making-where do the animal bodies come from? How were they obtained?

A: The animal bodies, much as most of the trash, comes from the streets of Montreal mostly. They were obtained by way of one of two methods: either I find them, and make the extra-ordinary decision to pick them up and take them home (which I do not do the majority of the time I see road kill. Usually I just take a look at them, contemplate the body and its context, and move on, perhaps as we all do sometimes).

OR

Sometimes, other people are compelled to do this and bring the dead body to me, or call and inform me of what they have seen and experienced. And where it is. This is all really pretty straightforward, and its not like, something that I have to deal with everyday. Usually, I am not spending any time thinking about, or working acquiring any bodies at all.

CLARIFY THE ART ISSUE:

Let me here and now just clarify that I do not, in the strict sense, consider the materials that I exhibit to be “art”, but rather, material, remains, what is left, what has been recuperated or reconsidered, that sort of a thing. I don't think of it as art, and I don't feel that my practice, or “work” or materials or whatever, needs to rely on the concept or idea of art or fine art, to have any sense of legitimacy in the world. The materials presented have their own sorts of coherent meaning autonomously from Art, and are sometimes even confused in a misleading sense, by the paradigm of “Art”. What is added by me, to this meaning, is the “gathering” of them in a considered manner, along with the visual and conceptual understanding for the viewer that *intensive physical labour* was necessary for said self-evident(ness) of the materials to be as such, in such a context.

Q: How is gathering and preserving the animals as material objects, rather than reproducing or simulating them in photographs, important? Is it integral to your message?

A: First and foremost, I do not have a message, because I am mostly just processing and dealing with materials that I have encountered in the world, and decided are appropriate within all contingencies where such questions would come about.

It is indeed 'integral' to the aspect of my practice that deals with the animal bodies and trash that the materials be real, and not merely "representation." Rather, My practice revolves around reacting to materials, confronting them, dealing with them and trying to create space for others to encounter them

Q: What does your work say about your/our relationship with and to the natural world?

A: I think that my work speaks to our collective relationship to nature, as humanity, as life forms, and especially, as city dwellers in modern industrialized/post-industrialized capitalist society, and the hidden reliance on death and collateral damage to the earth systems.

In terms of speaking about it from a more personal point of view, I would say that my work has directly guided, transformed and continually augments and informs my ideas of nature, of the relation of death to life, of the necessary connections between the death of another, to the life of the one taking it as an "other".

Appendix B: Janice Wright Cheney Interview

Please provide a brief artist statement.

My practice examines the historical and cultural ideas that shape western understandings of the natural world.

I am interested in both the orderliness of nature, as presented in museums and zoology textbooks, and the unruliness of nature, as seen in the presence of pests or vermin. Several recent projects explore our response to these unwanted creatures: how humans seek to control activity that threatens or displeases.

Reading is the origin of much of my inspiration. My visual ideas may come from a newspaper article, a scientific text, or a novel. Further research, material exploration and planning are followed by meticulous execution of the work itself.

Q: Describe your process of art making-where do the animal bodies come from? How were they obtained?

A: To create my textile-based installations, I employ a variety of techniques and materials: works may be embroidered, knit, hand-dyed, felted, or sewn from recycled materials. The concept of each project influences and determines the material that will be used. Recently I have been using ready-made animal forms ordered from a taxidermy supply company. First, I carefully cover the forms with velvet and brocade; subsequently the creatures may be dressed with furs and jewelry (*Coy Wolves*) or adorned with hand-felted roses (*Widow*). *Cellar* is an installation of featuring hundreds of life size rats; each rat was hand-sewn from recycled fur.

Q: How has the tradition of taxidermy informed your practice?

A: Historically, taxidermy has had many functions, which range from the preservation of specimens for museum display and scientific inquiry, to the stuffing and mounting of animals as captured curiosities or hunting trophies. Ultimately all taxidermy is about death and in this way meaningful to me.

Q: What does it mean to you to display, manipulate or position the animal body as a subject of art?

A: For me, taking care of the animal form is a very contemplative act. For example, I made, by hand, hundreds and hundreds of rats. To make an animal that is considered filthy, that is universally loathed, from fur, a material usually associated with luxury and wealth, was for me an interesting juxtaposition of animal meanings. An important aspect of the work was embedded in the care I

took in the making of each rat body. Likewise, working on the coywolves, bears and recently, panthers, involves hours of careful work to transform them into sculptures, and thus to give the animal bodies new meanings.

Q: Women have often identified with the history of the animal does this factor into your practice? If so how? Define the role of craft in your work?

A: I have training in Fine Arts, but like many others in contemporary practice I have embraced materials traditionally associated with craft. I work in textile-based media because the materials and techniques resonate for me with meaningful historical associations. It is terribly important to me that my work is well made, i.e. well crafted.

Q: Is there a narrative component to your work? If so would you please describe it?

A: Definitely, and each work has its own narrative. For example, the Coy Wolves series draws quite heavily on the Red Riding Hood fairy tale. I came to this as I was doing some research on our local coyote population. Genetic data confirms that coyotes in New Brunswick have bred with wolves*. What interests me is the concept that the wolf, supposedly long vanished from our region, has actually returned *in the disguise of a coyote*. So I started thinking about all the stories we tell about wolves as tricksters.

Lift up the latch and come in my darling.

Grandma! What big eyes you have.

*Which explains why they are considerably larger than their Western cousins. Indeed some biologists suggest that we are witnessing the evolution of a new species, a successful hybrid of coyote and wolf, thus “coywolf”.

Q: Does your work deal with death directly or indirectly and if so how? What does it mean to you as a cultural producer? Can you unpack what this may mean to the viewer?

A: Both directly and indirectly I suppose. Death is a certainly a dominant theme in all of my work, as many of my pieces refer to our cultural history with animals through the practice of taxidermy, museums, and zoos.

The *Widow* works deal with death very directly. These are life-size grizzly bears covered in hand-felted and cochineal-dyed roses. The work, which explores the impossibility of reconciling love, and desire, with death, is ultimately about survival after loss.

The idea for this work came to me differently; it did not come from research. I saw a dead bear on the side of the highway, curled up like it was sleeping. The sight of it filled me with a terrible sadness. I thought, who mourns for this bear? Who loved this bear? *Widow* is the bear that is left behind, the bear that grieves. So it had to be big: it had to be a grizzly bear, because I wanted to express the enormity of grief.

Q: What does your work say about your/our relationship with and to the natural world?

A: I say that I am interested in the “complicated relationship we have with nature”. The relationship is constantly shifting because we are constantly re-examining what it means to be both part of and apart from nature.

Appendix C: Rob MacInnis Interview

Please provide a brief artist statement

By presenting animals as sentient beings capable of making their own decisions, my objective is to portray an alternate world in which animals exist not as human possessions, but rather as individuals living within their own communities.

Q: What is your relationship with the animal? What traditions, histories and influences do the portraits drawn from?

A: I draw from a wide range of histories and traditions in a purposeful way; as I am attempting to represent animals in a variety of photographic traditions, to utilize these traditions in order to build a parallel world that mimics our own.

Q: What does it mean to you to display, manipulate or position the animal body as a subject of art?

A: The display and manipulation of the likeness of animals is central to my critique of photography. I draw a parallel between our literal consumption of the farm animal's body and the consumption of the body or subject in the photographic image. For each, we appear to be insatiable.

Q: Is there a narrative component to your work? If so would you please describe it?

A: The narrative is not generally specific. In some photographs, there is a definite purpose to the settings, such as with the Opening Night photograph. With most, however, they depict more or less what most photographs found in a shoebox under the bed would, which is little pieces of everything.

Q: Your practice does not focus specifically on animals, but more their context, what made you pursue the animal as a subject, and more specifically the farm?

A: The animals are the blue-collar workers of the animal kingdom. Their culture is connected to ours intrinsically, but they are more-and-more kept out of view. I relationship to them is quite complex. I didn't want to "expose the dark side" of most of their lives, nor did I necessarily want to strictly anthropomorphize them or gloss over the reality of their lives. A strange reflection of our own culture seemed to be the best option to provoke people to reconsider these animals.

Q: What does your work say about your/our relationship with and to the natural world?

A: I would say my relationship to the natural world is not much different than the rest of humans. We are insulated and sheltered from the profound riches of the rest of the species with whom we share this earth.

Appendix D: Amy Swartz Interview

Please refer to included CD

Appendix E: Images of Artwork

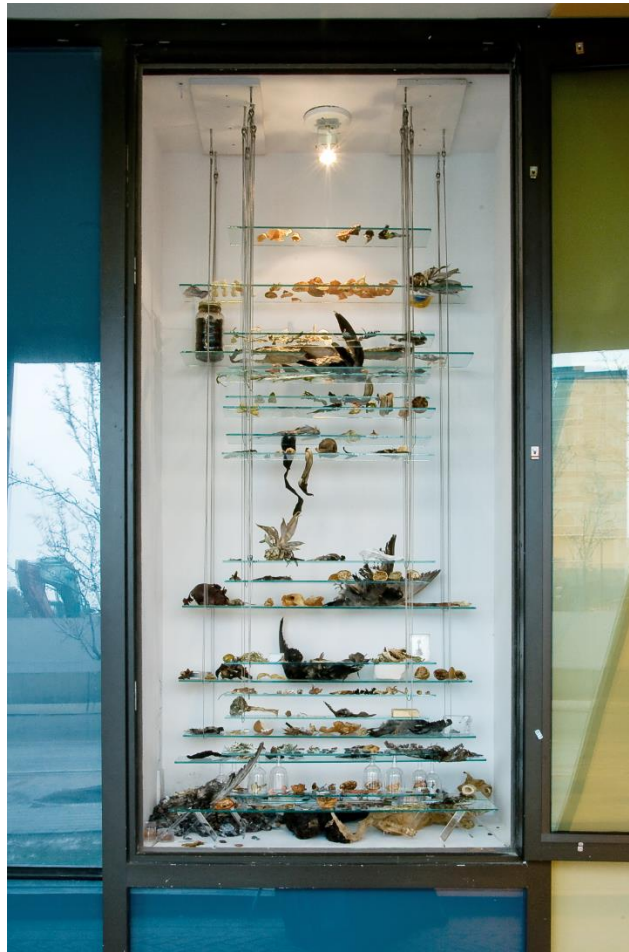


Figure 1. Nader Hasan, *Untitled*, Installation at York University, 2013.



Figure 2. Nader Hasan, *Untitled*, Installation at York University, 2013.



Figure 3. Nader Hasan, *Untitled*, Installation York University, 2013.



Figure 4. Rob MacInnis, *Farm Family 2*



Figure 5. Rob MacInnis, *Fresh Faces 1*

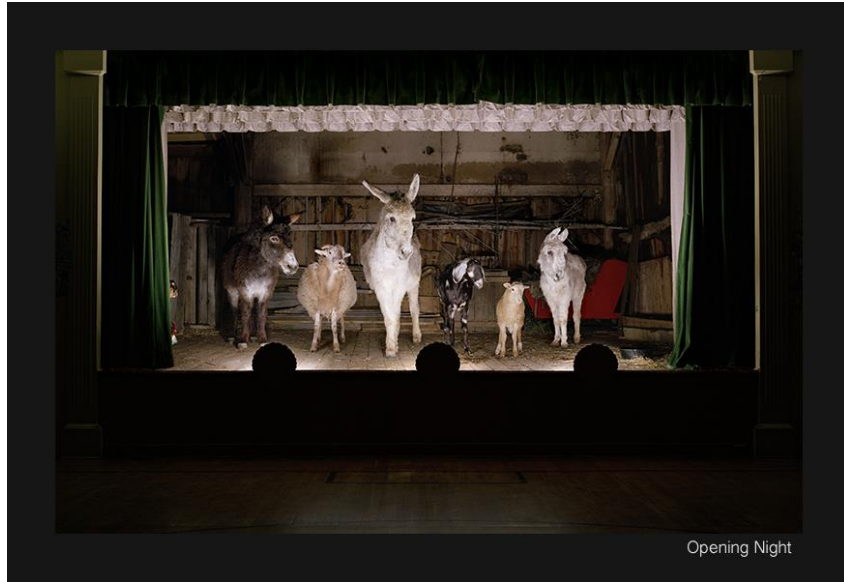


Figure 6. Rob MacInnis, *Opening Night*



Figure 7. Rob MacInnis, *Untitled 1*



Figure 8. Amy Swartz, *Pest* Installation View



Figure 9. Amy Swartz, *Pest*, Detail

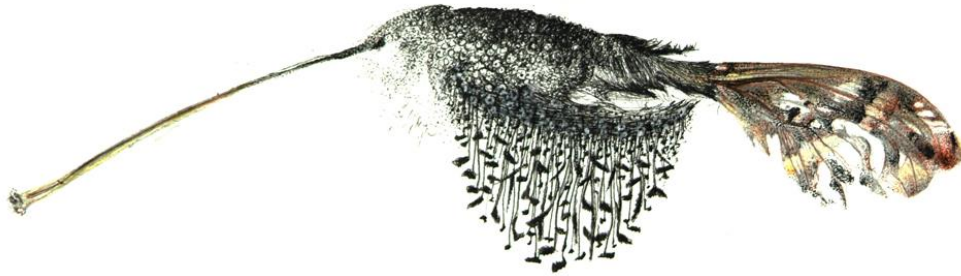


Figure 10. Amy Swartz, *My Mind is a lot like a Hummingbird.*



Figure 11. Amy Swartz, *My Mind is a lot like a Hummingbird.*



Figure 12. Janice Wright Cheney, *Coywolves*



Figure 13. Janice Wright Cheney, *Coywolves*

Appendix F: Installation Shots



Figure 14. Installation view 1: *Proximity to Animals* (Rob MacInnis & Amy Swartz)



Figure 15. Installation view 2: *Proximity to Animals* (Amy Swartz)



Figure 16. Installation view 3 and detail: *Proximity to Animals* (Nader Hasan)



Figure 17. Installation View 4 and detail: *Proximity to Animals* (Janice Wright Cheney, *Coywolves* and Nader Hasan)



Figure 18. Installation view 5: *Proximity to Animals* (Janice Wright Cheney, *Coywolves*)

Appendix G: Budget

| Budget - Partial funding will be provided by OCAD University by the Graduate Studies office, the remained will be covered by the curator. | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| INCOME | Line Item | | | Comments |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| EXPENSES | Line Item | Proposed Cost | Actual Cost | Comments |
| | | | | |
| | <i>Installation:</i> | | | |
| | Artist Fees 4x130\$ | \$520 | \$520 | |
| | Installation Materials | \$135 | \$396.14 | (Frame Rob's Work) |
| | Landscape painting/furniture/curtain | | | |
| | Vinyl Lettering | \$120 | \$75 | |
| | Artist Materials | \$75 | \$118.95 | |
| | Shipping (remaining artists) | \$100 | \$0 | |
| | Shipping: Janice Cheney* | \$1,500 | \$1,342.46 | Shuttle from Fredericton – Toronto |
| | | | | fuel |
| | | \$671 | | x2- (works need to be shipped back) |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | <i>Opening:</i> | | | |
| | Snacks/Refreshments | \$150 | \$175 | |
| | Liquor | \$300 | \$322 | |
| | SOP Liquor License | \$25 | \$25 | |
| | Security | \$100 | \$100 | |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-------|------------|---------------------------------|
| | | | | |
| | <i>Additional:</i> | | | |
| | Printing/Design | \$300 | \$90 | Print 10 Posters 24x18in (?) |
| | Publicity Marketing | \$75 | \$112 | |
| | Guest Lecturer | \$100 | \$100 | |
| | Space | FREE | | |
| | | | | |
| | <i>Unforeseen Costs:</i> | | | |
| | Carpetner | | \$140 | |
| | Materials to build ceiling | | \$75 | |
| | Documentation | | \$50 | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | Total: | | \$3,716.09 | |

