

“Surely it is our animal nature that recognizes the divinity of the natural world in all its mystery and beauty, despite the distressing habits and limited perception that afflict our species. So perhaps our hope of redemption lies in the fact that we are animals, not that we are people.” -Elizabeth Marshall Thomas

Art to Zoo: Exploring Animal Natures

September 28, 2014 – January 4, 2015

Von Romberg and Emmons Galleries

Artists have drawn inspiration from animals for centuries. Durer created sensuous renditions of bugs and rabbits, and pets were featured in elegant portraits of the aristocracy as well as the folksy scenes of such painters as Franz Hals. Photographers continue this tradition in creating a unique array of animal portraiture, documentation, and scientific study.

Photographs drawn from the Museum’s permanent collection bring the animal kingdom to both the Emmons and Von Romberg Galleries at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the College of Creative Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. This shared exhibition looks beyond the immediate allure of adorable animals, to explore the dimensions of animal characteristics and knowledge. The human species has long held itself as the highest animal form, while often overlooking the many traits that other species exhibit. By exploring nature from an artist’s perspective as well as animal behaviorists, *Art to Zoo* briefly disrupts the hierarchical barrier between humans and animals.

The aesthetic and composition of photographic greats accompany unique scientific insights into the lives of animal subjects. Stemming from this artistic platform, one can examine the MRI results of a scientific study on dogs, which revealed a uniform peak in response to one particular odor—that of the dog’s owner. The elegant raptors (eagles, hawks and falcons) are featured in their feathery glory, but one also learns that the “eagle eye” sees eight times better than humans. Perhaps through photographs we may begin to understand ants, which live in a colony with no centralized decision-making body, but manage to solve complex geometric problems.

Each image highlights a subject unfortunately too often misunderstood or overlooked. Viewers are invited to ask questions about animal knowledge and perception, for these photographs remind us that other sentient species possess language and communication skills; respond to forces with highly-developed senses; engage in heightened emotional experiences; many of which surpass our human comprehension. Just as animal portraiture reveals personalities, this exhibition will reveal scientific truths about our fellow creatures

“Nature never deceives us; it is always we who deceive ourselves.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau