

The Animal Within—Creatures in (and outside) the mumok Collection

September 22, 2022 to
February 26, 2023

Press conference
Tuesday, September 20, 10 am

Open House
Wednesday, September 21,
10 am to 9 pm

The animal returns like a meal that cannot be digested, a dream that cannot be forgotten, an other that cannot be sublated.

Akira Mizuta Lippit, 2000

The mumok collection contains nearly five hundred works that in one way or the other involve animals. *Mr. Bear* stomps through a painting, a *Cat, Aroused* exposes himself in a drawing, *Le Griffu* menacingly extends its claws in sculpture, and photographs depict scenes from slaughterhouses and zoological gardens. There is a giant blue spider and renderings of the Batmobile and Bambi, as well as a stele clad in snakeskin, the cast of a prehistoric skeleton, and a container filled with pigeon droppings. In Vienna Actionism, slaughtered lambs are wielded, while Gina Pane lets maggots crawl across her face as children sing “Happy Birthday.” These and many other works with animals make up a good five percent of the collection, a considerable proportion that raises the question of what kind of zoo the museum actually is. What is preserved, researched, displayed, and communicated in each of these places? And in whose interest?

As an institution, the museum—like the zoo—is rooted in the liberal concept of modernity that extracts humans from nature in order to place them above it. In this world order, the animal is the “other,” the supposed other becomes an “animal,” and children are unfinished subjects that in turn are surrounded by animals that have been robbed of their own otherness, of all that makes them alien to us. In the reciprocal positioning of viewer and “exhibit” the familiar, ostensibly civilized world is juxtaposed with what is foreign and allegedly barbaric. Art and nature are formatted into art history and natural history respectively, under the premise of protecting “freedom” (of art) and the “wilderness” (of the world of animals).

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The exhibition *The Animal Within—Creatures in (and outside) the mumok Collection* addresses such topics. The visual arts and their fascination with animals—whether as pets, zoo animals, farm animals, stuffed animals, or projections of wildness—prepare the ground to reflect on the nature of sex, hunger, and affection; family and gender relations; socialization and domestication; and, not least, the enduring impact of colonial history. In other words, *The Animal Within* relies on the popular appeal of animals as a way to question structures of violence and domination. Who eats whom? Who leads whom on a leash? Who gives a name to whom? But also: What are stuffed animals doing in children’s “playpens”? What purpose do aquariums and birdcages serve in the bourgeois living room? And what makes animal skins so alluring as a sexual and fashion fetish?

This exhibition is therefore less about animals per se than about bodies, moving or still, reclining or standing, crouching or crawling. The animal as motif serves as a starting point for arriving at a materialist understanding of art and life, and not in a figurative sense—it is astonishing how prominently bones, skins, hides, and feathers feature in the visual arts of the last hundred years. At the same time, *The Animal Within* considers itself an exemplary undertaking. It is not about exhibiting the “best” animal art or the most famous artists who have created artworks on the subject. In fact, this exhibition could take place in any museum with a comparable collection and would yield similar results. In the Western world, “taming and framing” is what we do to mark our territory and establish our subjectivities in both life and art.

In this light, the museum is not only a kind of zoo but also a trap, and what “captivates” us there also holds us captive in liberal humanist fantasies of freedom and autonomy.

Joining the various creatures that populate the exhibition levels, a mural by Ulrike Müller inserts itself between the architecture and the exhibits. Large shapes in shades of gray sprawl across the various levels of the exhibition, delimited either by organic curves or geometrical sharp edges that cut across the walls at idiosyncratic angles. Wall-high, the shapes are fragmented by floors and ceilings as well as by the exhibition architecture. Inside the galleries, it is impossible to apprehend the whole picture; rather, it is as if shadows of unknown origin are cast on the building from outside. In fact, the forms are based on light projections onto models of the three exhibition levels, with small creature-like shapes made of craft paper as the starting point. Of which bodies these abstractions tell, whether they signal a threat or the proximity of a benevolent presence, remains an open question. In any case, however, they situate viewers in their bodies and draw attention to perspectives that lie outside the framework of the museum, of art history, and also of this project.

Artists: Hildegard Absalon, Friedrich Achleitner, Hans Arp, Christian Ludwig Attersee, Josef Bachler, Georg Baselitz, Lothar Baumgarten, Herbert Bayer, André Beaudin, Renate Bertlmann, Joseph Beuys, Linda Bilda, Günter Brus, Werner Büttner, Cagnaccio di San Pietro, Helen Chadwick, Linda Christanell, Clegg & Guttman, Bruce Conner, Frank João da Costa, Wessel Couzijn, Walter Dahn, Friedl Dicker, Erik Dietman, Anton Dobay, Stefan Eins, Elisabeth Ernst, VALIE EXPORT, Öyvind Fahlström, Alois Fischbach, Johann Fischer, Heinz Frank, Gloria Friedmann, Adam Fuss, Valeriy Gerlovin, Rimma Gerlovina, Jochen Gerz, Bruno Gironcoli, Johann Gittenberger, Franz Graf, Nancy Graves, Al Hansen, Johann Hauser, Karel Havlíček, Jann Haworth, Candida Höfer, Ull Hohn, Jörg Immendorff, Johannes Itten, Robert Jacobsen, Ben Jakober, Anna Jermolaewa, Isolde Maria Joham, Ray Johnson,

Joe Jones, Birgit Jürgenssen, Béla Kádár, Richard Kalina, Franz Kamlander, Gudrun Kampl, Gülsün Karamustafa, Mike Kelley, Franz Kernbeis, Erika Giovanna Kliem, Alfred Klinkan, Dominique Knowles, Kiki Kogelnik, Peter Kogler, Fritz Koller, Broncia Koller-Pinell, Brigitte Kowanz, Kurt Kren, Tetsumi Kudo, Wifredo Lam, Maria Lassnig, Madame d'Ora, Dušan Makavejev, André Masson, Paul McCarthy, Missing Link (Angela Hareiter, Otto Kapfinger, Adolf Krischanitz), Alois Mosbacher, Michaela Moscouw, Koloman Moser, Otto Muehl, László Mulasics, Ulrike Müller, Bruce Nauman, Elly Niebuhr, Hermann Nitsch, Oswald Oberhuber, Julian Opie, Fritz Opitz, Frida Orupabo, Nam June Paik, Margit Palme, Gina Pane, Pino Pascali, A.R. Penck, Phillippe Perrin, Marcel Pouget, Herman Prigann, Otto Prinz, Eileen Quinlan, Mel Ramos, Stephan Reusse, Germaine Richier, Erika Rössing, Dieter Roth, Susan Rothenberg, Gerhard Rühm, Erica Rutherford, Branko Ružić, Niki de Saint Phalle, Lucas Samaras, Chéri Samba, Rudolf Schlichter, Kurt Schögl, Carolee Schneemann, Philipp Schöpke, Bernard Schultze, Franz Sedlacek, Zbyněk Sekal, Bonnie Ora Sherk, Franz Singer, Christian Skrein, Berty Skuber, Ned Smyth, Anne Speier, Margherita Spiluttini, Daniel Spoerri, Curt Stenvert, Leopold Stolba, Kamen Stoyanov, Ingeborg Strobl, Kurt Talos, Josef Till, Ursula, Maja Vukoje, Max Weiler, Lois Weinberger, Susanne Wenger, Wiener Gruppe (Friedrich Achleitner, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm, Oswald Wiener), Siegfried Zaworka, Erich Zitra, Heimo Zobernig

Curated by Manuela Ammer and Ulrike Müller

Publication

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