Appendix H: Recent Exhibitions/Catalogues on Animals and Art

Banksy, *The Village Pet Store and Charcoal Grill*, 7th Avenue between West 4th and Bleeker Street, West Village, New York City, 2008

This exhibition was staged as a pet store. The interior of the exhibition contained display cases, cages and aquariums; however the contents of each cage were animated food items with animal like qualities. For example chicken nuggets with legs and a taxidermeid mother hen, or fish fingers swimming in an aquarium. The aim of the exhibition was to reconnect food with animals while critiquing the distance we have created between ourselves and the natural world and the food we eat.

Mark Dion , *In Collecting the Collectors*, Rome Museum of Zoology, 1997

The exhibition *In Collecting the Collectors* curated by Mark Dion critiqued the classification of biological systems. Dion used the Rome Museum of Zoology's natural history display cases and filled them with objects gathered from scientific researchers such as goggles, microscopes, lab jackets and other scientific instruments. One commentator noted that "He even arranged the boxes and specimen labels used in the cataloguing of the collection, revealing the process and manner in which science is organized." Thus this exhibition inverted the observer vs. the observed.

Damien Hirst, *Retrospective Exhibition*, Tate Modern, London, 2013

Damien Hirst's now notorious art work has always evoked a natural history aesthetic while creating a grand spectacle of the natural world and our dominance over it. The combination of a natural history aesthetic with a

contemporary agenda stripped the displays of their scientific meaning with his long winded, and sometimes ambiguous titles, challenging traditional notions of order and meaning.

Nina Katchdourian, *Chloe*, San Diego Museum of Natural History as part of inSITE '94, 1994

Katchdourian created an interventionist display of a taxidermied Papillion lap dog, Chloe. The taxidermied dog was enclosed in a glass vitrine and exhibited in her natural habitat which was constructed from home furnishings. Chloe was to be placed in the San Diego Museum of Natural History alongside the natural history dioramas of coyotes and other mammals. However the museum refused to exhibit the work because it was deemed controversial and unsettling to small children. This scandal clearly demonstrates the categorical and socially constructed systems which perpetuate notions of animal hierarchy and prejudice, animals which are socially acceptable to be killed (and taxidermied) and animals which are pets and are not.

Peter Noever *Furniture as Trophy*, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, 2009, Published as *Möbel als Trophäe/Furniture as Art* edited by Peter Noever, with contributions by Sebastian Hackenschmidt [et al.], Nurnberg: Verlag fur Moderne Kunst , 2009. Print.

The catalogue *Furniture as Art* outlines the history of the display of trophy animal parts (horns, hoofs, hides etc.) as furniture. Beginning with totems as trophies the catalogue briefly examines big game hunting, the sexualization of animal parts in design aesthetic (fur/female, horn/male), surrealist furniture and contemporary furniture design.

Richard Serra, *Live Animal Habitat in Rome* , La Salita, Rome, 1966

This exhibition explores the animal as material. Serra curated cages of 22 live and taxidermied animals. Although, the exhibition, *Live Animal Habitat in Rome* is now quite dated, the exhibition was one of the first to focus on a humanist critique, viewing nature as a resource.

Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir, and Mark Wilson Nanoq: *Flat out and Bluesome*, Spike Island Bristol, 2004

Flat out and Bluesome was a four part project with an exhibition component which began in 2001. Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson located 34 taxidermy specimens of polar bears from private UK collections. Each specimen was then photographed to document their unnatural habitats and contexts. The documentation and ten polar bear specimens were curated in an exhibition which “addressed our complex relationship with wildlife and museum display” a place where culture, spectacle, history, preservation, trophy and consumerism all collide.

