



Minding Animals[®]

Minding Animals Curatorial Guidelines

Animals and Art Exhibitions

MISSION of MINDING ANIMALS INTERNATIONAL INCORPORATED

Minding Animals International Inc. works to further the development of animal studies internationally and to help establish legal and moral protections for all nonhuman animals.

CONTEXT:

Animal Studies, also known as Human Animal Studies (or HAS) and Critical Animal Studies (or CAS) is a burgeoning area of transdisciplinary scholarship concerned with the complexities of human animal relations. While the field has its origins in the humanities and social sciences, it is now very broad with respect to the disciplines in which Animal Studies scholars are based.

Key to the field of HAS is a determination to identify and avoid human exceptionalism/anthropocentrism, which prioritises humans over animals. Key to CAS is a critique of capitalism and globalisation in its role in the domination of people, animals and the earth, but CAS also sees the intersections of all oppression anywhere and for whatever reason as motivation for employing the powerful forces of compassion and social justice.

The creative arts, especially the visual arts, have played a significant role in this developing field and continue to do so. As such, exhibitions have regularly been run alongside or within Animal Studies conference and symposium programs, and are seen as an important aspect of the Minding Animals conferences.

While the following guidelines may appear to apply to a range of restrictions, as artists and curators, we believe that artists work within various limitations all the time, be they ethical, financial, thematic, physical, and so on. As such, these guidelines should be seen as providing information regarding issues of importance for artists and curators engaging with nonhuman animals as part of their work rather than as a form of creative censorship.

Definitions and information on Animal Studies/HAS/CAS can be found at these links:

<http://www.animalsandsociety.org/human-animal-studies/>

<http://www.animalsandsociety.org/store/> (see the publication *Human-Animal Studies: Growing the Field, Applying the Field* under Policy Papers)

<http://animalstudies.org.au/>

<http://www.nzchas.canterbury.ac.nz/about.shtml>

<https://mindinganimals.com/>

<http://journalforcriticalanimalstudies.org/issues/>

OBJECTIVE:

The growth of Animal Studies as a field has been mirrored by the increasing number of animal themed artworks and exhibitions. However, many artists and curators do not properly consider the impact of the artworks and exhibitions on perceptions of nonhuman animals, and on the individual animals themselves. The result has been numerous examples where the animal has been treated disrespectfully, marginalised, exploited, and caused physical and/or behavioural suffering. Animals have been killed as part of or for an artwork. These guidelines are designed to avoid such inappropriate and unacceptable uses of animals as subjects for artworks.

Essentially, the use of nonhuman animals as subject matter for artworks should conform to the same kind of considerations given to artworks that deal with human animals. For example, artworks in an exhibition concerned with gender or race would not be deemed acceptable or appropriate if these works could be seen to cause suffering to the subjects or reinforce, perpetuate, or encourage the very mechanisms and attitudes that have resulted in the oppression and marginalisation of these groups.

GUIDELINES:

1. The animal/animals should not be marginalised or trivialised by being inappropriately made to stand as symbols, metaphors or signifiers for other than the beings that they are.
2. Artworks must not cause animal/s to suffer any harm, either intentionally or accidentally, either in the production or presentation of the work. However, work that documents the suffering of animals at the hands of humans for the purpose of drawing attention to this and identifying it as problematic is both appropriate and acceptable, unless this suffering was in some way commissioned for the production or presentation of the work.
3. While humour can be a useful tool for engaging the viewer with difficult or confrontational subject matter when it comes to human animal relations, animals must not be trivialised through the inappropriate use of humour which refuses the agency of the animals and belittles his/her individual intrinsic worth and/or suffering. This also applies to the media coverage concerning art works (if the gallery/museum has the power to influence it). The gallery/museum has to take care not to (unintentionally) ridicule or belittle animals in their public relations activities or in their museum education programs.
4. There is no reason why any live animal, wild, tamed or domesticated should be included in a performance or gallery exhibition. The reasons for this are clear: the confines of a gallery or exhibition space impose a negative impact on an animals' emotional, behavioural, and physical needs. No species, from elephants to sheep to dogs to ants, should be removed from its habitat or place of abode. In addition, potential harm to conspecifics or other animals could emerge due to the absence of the animal from their natural or familiar environment because of their involvement in an artwork whose location is in a gallery or exhibition.
5. Documentations of interactions with both live wild and live domesticated animals offer better options when working with living animals so that the needs of the animal involved can play a primary role. The source of living animals who will be involved in an artwork as well as the whereabouts of living animals who have been involved in an artwork have to be revealed upon request.

6. The use of animal bodies/body parts must be avoided unless it can be clearly argued/demonstrated that such use is not the result of the artist causing any animal to suffer, AND the artwork uses the animal body/body parts in such a way as to engage the viewer with a concerned consideration of the animal/s' suffering and or death/s.
7. The use of animal parts, such as flesh, bones, blood, hair/fur/feathers/scales/silk, cells, milk/milk products, eggs, honey, and so on, must be avoided unless it can be clearly argued or demonstrated that such use is not the result of the artist causing the animal to suffer, AND the artwork uses the animal body/body parts in such a way as to engage the viewer with a concerned consideration of the animal/s suffering and/or death/s. Nonhuman animals cannot give their consent to be used in this way and are unlikely to benefit from these procedures. Where possible, art supplies that are used for paintings and other artwork, like pigments, dyes, inks, and brushes, should be vegan, whilst any animal parts are sourced from animals that are already deceased.
8. The display of artwork that trivialises deceased animals will not be accepted. An overriding consideration may be whether a similar artwork applied using a deceased animal in a gallery is acceptable in equal measure as to a display that would use a deceased human in that same artwork.

DEFINITIONS:

1. Animal = nonhuman animal.
2. Human exceptionalism/Anthropocentrism = is the belief that humans are the central or most significant species on the planet (in the sense that they are considered to have a moral status or value higher than that of all other organisms), or the assessment of reality through an exclusively human perspective (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropocentrism>). The result of such attitudes is that the needs/desires of humans are placed above those of all other animals.
3. Intrinsic worth = intrinsic value, a type of value not reducible to use/instrumental value for others.