

An Animal Among Animals

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Abstract

The discourse of Animal Studies has been gaining momentum as a scholarly discipline, advanced in remarkably diverse ways by theorists such as Jakob Von Uexküll, Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Michel Serres, and Giorgio Agamben. Drawing on these theorists, my research on animality seeks to name what the animal represents, as well as situate the human as an animal, and address questions of ecology and non-anthropocentric relational subjectivity. I will also look at several artists who have advanced the cultural identity of animals through their work including Lin Lee-Chen, Jochen Lempert, and Pudlo Pudlat. This paper proposes to reject the notion of humans as separate from nature and emphasizes the exploration of unrecognized forms of knowledge acquired from the parallel lifeworlds of animals.

I will also describe my method of practice-based research through visual art as a means to approach the abstract and often inaccessible knowledge of an animal's experience without favoring the anthropomorphic constraints of language. My visual research employs storytelling and metaphors through painting, drawing on personal narratives or dreams as a medium to engage the multiplicity of worlds and reveal meaning without imparting propositional claims. I will walk the reader through the accompanying thesis exhibition, describing a series of paintings that focus on rendering animal experiences that are oftentimes disregarded or invisible to our human affordances. A large-scale installation will facilitate a space that situates the viewer in relation to nonhuman animals inhabiting parallel environments. Paintings focused on rendering the physicality and vantage points of nonhuman animals, along with non-pictorial elements, are used to disengage anthropomorphic assumptions and situate human animality in a symbiogenetic relationship with other animals.

Dedications

For my family, Meri, and Daniel.

Acknowledgments

This body of work has been developed on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still the home of many indigenous people from across Turtle Island. I am grateful to inhabit and conduct my work on this land.

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Image 1: Sara Maston, *Studio Veil Test: Underwater vantage point*, acrylic on polyester mesh, 12'x 24', 2018

Methodology

Throughout the spring, while I was researching and creating work for my thesis, I visited a mother raccoon and her three babies every afternoon for lunch. The animals lived in a garbage can, located on an isolated part of the York University campus. The mother had co-opted the university-regulated garbage can into a cozy den for rearing her children, a delightful scenario in contrast to the desolate landscape of concrete and AstroTurf. I brought the mother pan-seared chicken legs and grilled ribeye steaks discarded from customers who dined at the kosher restaurant where I worked. This observation of furry bodies prompted a feeling of humility by distracting me from the routine aspects of quotidian human life. The mother raccoon allowed me

a glimpse into a complete self-contained world operating within a garbage can that happened to overlap the realm of York University.

Exhibition Details

The spectator walks into a space divided by veils of semitransparent fabric suspended from the ceiling. The hanging installation forms an organically curved enclosure, where the spectator can navigate around, and in-between the work from multiple entry points. Ghostlike images that reference animals within their environments appear to float between layers of transparent mesh. As the spectator moves within the veiled enclosure, the fabric's movement triggers shifting bodies that are rendered on the mesh panels. The multiple layers of paintings on transparent fabric respond to other paintings hung on the far walls of the gallery. These latter paintings, traditionally stretched on canvas and linen, are composed of dense imagery of animals folding into one another in overlapping aquatic, land, and aerial environments.

The dark brown body of a horse painted on a veil is swimming above the spectator, suspended in transparent blue waves. Gazing through the horse, a painting hung on the wall contains drifting creatures rendered below the watery picture plane. The veil acts as a mediator providing entrance to the speculative world of nonhuman creatures. Plant-eating insects occupy layered veils of foliage that make up a hanging garden. These parasitic creatures may seem to humans as pests, relentlessly infiltrating public and domestic spaces. However, in this human-manicured landscape, the insects are represented in harmony within the garden environment. The animals fly purposefully, their transparent shadows multiplied throughout the exhibition as an affirmation of their presence. From one point of view, the spectator will encounter a prominent bat circling above a painting that contains the elusively identifiable body of a human.

The thesis exhibition explores the vantage point of animals such as insects, single-celled organisms, domestic horses, birds and rodents. Although I cannot truly understand how nonhuman animals conceive of themselves, what they feel, or how they visualize the world, art making for me is an essential exercise in getting closer to the knowledge of nonhuman animals. The experience of animals who share similar physiological features such as limbs, eyes, noses, mouths, and nervous systems is explored figuratively, and is partly the result of observing and contemplating an animal's behavior. In other instances, I create non-pictorial imagery in order to evoke, rather than depict, the animal's milieu. I am conscious that this exhibition will be interpreted by a human audience, and therefore my main objective is to create spaces that prompt the spectator to engage in a less anthropocentric orientation, where the systems of expression of animals are understood through visual storytelling and the use of metaphors from the animal's viewpoint that engage the human audience.

