

THE ANIMAL THAT THEREFORE I AM



catalogue



la_cápsula

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The Animal That Therefore I Am

Making visible the invisible (I)

The Animal That Therefore I Am is la_cápsula's interpretation of a contemporary bestiary.

Widely popular during the middle ages, bestiaries were books containing illustrations and descriptions of the animals and beasts that inhabited this world. Some of the creatures depicted were real, but others were either mythical or product of the imagination of the person in charge of drawing them.

Since they first appeared, bestiaries had the objective of allowing humans to read nature “as if it were a book”, in order to reveal, classify and control the world. Additionally, they used the animals as symbols to convey moral and religious lessons through metaphors and fables.

For this exhibition, la_cápsula was inspired by one bestiary in particular, the Bestiary of Don Juan de Austria (1570), the most important one written in Spanish language. Dating from the 16th century, this book already included animals from America.

How could a contemporary bestiary look like? This curatorial

experiment by la_cápsula includes drawing as a reminiscence of medieval bestiaries, but expands the format to painting, sculpture and print, and brings animals, beasts and monsters to the space in the shape of three dimensional, artificial and even electronic creatures. Contrary to medieval bestiaries, the animals, beasts and chimeras in the exhibition are not attempts to describe or classify the natural world, but a conscious re-elaboration of it.

4 The show is divided in three chapters named after the chapters of the Bestiary of Don Juan de Austria: “Animals, Birds and Fish”, “Monsters” and “Anatomy of what Humans are”. Instead of the moral or religious lessons of traditional bestiaries, the catalogue of creatures put together by la_cápsula address some challenges of our time, namely the over-exploitation of resources, whether natural, animal and even human, technology and its effects in contemporary societies, migration and forced displacement of animals and people, and human emotions. Trying to mimic an ancient way of conceiving the world, the exhibition is structured in the shape of a spiral, which starts in the middle of the room.

Animals, Birds and Fish

The first work in the parcours is *100 km* by Julieta Hanono, an Argentinian artist who was a political prisoner during the military dictatorship (1976 - 1983). She usually works with topics related to

translation and languages, but in the last years she has started a project with artisans from the Qom community from Northern Argentina in order to create works that deal with migration, displacement and land dispossession. Then, the visitor moves to Marco Barotti's *Clams*. Barotti is an Italian media artist interested in creating an artistic language where a fictional post-futurist era is expressed through kinetic sound interventions in natural and urban environments. His installations merge audio technology, consumer objects and waste into moving sculptures triggered entirely by sound. His "tech ecosystems" resemble animals and serve as a metaphor for the anthropogenic impact on the planet and environmental issues. The next group of works by EXTINTO (Mexico) are life size prints of animals: a fox, a macaw, an ocelot. All endangered species. EXTINTO is a collective of Mexican designers which seeks to raise awareness of endangered animals by intervening public spaces with their prints.

Monsters

Swiss artist Michael Günzburger is the next in the parcours. He works with drawing, printed graphics and installation. Together with printer Thomi Wolfensberger, he developed a method of capturing an animal's impression on a lithograph. Their technique is so precise that even the single hairs on the animals bodies can be



EXHIBITION VIEW



seen in the lithographs. His work *Ikarus* offers a new perspective about our understanding of the relationship between humans and animals. Five drawings by Colombian artist based in Mexico Mateo Pizarro follow. He creates small miniature pencil drawings with great detail, containing images of very diverse subjects, product of an imaginary of enormous richness. During the last years he has worked on several series of drawings about imaginary animals. Lastly, the visitor can move around Selina Baumann's sculptures *Trapa* and *Bellis*. They are made of fired clay, and exist between abstraction and figuration. Her sculptures give the spectator a strong feeling of familiarity even though they are neither humans, plants or animals.

Anatomy of what Humans are

This chapter starts with two more drawings by Mateo Pizarro. This time, the drawings depict creatures part human part animal. Next, Horacio Quiroz's *Human Meatball* catches the attention of the visitor. Quiroz is a self taught painter. His work is an exploration of the concept of polarity inspired by the texts of hermetic philosophy of The Kybalion, Carl Jung and the Tao. He uses the human body as a tool for representing movement and change. The parcours is closed by Denilson Baniwa's installation. Baniwa is a visual artist native of the Rio Negro, in the interior of the Brazilian Amazon. His works express his experience as an indigenous person, mixing traditional

and contemporary indigenous references and appropriating Western icons to communicate the thought and struggle of the indigenous peoples in various media such as canvas, installations, digital media and performances. *Natureza Morta (Still Life)* reflects on the exploitation and deforestation of the Amazon.

Fundamental to the discourse of the exhibition is the concept of visibility/invisibility. As the following essay will explain, since the Renaissance, a “visualizing procedure” started happening in which



EXHIBITION VIEW

the image of animals and plants —drawing, engraving— became the object of scientific study, instead of the real animal or plant itself. At the same time, scientific discourse started separating human beings from nature (plants and animals), leading to the marginalization and disappearance of non-human animals from daily life. The exhibition seeks to subvert this dominant narrative of Western modernity and make us question how we have learned to look at animals/beasts.

10 Besides the eight artists participating in the exhibition, la_cápsula invited three more artists to create site specific performances inspired by the exhibition. Mexican artists Enrique Arriaga and Janet Martínez performed *The Beasts*, an auditory exploration made up of narrative elements, soundscapes and abstract noise, together with live visual programming, which led the audience into an immersive audiovisual experience. The performance was an evocation of the non-human entities that surround us, but also a call to the animal within us. In her solo performance *Mischwesen werde ich sein* Swiss singer Dalia Donadio explored her own existence as a hybrid being. Her piece was an auditory bestiary of texts, acoustic and electronic animal, which mixed creature and human sounds with images.

Given that bestiaries were printed books, la_cápsula also prepared a publication. French-Serbian artist Nastasia Louveau was invited to propose her own interpretation of the artworks in the exhibition and draw them as if they were creatures in a bestiary. Together with the texts written by the curators, they give the audience a sense of what a contemporary bestiary could look like.

Hopefully, this catalogue of animals, beasts and monsters at la_cápsula will point to worlds which exist beyond our anthropocentrism (the idea that humankind is the central or more important element of existence) and will make us question how we have learned to look at animals and beasts. As a group, the artworks in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* seek to transgress the anthropocentric idea and expand the possible relationships between human and non-human creatures.



EXHIBITION VIEW



Naming, visualizing, controlling:

natural history and the depiction of nature

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Natural history is the science that brought together knowledge about nature since ancient times; however, it was established as a discipline by Francis Bacon in the 16th century, encompassing a whole range of sciences of observation –as opposed to natural philosophy–, in search of the causes of natural phenomena. The essential contribution of natural history to modern science is the systematization of the methods of inventorying, identifying and classifying natural species. Thus, this discipline has historically dealt with the observation of living organisms or the objects of nature. The systematization of animals and beasts in bestiaries was one of natural history's results. Since the Renaissance, but especially since the Enlightenment, natural history underwent a major development, both in terms of the recovery, conservation and dissemination of the classical legacy and the new objects of study, while at the same time acquiring the marks of identity that legitimized it. On the other hand, it also sought to correct errors and the lack of images of plants and animals in ancient Greek texts. The graphic image was, from

then on, destined to grant veracity to what the texts described, and also to facilitate the recognition and identification of the species; this indicates a new “visualizing procedure” whose objective was the correct vision of natural facts,¹ not through the simple copy of reality, but through an analytical process that lead to the complete description of each object.² In this task, botany was the branch of natural history that endured, especially in the 17th century, the weight of scientific transformation. Nonetheless, zoology also made significant progress thanks to the work of renowned scientists such as Conrad Gessner.

Naming and signifying were the two fundamental purposes of natural history since the Renaissance and, for this task, the image constituted a fundamental tool, coming to occupy “the place of the object or, rather, of our knowledge about that object scrutinized and observed”.³ Through the scientific image of natural history, reality (vegetable, animal, human) is placed before our eyes without the mediation of the word: this idea of the analytical image, which isolates particular features to expose only the regularities of species, contributes to the visual regulation of nature and will be fundamental in the historical evolution of scientific design in these centuries. The image becomes an intellectual object, the result of a long work of reflection by the artist based on preparatory drawings

of nature and previous works (herbaria, bestiaries).

But we will not be left with this kind image alone, for we must not forget, as cultural theorist Mary Louise Pratt puts it, that

at the level of ideology, science –“the exact description of everything”, as Buffon put it– created global imaginings above and beyond commerce. It operated as a rich and multifaceted mirror onto which all Europe could project itself as an expanding “planetary process” minus the competition, exploitation, and violence being carried out by commercial and political expansion and colonial domination. [...] The systematizing of nature carries this image of [primitive] accumulation to a totalized extreme, and at the same time models the extractive, transformative character of industrial capitalism [...]. As an ideological construct, it makes a picture of the planet appropriated and redeployed from a unified, European perspective.⁴

We will not forget, then, the role that science and its global imagery (but also the trade that it fostered) have played in the evolution of certain parts of the world, such as Latin America.

On the other hand, as art critic John Berger states, in the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared from the human realm. Today we live without them, and in this new solitude anthropomorphism makes us uncomfortable. The decisive theoretical breakthrough came with Descartes. By absolutely separating body from soul, he abandoned the body to the laws of physics and mechanics, and since (for him) animals had no soul, they were reduced to the model of the machine. The animal was then emptied of experience and secrets, and wildlife was increasingly confined to nature parks and game reserves. In the early stages of the industrial revolution,

animals were used as machines; so were children and adults. Today, in so-called post-industrial societies, they are treated as raw material. Animals used as food are processed as manufactured products.⁵

The works in the exhibition re-weave the networks of historical and material relationships between humans and animals that the enlightened natural history broke down with its obsession to classify and decontextualise its objects of study (the different forms of life on the planet) and with the obsession of Western capitalist consumer society with perpetual growth. Natural history is not a simple question of mimetic description of natural reality, as Pratt states, but about establishing a certain (colonial) order in the “natural chaos” through words and images. By recontextualizing animals and beasts, and endowing them with new meanings, the artists in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* give a new visuality to the stories and imaginaries that their works present.

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NOTES

1 De Pedro, Antonio E. *El diseño científico, siglos XV-XIX*. Madrid: Akal, 1999, p. 7-8.

2 Pinault, Madeleine. *Le livre de botanique, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2008, p. 79.

3 De Pedro, *El diseño científico*, p. 14.

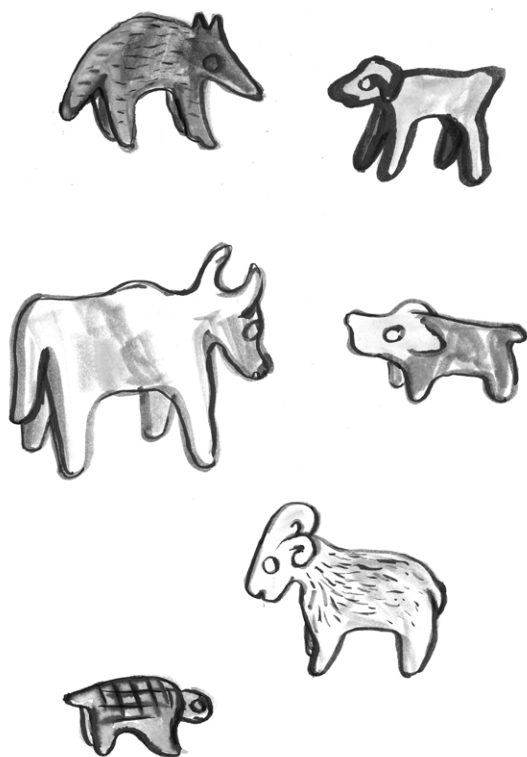
4 Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 34, 36.

5 Berger, John. *Why Look at Animals?* London: Penguin, 2009.

besti ario

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with drawings by Nastasia Louveau



100 km, Julieta Hanono

100 km –popularly known as *Bichitos*– are a species endemic to the Chaco Region in Argentina, more specifically Resistencia, its capital. They are miniature animals whose bodies are made from fired clay and who tend to live in large groups, the biggest one consisting of 709. They exist thanks to the efforts of the Qom population, who has ensured their wellbeing and reproduction. Each individual creature is a different miniature animal: pigs, alligators, horses, dogs, goats, turtles, cows, armadillos and rabbits. They stay together in white flat surfaces to make a statement about forced displacement, either of animals or humans, as a result of wars or the impact of humans in nature.



Clams, Marco Barotti

Clams are marine animals with the appearance of a mouth that opens and closes. They act like tiny filters that detect particles and pollutants in the water. Their bodies are made of recycled plastic waste and are connected to one another by cables hidden under the sand or the earth that they lie on. They are highly technological and advanced creatures that receive information of water bodies via internet, producing vibrations and sounds according to the quality of the water. They are mesmerising and incredibly pleasant when they are on a good mood, but loud and annoying when people disturb them.



Zorro chilote, EXTINTO

Foxes are shy animals that can easily be mistaken for a middle sized dog. They are flat and printed in black and white ink on regular bond paper. They stick to surfaces thanks to a home-made glue made out of rice flour and water. They try to avoid contact with humans, thus hiding from their sight. However, they are easily spotted by children, who usually want to touch them and play with them because of their cute faces. The mission of these animals is to remind humans of the endangered species that populate our earth, such as their cousins the Chilean Grey Foxes.



Ikarus, Michael Günzburger

Ikarus is a mysterious creature of great proportions, which marvels everyone who looks at it. Part human part owl, it stands tall and proud of its winged Victoria appearance. *Ikarus* belongs to the family of chimeras, and comes from a long lineage of wild animals that have been printed on a lithograph through a very complex method invented by two great minds. *Ikarus* does not have a defined sex, which makes it a unique pansexual species that speaks to its viewers about the relationship between humans and animals.



Symbiosis, Mateo Pizarro

This creature represents an evolutionary leap in the mammal world, because it combines a predator and its prey –in this case a Cheetah with an Antelope. The *Symbiosis* looks like a big cat with dots in its fur and can accelerate from 0 to 60 km in three seconds, which is faster than a car, making it the fastest animal in any exhibition. *Symbiosis* is a unique animal which lacks color in its body due to the graphite that constitutes it. Looking very fashionable, *Symbiosis* is a statement of the interconnectedness that underlies the animal world, to which humans also belong.



BELLIS 2017

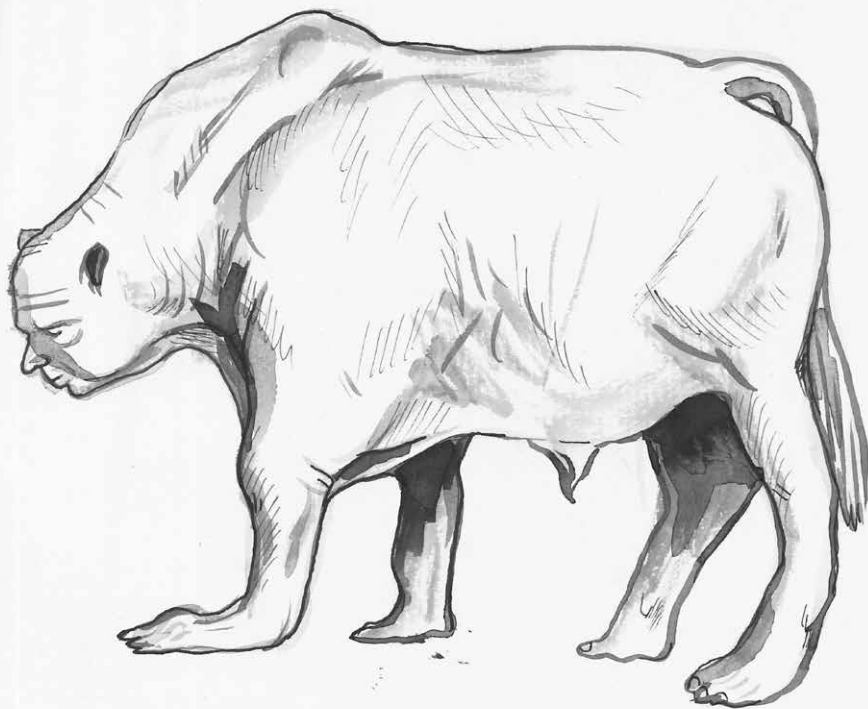


TRAPA 2017



Bellis & Trapa, Selina Baumann

Just like the marine animals that live inside seashells, Trapa and Bellis carry their own wooden houses with them –almost– everywhere they go. Made of fired and glazed clay, they have bright colours and a shiny exterior which draws people to them and ignites the desire to touch them. Curators have long debated if they resemble something figurative like a jellyfish or a cell, or if they are an abstract figure. So far no conclusion has been reached. Showing the world that beasts and monstrous creatures are hybrid and diverse, but not necessarily frightening, is what they exist for.



Nameless Beast, Mateo Pizarro

Nameless Beast has no name because it has been forgotten by humans. Believing that the human species is superior to animals, humans forgot what it is like to coexist and get along with non human creatures, thus forgetting about the existence of this creature, half human half cow. The *Nameless Beast* has a melancholic temperament, is a natural philosopher and roams the earth alone. It has no color because it never exposes itself to sunlight. Its long front paws make it a very skilled origami maker.



Human Meatball, Horacio Quiroz

The species known as *Human Meatball* is endemic to Mexico City and consists of only nine specimens. They live hanging on walls and are framed by a square canvas. *Human Meatballs* are mysterious creatures with the superpower to either captivate or repel viewers with their exotic and contorted anatomy. In spite of their unusual exterior, they are actually very sensitive creatures carrying in their bodies a whole range of emotions and displaying how movement and change in human bodies can be displayed simultaneously.



Natureza Morta, Denilson Baniwa

Natureza Morta is a creature that first appeared when humans started over exploiting the Amazon rainforest. It is an activist digital animal whose body is made of deforested lots and can only be seen from above. This magical being has the ability to morph in order to resemble different living organisms endemic to the Amazon, mainly parrots, jaguars and indigenous shamans. Its distinctive colors are dark green and earth tones and it arrived in Zurich at the speed of the internet connection between Brazil and Switzerland.

List of artworks

JULIETA HANONO

100 km, 2018

100 clay figures, variable dimensions

MARCO BAROTTI

Clams, 2019

Recycled plastic, sensor, software,
magnets, subwoofers

EXTINTO

Ocelote, 2019

Vinyl

EXTINTO

Guacamaya, 2019

Paper on metal plate

EXTINTO

Zorro chilote, 2019

Paper

MICHAEL GÜNZBURGER

Ikarus, 2019

Approx. 140 x 99 cm, lithography
on paper

Edition 1/6 – 6/6

Printed at Steindruckerei

Wolfenberger, published

by Wolfsbergverlag

MATEO PIZARRO

Snog (Conflict Resolution III), 2019

23 x 28 cm, pencil on paper

MATEO PIZARRO

Four Legged Chicken, of course

(Nameless Beast VIII), 2019

22.5 x 30 cm, pencil on paper

MATEO PIZARRO

Symbiosis (Conflict Resolution I), 2019

27 x 42 cm, pencil on paper

MATEO PIZARRO

It's sad how everyone remembers Wile

E. Coyote for his violence and not for his

realistic paintings of tunnels or I love

America and America loves me, 2019

22.5 x 31 cm, pencil on paper

MATEO PIZARRO

Animal Machine #1, 2016

30 x 22.5 cm, pencil on paper

SELINA BAUMANN

Bellis, 2017

Approx. 50 x 34 cm, ceramic

SELINA BAUMANN

Trapa, 2017

Approx. 63 x 30 cm, ceramic

MATEO PIZARRO

The hand of man (Conflict Resolution

II), 2016

22 x 29.8 cm, pencil on paper

MATEO PIZARRO

Nameless Beast #1, 2016

22.5 x 30 cm, pencil on paper

HORACIO QUIROZ

Human Meatball 3, 2018

25 x 25 cm, acrylic on wood

DENILSON BANIWA

Natureza Morta, 2016-2019

Digital prints, variable dimensions

The Animal That Therefore I Am

October 19th 2019 - January 18th 2020

Stauffacherstrasse 119, 8004 Zurich

Curated by la_cápsula (Adriana Domínguez and Elena Rosauro)

All texts written by la_cápsula

All drawings by Nastasia Louveau

Pictures and graphic design by Elena Rosauro

Technician Gil Cienfuegos

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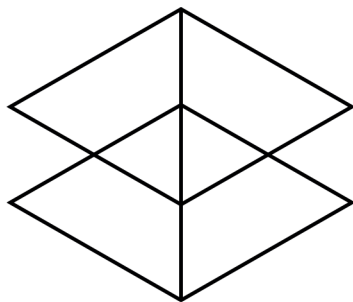
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