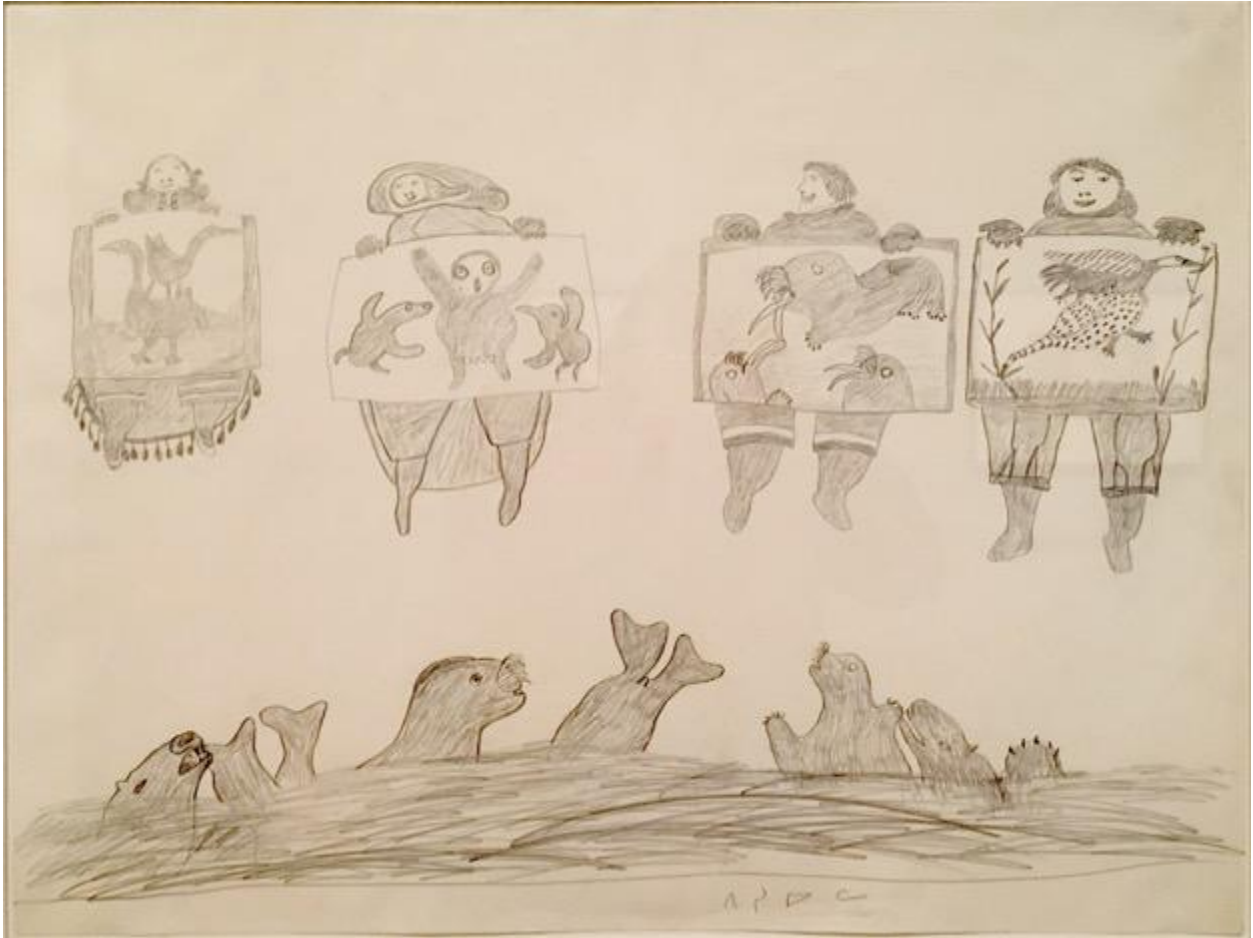


Image 2: Pitseolak Ashoona, *A Pitseolak Drawing of People Holding Pitseolak Drawings*, graphite on paper, 1964

I am inspired by artists who incorporate a culture of storytelling into their work using narratives as a way of structuring the world and understanding the significance of life. Inuit artist *Pitseolak* Ashoona references oral histories, teachings and myths as a method to generate innovative paradigms for the understanding of animality. The work, *A Pitseolak Drawing of People Holding Pitseolak Drawings* (1964), depicts four human subjects holding up drawings by the artist, each containing a distinct group of animals. A live audience of animals is also situated in the foreground of the picture. Ashoona is notable for several self-referential works that portray her role as an artist. In addition to reflecting the drawings within a drawing, this work also grants agency to the nonhuman animal as subject, spectator, and critic.



Image 3: Sara Maston, *Gallery test with painted veils and paintings*, 2017

Knowledge That Has Become So Self-Evident That It Seems Natural

I develop my paintings by remaining acute to experiences that induce affect, an attentiveness of day-to-day situations that generate sensory forces that are difficult to pin down or articulate. This intensity often appears pre-cognitively as a sensation in the body. For example, an energy sensed around the gut generally implies an emotional trigger leading to the creation of a painting fueled by excitement, apprehension or elation. A force concentrated around the chest often motivates the creation of artwork addressing deeply saddening, or enchanting,

phenomena. Perhaps these actions are an aspect of the evolutionary aesthetic drive and creative spontaneity linked to the primary consciousness of all living beings.

The *Legend Lin Dance Theatre* founded by Taiwanese choreographer Lin Lee-Chen is focused on Lin's spiritual perception that all elements in the environment contain a soul and an attentiveness to inner power through movement embodied in dance. The choreography in *Song of Pensive Beholding* (2009), for example, explores the relationship between being, spirit, human, and nature. Performed in mythical costumes sourced from the Miao and Dong ethnic groups and Taiwanese aborigines, Lin works through her dancers to animate the soul of nature. By concentrating on slow choreography that reflects minute details of the environment, Lin describes looking inwards to express what one sees outwardly in subtle and deliberate movements. When concentrating on the surface of an object, Lin states, "you will find there is life within life...when you look through that magnifying glass, when you slow things down, you will feel the inner sensations. The slow movement releases enormous power"². Lin's process of working over many years with the same dancers is also attributed to the measured and meditative quality of this work. The *Song of Pensive Beholding*, for example, was produced throughout nine years as the last chapter to her trilogy, *Heaven, Earth and Human Beings* (2000 – 09). In making work that explores the perception of nonhumans, I am in tune with Lin's principle that looking inward and addressing inner impulses reflects one's external perception of the outer world "when we look at things outside ourselves, we reflect our inner selves"³ Lin states. I consider this notion to be an affirmation of human animality.

To challenge the hierarchy of human vision, I characterize alternative modes of looking by identifying the nonhuman animal's ability of perception. For example, in the painting *Eyes*

² Chen, Singing, director. *The Walkers* (行者). Singing Chen, Lin Leh-Chyun, 2015.

³ (Singing Chen, Lin Leh-Chyun, *The Walkers* (行者). 2015)

that See in the Dark (2018), I render the human in the visualization of animal echolocation, a process similar to how a dolphin visualizes their surroundings by bouncing biological sonar waves off of their environment. I imagine the installation as encompassing nature where individual narratives between species prompt the spectator to engage with their own sense of being, or becoming a living animal. American philosopher Stephen Shaviro describes the human in relation to nature in *Twenty-Two Theses on Nature*, stating that “nothing exists altogether on its own, outside of all-encompassing Nature, entirely self-subsistent and without ever being affected by anything else”⁴. My exhibition’s title, *An Animal Among Animals*, infers that the reader and spectator are implicated within a greater framework that recognizes the non-anthropocentric transformations and accumulations of energy that occur in the world.

The approach of looking inward and reflecting on what we see outwardly is also understood as a process of painting. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the interior and exterior vision that relates to the movement of a painter’s body left by traces from a brush in paint. Merleau-Ponty defines the painter’s body as an aspect of the world: “We cannot imagine a painting without a body—without hand and eye—or without movement. But the very body that moves and that the painter uses to descend to the depths of being in trying to grasp how sensation and perceptual experience arise—that body is made of the same stuff as the world. It is flesh as the world is flesh.”⁵. By painting with an awareness of my environment, the visceral materiality of thick or thinly applied paint, and the pressure exerted from a brushed or wiped marks exhibits both the possibilities and limits of my body’s ability to perceive the fundamental nature of another creature’s experience.

⁴ Steven Shaviro, *Discognition*. (London: Repeater, 2016): 371

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, et al. *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. Edited, with an Introduction, by James M. Edie. 1964: 163

Painting for me involves a lot of looking. There are also many pauses in-between that may or may not have anything to do with the work itself. To understand these actions in a painting, a viewer must be willing to take the time to consider the concept of the space, the illusion, and the various references that appear within the medium of paint. My perceptual experience of painting requires both mental and physical energy influenced by a rotating factor of subconscious decisions such as my choice of a brush, the colour, the viscosity of paint, the pressure of a mark or the direction and placement of a stroke. I attempted to articulate this progression by recording my thought process and actions in a twenty minute live video. I discovered that in making my thoughts audible while working, I became distracted by a stream of disjointed emotions linked to the past or future, and I lost the instinctual sensitivity and intuition of my painting process.

Often my main reference points do not hinge on a specific image, but rather are remembered or imagined fragments of reality. For instance, I avoid the use of lens-based images when painting, that said, I collect objects as a bookmark or as prompts for the development of new work. If I am fortunate, the subject of a painting may be present in my studio, wherein I paint from observation. If I do not have an immediate reference, I bring in related objects to re-energize my visual vocabulary. A selection of articles collected in my studio over the past two years are pictured below:



Image 4: Clockwise from top right: *pussy willow tree*, *shibori dyed linen*, *eagle feather*, *dead hummingbird*, *diseased plants handbook*, *rubber snake*

Case Study 1: Spider Web in the Wind

In his book *Eyes* (2016), french philosopher Michel Serres imagines a museum dedicated to the work of animals. In Serres' imagination, the exhibit is made up of images produced by seagulls, rats, rattlesnakes and spiders. "As there are millions of species on Earth" Serres states, "they must live in as many different worlds, feel millions of perceptions, and see millions of drawings, colors, canvasses and paintings that are different from ours"⁶. Just as it is difficult to

⁶ Michel Serres, et al. *Eyes*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016): 110

convincingly render the experience of other creatures, it is also challenging to record a process that is meant to be perceived through a visual experience. I attempt to understand the abstract dynamics of an animal's experience by using the vocabulary of painting rather than privileging a spoken language.

I employ painting as a method to explore the vantage points of multiple species. In the painting *Private life of Arthropod* (2017), there are observational characterizations of nature, while other focal areas speak more to the materiality of paint to indicate a sense of the time and environment. I am interested in how the painting can operate for the fly, spider, painter, and viewer all at once. The spider web in this painting is stretched and anchored on all sides to depict the physics of its breaking point, suggesting its material strength. The painting can be navigated by traveling along the shining iridescent web and experiencing the tension between the background pushing up against the foreground. I painted this image while speculating on the spider's *umwelt*, having researched German Biologist Jakob von Uexküll's semiotic theory defining an organism's self-centered experience of its environment. The Uexküllian notion of the *umwelt* identifies living beings in individual phenomenal worlds⁷. Uexküll declares that all organisms possess unique *umwelten* regardless of if they share the same environment with other species⁸. Considering the possibilities of what the web could represent to a spider, the painting *Private life of Arthropod* emulates a sense of comfort and security by depicting a weapon, an apparatus for sustenance, or a nest. I also imagined the web from the point of view of a fly, potentially a symbol that represents surprise, struggle, or death. I painted the multiple vantage points in layers to create a sense of depth and illusion that emphasizes the complexity of the

⁷ Kadri Tüür, *The Semiotics of Animal Representation*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014): 17

⁸ Jakob Von Uexküll, et al., *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*. Minneapolis, (MN: U of Minnesota, 2010): 50

Anthropod's world. The separate *umwelten* of these two species is primarily addressed in the painting through the use of colours that reflect how we conceive of an insect's spectrum of vision, textures that shift according to the light source, and a spider web enlarged to the scale of a human viewer.



Image 5: Sara Maston, *Private life of Arthropod*, oil on canvas, 54" x 54", 2017



Image 6: *There are drawings of how the fly observes the world by the biologist Jakob Von Uexküll which my photographs reminded me of. (Jochen Lempert XXIX)*
Image source: Lempert, Jochen, Steven Lindberg, Richard Sadleir, Brigitte Kölle, Roberto Ohrt, and Frédéric Paul. *Jochen Lempert: Phenotype*. Köln: Verlag Der buchhandlung Walther König, 2013. Print.

An untitled photograph from German biologist and photographer Jochen Lempert's book *Phenotype* (2013) was a primary source for the painting *Private life of Arthropod*. At first sight, Lempert's image appears as soft-focus black and white foliage with an ambiguous grey line dividing the center of the photograph. Locating the aforementioned photograph within the sequencing of the photographer's book, however, suggests that the environmental and physical elements present in his image represent something beyond what the human eye, or image-making apparatus, is able to capture. *Phenotype*⁹ is a sequencing of black and white analog photographs highlighting the trans-species relationships that occur between human and other animal worlds. This book includes an index that contains both biological and poetic titles to the corresponding images. Some photographs are paired with quotations from Darwin's conversations, while other photographs are labeled in binomial nomenclature—a formal system that denotes different

⁹ the term 'phenotype' defines an organism's observable characteristics and traits.

species of living animals. Other photographs, such as the one that inspired my painting, are untitled, prompting a visual interpretation without the aid of linguistic clues.

In *When Species Meet* (2008), Donna Haraway compares a camera's colour detection and focal capacity to the primate visual system, characterizing the metal, plastic, and electronic flash as the 'flesh' of the apparatus¹⁰. Defining our perception as a sensual pleasure, Haraway recounts the visceral sensation experienced when interpreting a photograph; touching the high-density jpg object with "fingery eyes" made possible by a fine digital camera, computers, servers and email programs¹¹. I associate the 'visual touch' Haraway describes to painting as a medium with the potential to prompt corporeal sensations as well as a foundation for thoughts. A painting may contain a sense of vivid colour and sharp focal power, and in a separate moment, convey perplexingly muted or undefinable imagery.

¹⁰ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2008): 5

¹¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 3



Image 7: Sara Maston, *Untitled (Self Portrait)*, marker on paper, 1994

Case Study 2: Hole/Void

My sense of empathy towards other living beings can be traced from the death of my mother and growing up with a close familiarity to loneliness. In my mother's absence, an intensified recognition of mortality has shaped the way I understand the world and conceptualize artwork. Throughout my childhood, my family was composed of four major players: my father Mike, sister Lia, a golden retriever named Cookie Dog, and myself. I often turned to the dog as a source of comfort—she had a loving neutral temperament, soft ears, and the most beautiful eyes. Many years before I developed the language to articulate my anxieties about death, I created narratives for a cast of characters who resembled quadruped girls drawn with fangs and sharply clawed paws and who all sported a bluntly cut bob and straight across bangs.

Visiting the cemetery one Mother's Day, as my father wiped away the dust that had settled in my mother's etched portrait, I observed the polished granite stone embedded in the

grass becoming a perfect reflection of the sky. From 2012 – 17, I created three renditions of the painting *Mother* from this memory. Throughout the completion of the *Mother* paintings, I came across other artists who have similarly explored rendering imagery from reflections encountered on the ground.



Image 8: Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, Oil on canvas, 6' 6 3/4" x 41' 10 3/8", 1914-26



Image 9: Peter Doig, *Window Pane*, oil on canvas, 1993



Image 10: Dexter Dalwood, *Midday*, oil on canvas, 24” x 29”, 2012

The three aforementioned paintings contain a sense of desire to emulate nature. The sky, albeit uniquely rendered in each work, presents a compelling parallel universe in contrast to the reflection’s fixed position on the ground. While painting my version of this visual trope, I contemplated the different ways we grapple with the idea of death and come to terms with it. In the third and most recent version of *Mother* (2017), the reflection was transformed into a matte surface that is often interpreted as a body of water. In this space, I thought about a literal hole in the ground— either a practical hole dug to house or nurture a living animal, or a ceremonial hole dug to encompass a dead human body. At the same time, I also attempted to render a void in the

painting by contemplating the space left from the absence of a person, picturing the intangible lack of their presence long after their body has decayed.

In my thesis exhibition, the viewer encounters *Private life of Arthropod* and *Mother* in the same space through overlapping veils that create the perceptual diversity of animal experiences. As well as de-centering anthropomorphic perception, these paintings create a merging of worlds by referencing the universal process of death and the subsequent transference of energy into new life that all animals encounter.



Image 11: Sara Maston, *Mother*, oil on wood, bean bun, stoneware, hummingbird, 2017

Awake at Night

Following a community approach, *The Our Neighbourhood Project*, a two-year program (2014 - 15) was conceived as a platform to connect people from the Derry, Londonderry, and Doire neighborhoods to develop new identities and collectivities inclusive of nonhuman animals within the urban environment. Along with artist-led workshops, curator Sara Greavu produced a workbook as a reference model intended to be revisited, reworked and adapted for different communities across the world. Lead artist Sarah Browne speaks of the workshops from the *Between a Dog and a Wolf* workbook (2015) “as adaptable templates to be shaped according to the places and people involved to generate different ideas and results”¹². Included in the workbook are exercises to confront and investigate the perception of wild and domestic animals that inhabit urban public spaces. The exercises within *Between a Dog and a Wolf* encourage participants to find connections between seemingly dissimilar species that inhabit shared spaces within urban communities. The artist-led workshops challenge the perception of animals not just as objects for human consumption, entertainment, as a source of study, or as pets, but as entities with their own language, culture, intelligence, and intuition.

Along with projects that involve animal collaborators, several researchers have attempted to physically experience the sense of living as another animal. Thomas Thwaites, a self-proclaimed ‘goat man’ describes his ambitions to become a goat to escape “the violence of being human”¹³. Thwaites set his ambitions on becoming an animal he believed lacked the necessity of

¹² Sarah Browne, *Between a Dog and a Wolf: An Animal Empathy Workbook*. (Derry: CCA Derry~Londonderry, 2015): 17

¹³ Scott Simon and Thomas Thwaites. "When Being Human Got His Goat, This Designer Became One." *NPR*. NPR, 14 May 2016. Web. 19 June 2017.

language and the ability to project into the future. “To be human is to worry”¹⁴ Thwaites states, inspired by a dog oblivious to the psychological pain he was expressing. The journey of becoming a goat was riddled with violent acts to deprive the British designer’s human senses. To turn away from language, Thwaites undergoes electromagnetic therapy to disrupt the function of his brain. He also designs prosthetic goat legs to lower his vantage point to a goat’s eye view of the world. Similarly, striving to understand the way an animal navigates the world, English philosopher and veterinarian Charles Foster writes in *Being a Beast* (2016) of his experience living nocturnally, walking on his hands and feet as a quadruped, and using a blindfold to rely on smell rather than sight. Through these experiences, Foster learns a new way of understanding his surroundings, describing “a world that is padded through at knee height and smelt more than seen”¹⁵. With knowledge gained from favoring different senses, Foster recognizes a new resonance between the environment and his body that is often overlooked in a human’s day-to-day experience of the world. Although the philosopher put his body into the badger’s landscape, Foster admits that the experiment did not entirely work. As soon he took off his blindfold and the visual world reasserted itself, Foster describes his head filling with thoughts a badger would never assume. This longing and curiosity to understand another animal’s experience is perhaps one of the qualities that defines the human *umwelt*. Rather than suggesting that one physically behaves like another creature, donning a blindfold and walking on hands and knees, I am interested in approaching this discourse through visual metaphors. The visual installation prompts the viewer to observe and imagine the physical qualities and characteristics of a nonhuman animal as well as consider their own features and senses as a recognition of human

¹⁴ Scott Simon and Thomas Thwaites. "When Being Human Got His Goat, This Designer Became One." *NPR*. NPR, 14 May 2016. Web. 19 June 2017.

¹⁵ (Preston 2016)

animality. (Sometimes as mirrors, othertimes as empathetic readings to shared processes of dreaming, companionship, gossip, anxiety eg. Life within Life. (see following page)



Image 12: *Eyes that See in the Dark*, oil on canvas, 2018

Eyes that See in the Dark

The growing popularity of conducting life as another animal, or situating animals in roles that are typically designed for humans, inherently calls attention to the anthropocentric binary between the human and nonhuman animal. In *The Semiotics of Animal Representation* (2014), Estonian philosopher Kadri Tüür characterizes the human as “the animal that does not want to be an animal”¹⁶. Subsequently, as human kind we habitually define ourselves in opposition to other animals. Acknowledging this divide, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben references the German biologist Jakob Von Uexküll’s term the *umgebung* to describe the perceptual bias in which humans perceive other living beings¹⁷. This human objectivity, however, does not take into account the multiple other worlds and time zones that animal species operate within. As Uexküll explains, “every living thing is a subject that lives in its own world, of which it is the center”¹⁸. Although Uexküll’s concept of *umwelt* isolates the organism within its experiential world, the biologist affirms that the worlds of distant species remain linked together in a symbiogenetic¹⁹ earth through collective ecosystems that originated from the creative forces of symbiosis among bacteria. In my exhibition, the layers of semitransparent paintings suggest a crossover from the individual’s *umwelt*, to the multiple lifeworlds of other living beings. The suspended large-scale paintings create a space that welcomes a receptiveness to experiencing the gallery through the metaphorical possibilities encountered by visually navigating alternative

¹⁶ Tüür, *The Semiotics of Animal Representation*, 18

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford UP, 2012): 40

¹⁸ Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 50

¹⁹ American evolutionary theorist Lynn Margulis states that “the creative force of symbiosis produced eukaryotic cells from bacteria. Hence all larger organisms—protists, fungi, animals, and plants—originated symbiogenetically. (Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 31)

worlds, some of which are considerably abstract and naturally challenging for a human to properly articulate.

Chinese Philosopher Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou) frames the human's view of the world through our reliance on language. In his essays, Zhuangzi recalls a distant past, in which human beings saw the world as a whole without any division between themselves and the surrounding context of Nature. The philosopher attributes the development of language as the destructive categorization of the world. "In time, our perception of the world has degenerate from a holistic grasping of it as a single system, to a perception of a space filled with individual items, each having a name. Every time we use language and assert something about the world, we reinforce this erroneous picture of the world."²⁰ Zhuangzi expresses these views through stories and metaphors to bypass the language-based thinking that he believes has distorted the world.

Akin to the notion of *umwelt*, Zhuangzi proposes the existence of alternative understandings of the world "Why should we believe that the human perspective has any intrinsic validity, and why should we not wonder whether we could experience the world from other standpoints."²¹ The philosopher asks. Similarly, Uexküll proposes an infinite variety of perceptual animal worlds that, although non-communicating and reciprocally exclusive, link together to compose the earth. "Life is not just about matter and how it immediately interacts with itself" Uexküll states, "but also how that matter interacts in interconnected systems that include organisms in their separately perceiving worlds—worlds that are necessarily incomplete, even for scientists and philosophers who, like their objects of study form only a tiny part of the

²⁰ Zhuangzi et al., *Basic Writings*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1996): 3

²¹ Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings*, 5

giant, perhaps infinite universe they observe”²². Uexküll’s investigations into the animal environment sought to dehumanize the concept of nature²⁴.

The subjects in my paintings oscillate between three spaces defined by Uexküll in which sentient beings operate: Effect space, tactile space, and visual space. Unlike effect space and tactile space, visual space is isolated by an impenetrable wall which Uexküll defines as the horizon or farthest plane; this plane includes all visible things²⁶. Humans among other animals rely on visual cues from their environment to understand and navigate the world. Although the exhibition will be experienced principally in visual space, I am interested in how our daily environment would shift in perception if negotiated through a sense of tactile space or effect space. A species navigating the world through effect space operates with an inner homing behavior built into their system. Effect space is depicted in the painting *Eyes That See in the Dark* (2018), from a bat’s aerial vantage point by imagining points of contact made with foliage and insects through echolocation (by calling out into space and having these signals bounce back). Tactile space, which includes the space of nocturnal animals, is processed predominantly through objects that can be sensed through the body. An alternative method of experiencing the work in my exhibition is to navigate the installation using tactile senses, physically guided by the hanging veils that are configured in an organically circular labyrinth. Every twelve to twenty-four feet along the veil is a break in its surface through which the spectator may move inside, between, or along the exterior of these hanging walls.

²² Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 1

²⁴ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 39

²⁶ Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 63



Image 13: *Studio Veil Test Garden Layer*, acrylic on polyester mesh, 12'x 12', 2018

As is discussed in Art Historian Rosalyn Deutsche's *Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy* (1992), the delimitation of anthropocentric spaces requires the establishment of an external other to the human, and as a consequence, human-deemed public and domestic spaces become an appropriated territory to regulatory power²⁷. In a broader sense, the human world remains closed to nonhuman animals unless the animal is given a formal invitation to participate or perform in a human-led project. To counter this notion, Donna Haraway suggests an alternative to the closed, human-regulated system in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003),

²⁷ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy." *Social Text* 33 (1992): 38 - 39

suggesting that we inhabit a symbiotic system looping within other worlds²⁸. Artistic and cultural interventions that encourage participants to see the environment through our relationships to animals are crucial to develop new definitions of ‘community’ and in a greater sense the recognition of ‘naturecultures’, wherein animals and humans form a relationship in what Haraway describes as *the dance of relating* between species, “full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages”. Through their mutually relating roles as subject and object to each other, humans and dogs are Haraway’s primary models of adapted partners²⁹. My installation contains visual prompts, such as the human-scale experience of an insect’s environment, to generate a sensitivity to the multiple levels in which our environment can be understood and experienced to recognize that we are inherently a species of animal operating within a wilderness among other animals.

Ignoscere / The Light in Unknowing

Perhaps recognizing the human *umwelt* is a way to conceptualize the human as animal in relation to other animals. This practice has been recorded in Belgian philosopher Vinciane Despret’s *The Enigma Of The Raven* (2015), which documents the story of Bernd Heinrich, a German biologist intent on understanding the cognition and behavior of ravens. Heinrich discovers that generating empathy for the birds is key to perceiving their previously enigmatic behavior. When the relationship becomes more equalized, he starts to understand the previously inexplicable motives, thought patterns, and culture of the ravens. By thinking like them rather than studying them, Heinrich becomes a collaborator with the ravens, citing Uexküll’s model of *umwelt* as the process in which he understood their world.

²⁸ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 216

²⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 25

Human Animals

The notion of becoming-animal originates from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's analysis of Francis Bacon's fleshy and visceral paintings³⁰. Bacon's work demonstrates the multifaceted and communicative nature of the painted surface, which has the ability to assume philosophical reflection and sensuous embodied experiences—qualities that correspond to Deleuze's concept of becoming. The symbolic and structural relationship between human and animal is characterized by Deleuze in defining animality as the destruction of the human that occurs in the passage to the animal³¹. Deleuze illustrates the correspondence between human and animal as an “ordering of differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations”³².

The presence of nonhuman species is essential to forming our understanding of humankind. Haraway describes this interspecies relationship as “to ‘become’ with many”, and suggests an alternative form of globalization where organisms, systems, and technologies involved within the anthropocene are reconfigured into a more equalized relationship. In this vision, animals are treated as collaborators rather than viewing them as commodities³³. As an example on the intimate level, our human genomes form only 10% of our body, whereas the remaining 90% of cells that make up an individual are genomes we share with bacteria and fungi. Deleuze and Guattari describe the event of becoming-animal as the transformation of the human into an animal breaking free from the constraint of human life³⁴.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2004): 78

³¹ Claire Colebrook, "Suicide For Animals." *The Animal Catalyst: Towards Ahuman Theory*. By Patricia MacCormack. N.p.: n.p., n.d. 133-44: 137

³² Gilles Deleuze, et al. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1987): 236

³³ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 253

³⁴ Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 37-50



Image 14: Pudlat, Pudlo, *Flight to Sea*, Lithograph Edition: 34/50, 1986, Cape Dorset

Naturecultures

In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway suggests that we inhabit a symbiotic system looping within other worlds, “a symbiogenetic conjuncture of living and dying centered around the earth”³⁵. As humans, we do not often acknowledge the presence of animals as participants in the creation of culture. Venturing out into downtown Toronto’s indoor shopping centers presents an opportunity to observe the hybridity of sterile regulated environments and the chance elements of naturecultures³⁶. While searching for the presence of nature within interior spaces of

³⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 216

the business district, I encountered a gnat infestation in the Sun Life Financial Tower's living wall and later came across a tree brushing up against the ceiling in the P.A.T.H., an underground labyrinth that connects downtown Toronto businesses. Employing the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming, the tree in the P.A.T.H. characterized an instinct to escape from the constraints of the anthropological machine. I was initially drawn to the work of Cape Dorset artist Pudlo Pudlat, for his imaginative rendition of hybrid relationships between anthropocentric and nonhuman animal cultures. His work *Flight to Sea*, portrays an unlikely natureculture between an Arctic animal and helicopter. *Flight to Sea* reveals Pudlat's whimsical methodology of anthropomorphizing modern technologies introduced to the north using Inuit transformation iconography.

Sleeping During the Day

Studies conducted on animals are designed for humans to understand, and frequently do not accommodate the cognition of the animal subject³⁸. From the orientation of the nonhuman animal, the knowledge gained from their study often originates in the violence of extreme confines where the animal as test subject is held captive for the benefit of human curiosity. In *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1992), French philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes the mechanisms of control in the conduct of scientific research by tagging and monitoring the animal in the wild or keeping them captive as a subject of study³⁹. The homogenizing concept of the animal in western philosophy is constituted upon the animal as a subordinate to the human. This notion was supported by German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who believed that the

³⁸ De Waal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016): 48

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." (October, vol. 59, 1992): 6

nonhuman animal, unaware of its surroundings, operated through preprogramed actions within the limited confines of its perceived earth.

Certain animals acknowledged collectively are transformed into monuments of nationalism and patriotism that commemorate loyalty and sacrifice. Other anonymous animals are used as test subjects in physiological experiments⁴⁰. A select few animals are anthropomorphized through human services such as health insurance, shelters, cemeteries, daycare, bakeries, salons, pet-scale furniture, clothing, and used as sales representatives in cell phone and insurance companies. By giving names to domestic animals, they become quasi-human companions introduced into society. Wild animals, British anthropologist Tim Ingold states, are sandwiched in-between persons and places since they are not distinguished by name or address⁴¹. Appropriating a named identity relates to the politics of occupying a specific named place. When an animal is classified as a member of a category designated by a common noun, it is reduced to an object, unaware of what it is called. Ingold affirms, however, that animals are conscious of the names given to them, and “if humans respond to the calls of animals in the same way that animals respond to their vocal invocation by humans, then there is no absolute difference between animal vocalization and human name calling”⁴². As an alternative to characterizing an animal’s subjectivity with a name, Ingold cites Deleuze and Guattari to speak of an animal beyond nouns through a manifestation of a process of becoming; of simply being alive. While making work for the thesis exhibition, I am focused on the reflective perception of becoming described in the philosophy of becoming-animal.

⁴⁰ Browne, *Between a Dog and a Wolf: An Animal Empathy Workbook*, 81

⁴¹ Browne, *Between a Dog and a Wolf: An Animal Empathy Workbook*, 100

⁴² Browne, *Between a Dog and a Wolf: An Animal Empathy Workbook*, 101

Our natural ability to induce thought and create human and social sciences is associated with our uniquely human *umwelt*, however the expense of these connections are an abstracted understanding of nature's wholeness. As American author Dorion Sagan describes in his introduction to Uexküll's, *A Foray Into The Worlds of Animals and Humans* "Earth seen from space sports none of the color-coded boundaries among nations we see on the typical map of the world. Nature does not weep over academia's fractious territorialism, nor take pleasure in the university's attempts at interdisciplinary cross-fertilizations"⁴³. Attributing boredom as the sole link that connected humans to other species of animals, Giorgio Agamben describes Heidegger's belief that the demarcation between human and animal is the human's inescapable feeling of boredom to the animal's inability to turn away from its own animality⁴⁴. Conversely, nonhuman animals embody intelligence and motor skills that we may not have access to in a human-moderated environment. Evidence of boredom is observable within the human-imposed environments of animals in captivity. For example, lethargic animals lie motionless in concrete zoo enclosures or a domestic caged bird who pulls out its feathers from the lack of stimulation and the ability to fly. Derrida describes the homogenizing categorization of the animal as a violence to the diversity of animal life and the irreducibly complex relation of the animal to the human. Derrida alternatively proposes that "no animal in the general singular is separated from man by a single indivisible limit"⁴⁵. In contrast, crediting the nonhuman animal with abilities that surpass boredom not only recognizes the alternative forms of knowledge that animals possess, but also opens the potential for animals to create new forms of culture.

⁴³ Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 29

⁴⁴ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 43

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, et al. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. (New York: Fordham UP, 2008):

Animal instinct accounts for many cases of automatic actions observed in animals, and according to Canadian social theorist Brian Massumi, an animal's instinctive activity contains the potential to produce an aesthetic result. As Massumi states in *The Nonhuman Turn*, this instinct also has a tendency to betray the animal by overshooting its target⁴⁶. This becoming or emergence, Massumi connotes, may develop as a form of art⁴⁷. Massumi characterizes animal instinct as functional, spontaneous, and creative. Although unpredictable and indistinct, desire and creative involution naturally occurring in external relations between the animal and its environment is not accidental. Behavior that instinctively operates beyond utility is oriented toward a spontaneous excess of creative self-consistency⁴⁸. Referencing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming", Massumi describes animal life through "expressive becoming" rather than the selective adaptation accepted in Neo-Darwinian thought⁴⁹. For Deleuze, the making of art is an animalistic trait that extends beyond the condition of the human. This concept has also been explored by English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead who asserts that becoming and creativity, apply to all happenings in the cosmos. Whitehead's highest value is creativity, which he calls "the universal of universals"⁵⁰. For Whitehead, the world is never static but in a continual transformation, and each process of becoming produces something new.

Animal Artist

Current ecological studies present clear examples of animals demonstrating abilities for cognitive processing, use of language, and in more complex species, display a 'theory of mind'

⁴⁶ Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2014): 1

⁴⁷ Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, 10

⁴⁸ Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, 13

⁴⁹ Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, 2

⁵⁰ Steven Shaviro, *Discognition*, (London: Repeater, 2016): 17

relating to self-awareness and communication⁵¹. Cognition varies in complexity. For example, an animal that lacks a cerebral cortex will display less propensity over primates or corvids when approaching tool use and language. Although verbal language is not observable in many nonhuman animal species, there are various ways of communicating that humans tend to overlook such as body language, inaudible sound waves, scent, or oscillations. Irene Pepperberg, the animal psychologist who worked with Alex, the African Grey parrot, describes animal intelligence as a continuum of human intelligence⁵². Alex not only mimicked sounds but displayed cognition to understand what he was saying. Kanzi, a resident bonobo at the Great Ape Trust Research Centre in Des Moines, Iowa, is another case of an animal using complex language. Kanzi speaks through symbols, using a combination of 384 icons to communicate. Furthermore, the cognition of animals has not been limited to the study of language. Tetsuro Matsuzawa, a Kyoto primatologist, designed a test in which numbers flashed for no more than a second at random on a screen. Chimpanzee test subjects swiftly arranged the squares where the numbers had been in ascending numerical order. Dr. Matsuzawa suggests that early human species favored symbolization and language skills, thus leading to a deterioration in the human's immediate memory processing⁵³. This study revealed cognitive processing in chimpanzees that far precedes the aptitude of a human's visual and immediate memory skills. Corvids have also shown to be one of the most intelligent animals through their sophisticated social societies,

⁵¹ Jeffrey Kluger, "Animal Minds: What Are They Thinking?" *Time*. (Time, 25 Aug. 2014): 14

⁵² Irene Pepperberg, "Alex and Me: A Scientist and A Parrot Discover A World of Animal Intelligence." [Http://www.mslaw.edu/](http://www.mslaw.edu/). Massachusetts School of Law, 17 June 2010. Web. 25 June 2017.

⁵³ Satoshi Hirata, et al. "'Sweet-Potato Washing' Revisited." *Primate Origins of Human Cognition and Behavior*, 2008, 487-508. Web.

problem-solving skills, and use of tools—As noted earlier with regard to Bernard Heinrich’s collaboration with the animals.

The performance artists Alex Bailey and Krōõt Juurak believe that although their work is often disregarded by humans, animals are artists in their own right. Informed by this notion, Bailey and Juurak choreograph performances designed for domestic animal audiences. When speculating on the animal as an artist, one must be open to the possibility of art made by animals for their own communities. The bowerbird constructs an architectural structure to frame found objects. The bower is not a storage space for food. It does not function as a shelter, nor does it provide an incubation for young. A bower functions aesthetically to attract the attention of female bowerbirds, and although the structure of the bower remains relatively constant to the species of bird, the contents of each bower are unique to its maker. Bowerbirds also employ the artistic methodology of apprenticeship; wherein young inexperienced birds work with older established birds to develop their aesthetic skills. It is possible to draw parallels between a bower, a structure that houses a curated installation of found objects, and a gallery displaying an exhibition of artworks.

The demarcation of ‘man’ as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes, is the result of a simultaneous division and articulation of the animal and the human. Acknowledging an unidentifiable zone between species, Agamben cites the Latin verb *ignoscere*, which translates into “to forgive” not to let something be, but rather to leave something outside of being, to render it unsavable⁵⁴. In describing the anthropological machine, Agamben concludes that we should not focus on which of the two variants of the same machine (human or animal, speaking being or living being) is better, but to understand how they work so that we might be able to transition

⁵⁴ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 91

into a new trajectory of being⁵⁵. The habits of perception and nature of the environments that we inhabit have reduced the richness of our sensory experience. Similarly, Zhuangzi references teachings of the Dao to return to a full range of the human experience by accepting the unknowability of the world. Rather than relying on logic and reasoning, the philosopher describes “an opening of oneself... insuring that the understanding consciousness comes to rest in what it does not know”⁵⁶. For Zhuangzi, not-knowing is not a rejection of all knowing, but rather an openness to spontaneous knowledge.

Contemplating the human body’s perception of flight and imagining this experience through the sensation of a distant bird ancestor, I picture the world through the window of an airplane descending: the anthropocentric infrastructure visible in the highway traffic, swimming pools, lawns, and rows of suburban houses. This vision is comparable to the organization of a high-density ant colony wherein cars become interchangeable with the commuting trails of workers coming and going from the ant hill. Our human affordances often overshadow the notion that we are animals living among other animals.

My thesis work challenges the notion that animals lack the autonomy to navigate an anthropocentric world. In accepting that humans are a small piece of the puzzle that completes our environment, I propose that the demarcation of the world and earth be redefined as a society inclusive of nonhuman animal species. By rendering a combination of lifeworlds, and creating a space in which they must be interpreted through one another, my thesis installation allows an opening for the human spectator to consider our connection to animality. Through an assembled

⁵⁵ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 38

⁵⁶ Scott Bradley, “The Rambling Taoist.” *The Happiness of Fish*, ramblingtaoist.blogspot.com/2010/05/happiness-of-fish.html.

sequence of painted imagery, the installation aims to depict the connection of living beings to their surroundings and situates the experience of their *umwelt* within the perceived environments of other species. Images that depict human subjects from the vantage point of nonhuman animals reject the notion of a separation of the world from the earth and critiques the anthropological machine that governs our conception of humanity. The thesis exhibition portrays the disjointed realities described by Uexküll as the *umgebung*, the point of view in which humans perceive other living beings⁵⁷. This objectivity privileges the *umwelt* of multiple other worlds and time zones in which nonhuman animals operate.

Portrait of Meri Looking Away

In his youth the budgie escaped the captivity of someone's apartment, but guided by his domestication, after a few rebellious hours, he sought sustenance and human company. I equated our relationship to long-term roommates. Although we shared the same living space for over a decade, he lived out his life independently and on his own terms. This was not to say he was not social, in fact, he was aggressively outgoing in his chosen moments (especially if a cell phone or mirror was in use). Intermittently he became a wild animal, captive prisoner, domestic pet, best friend, adopted son, bachelor, father, and elder. The first signs of his illness escalated quickly and within two days, his feathers were puffed, his tail drooped and he swayed unsteadily on his feet. When I came home from work the evening before Christmas Eve, he was wrapped in an old wool hat next to the warmth of the office computer. I held him next to my heart under my sweater. I put on a documentary about wild budgies with the volume turned up, the continual high-pitch chattering I hoped would soothe him. Midway through the episode, he shifted to his

⁵⁷ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 40

back. I took him out from my sweater and watched his one eye cloud over, wings stiffen and fall open. My tear fell into his open eye and he stared back unflinchingly.

Addressing the categorical empathy of human beings, Michel Serres poses the question, “how can we be just and sympathetic in our treatment of animals if we do not try to see the world they discover and which their lives build for them? Why do we take pity on the lamb, bled to death at the slaughterhouse? Why, however, do we lightheartedly crush mosquitoes and woodlice? And yet they all have eyes! Do they have tears too?”⁵⁸. I am interested in how this hierarchy of species, described by Serres, is formed. For example, hyenas as a species are often demonized as vicious predators in contrast to lions who are perceived as royal beasts. Regardless of their reputation, hyenas have proven to live in complex cooperative societies that operate matriarchically with laws and strong family bonds⁵⁹. By addressing the biases in assuming a hierarchy of earth, the work of my thesis exhibition consciously discards the categorization of good, evil, cute, naïve and innocent, and instead represents a diverse related network between elementary forms of life, from the single-celled slime mold or short-lived fruit fly, to complex social animals such as dolphins, corvids, and humans.

⁵⁸ Serres, *Eyes*, 110

⁵⁹ Kluger, "Animal Minds: What Are They Thinking?", 27



Image 14: *Rat in Grass*, oil on canvas, 2018

A Painting Animal

Although time is a notion thought to be consistent between all species in their environment, Uexküll proposes an alternative theory; that the individual subject controls the time

of its environment. “While we said before, ‘There can be no living subject without time’” Uexküll states, “now we shall have to say, ‘Without a living subject, there can be no time.’”⁶³. As a corresponding concept, the time perceived in a painting may be different from the present timeframe of the spectator; an experience of time that is structured throughout the perception of layers, marks, textures and various visual analogies. In his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2014) American art critic Jonathan Crary describes the human tendency to disregard sleep in favour of uninterrupted monotonous stimulation through new information and communication technologies⁶⁴. Crary warns of the social and environmental consequences of engaging in “the glare of high intensity illumination in which one cannot make perceptual distinctions and orient oneself to the uninterrupted harshness of monotonous stimulation in which a larger range of responsive capacities are frozen or neutralized.”⁶⁵ Because of its slow nature, painting for me is a way to reinstate my relationship to memory, subjectivity, and a connection to the environment outside of the ubiquitous technological interfaces within our anthropocentric global infrastructure.

My methodology of working is a meditative process that involves a great deal of mental arrangements in forthcoming marks and layers. In creating this body of work, my attempt to disengage with my human affordances⁶⁶ remains a constant factor. One of my strategies to slow down the experience of a work is to stage a somewhat disorienting space in which the viewer

⁶³ Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*, 53

⁶⁴ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, (Verso, 2014): 69

⁶⁵ Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, 45

⁶⁶ A term created by American psychologist James J. Gibson. Affordances involve both the environment and the animal. For Gibson, an Affordance denotes the complete perception and all possible transactions between the individual and its environment. J. J. Gibson (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH), Boston.

may enter the painting from multiple directions and navigate through transparent layers, or around solid space. Furthermore, working on mesh fabric is a method of distancing the viewer from the traditional format of painting on stretched canvas, as well as articulating a symbolic space that relates to the parallel environments of other living animals. On the fabric, my marks are often applied as invisible lines due to the orientation of light in my studio, and the configuration of the mesh, which is slippery and difficult to negotiate when hung from its twelve-foot height. The scale of the work acknowledges the perception and physical proportions of the viewer. By layering the veils, recognizable elements elusively appear in the field of vision, oftentimes intermingling with imagery that is indicative of a distant ancestor's sense of physicality or an alternative rhythm of nature. In respect to the imperceptible worlds of other animals surrounding us, the work in this exhibition humbly suggests the observation of *ignoscere*, an openness to experiencing the work through our human umwelt with undisruptive empathy to allow the nonhuman animal's experience outside of being. The installation also facilitates a space that encourages the spectator to recognize their place and movements in relation to a diverse ecology of living animals. The spectator may follow a line of movement through the perception of various animal species rendered on canvas and in the veils to compose a complete ecosystem.

The goal in painting, American art critic Barry Schwabsky states, is no longer to establish 'autonomy' or 'autarchy', but to invent new trajectories wherein the boundaries are constantly being redrawn. In the most recent iteration of the contemporary painting survey book *Vitamin P3*, Schwabsky describes the current mood in contemporary art as a persistent disorganization of culture into separate spheres⁶⁷. Following this progression, the body of work

⁶⁷ Tom Melick, et al., *Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting*. (London: Phaidon, 2016): 10

for my thesis is created without fixed dimensions for a general cohesiveness. Instead, the varying applications, materials, formats, and scales of the work are created in consideration to subject matter of each individual piece. The work oscillates between the distinctive worlds of the individual animal species represented. For example, the painting *Eyes that See in the Dark* (2018), considers the impact of size to bodily experience. The 6'10" x 4'4" painting propped against the gallery wall like a full-length mirror, invites the viewer to adjust their perspective and enter a bat's environment, a disorienting perspective of isolated objects from an aerial nighttime vantage point. Whereas the painting *Life Within Life* (2018), intimately frames two insects by the dimensions of the canvas. This work reflects the physical connection between beings, and references the Daoist notion that the cosmos is an undivided whole in which we are all a part. The paintings present abstract intellectual content, at times an encounter of meditative calm, an experimental strangeness, or perhaps a representation of love, fear, or hunger. Individually, the paintings tell unique narratives. Installed together, the works exist as chapters of a holistic story about the world.



Image 15: *Life Within Life*, oil on canvas, 2018.

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