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Bringing out the animal in me: An examination of art and the individual within the Furry subculture

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Bringing Out the Animal in Me: An Examination of Art and the Individual within the Furry
Subculture

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Visual and Performing Arts
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Jacqueline Danielle Guerrier

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Art, Design, and Art History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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Acknowledgements

When I began the monumental endeavor of creating a Studio Art Senior Honors Project over a year ago, I really didn't know where to begin. Looking back now I can say I couldn't have chosen a better topic for my work. Like the Furry community, the individuals who helped me along the way are some of the most unique and incredible people I have ever met, let alone had the pleasure to work with.

Thank you Susan Zurbrigg for agreeing to be my advisor for this project. From my first class with you till now you have given me the courage and ability to pursue my passions. You always encouraged me to do what I wanted to do, and pushed me to go the extra mile.

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Introduction

Humanity has always shared a close relationship with animals for as long as we have roamed the Earth. The creation of hybrid forms of man and animal has taken place for as long as humanity has existed as a culture. The culture of ancient Egypt worshipped animal-headed deities such as Horus, Bastet, and Anubis. The human-headed, lion-bodied sphinx also sat as a guardian of the pyramids. Aztec culture worshipped winged snakes, which could take on human form, and jaguar-headed gods. Chinese deities were often animals gifted with supernatural abilities, including human speech. Native American tribes engaged in Spirit Quests to meet a Spirit Guide that would often take the form of animals.

Anthropomorphization, or to project human qualities onto non-human beings, has been and continues to be, a universal practice. Evidence can be found in the simple, sympathetic and loving bond between a domestic pet and its owner; or the complex hybridity of human and animalistic forms as a divine being. When humans look at animals it is all too easy to see bits of ourselves reflected in them. We form relationships with animals, letting them into our homes and hearts. We love them, and feel that they love us as well.

The bond between human and animals, and the anthropomorphization of animals, is the basis for the Furry subculture. Furrries are a small community of people of any race, sex, gender, age, or occupation who have a fondness for animals and enjoy human/animal hybrid forms. These animal-human hybrids are generally referred to as Anthros. The single most important aspect of a Furry member is that they consider themselves a part of the Furry community. Unlike

most other communities, there are no “gatekeepers.”¹ Once an individual refers to themselves as a Furry, the rest of the community agrees to welcome them to the fold. Today, the Furry community has an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 members.²

Individuals within Furry culture often create their own Anthro alter ego called a “Fursona” (Furry-persona) to represent themselves within the community. These Fursonas can be any species, or mix of species real or imagined, combined with a human form of any race, sex, gender, etc. The possibilities are infinite and all depend on how a person wishes to represent themselves in a completely customizable form. This form often changes with an individual’s tastes and can be expressed in a variety of renditions, as there is no limit to a member’s quantity of Fursonas. It is with these Anthro alter egos that a Furry will interact with the community both in person and online. These Fursonas can be a reflection of the person as an Anthro, they can have entirely different personalities, or they can be an idealization of what a person wants to be like (or any combination of the three).³ Oftentimes a Furry will introduce themselves as their chosen animal specie or species to provide a mental image of the individual as an Anthro; it also helps a Furry find other similar groups of Furrries to associate with (otters can find other otters, for example).

Furrries will also choose a name when interacting within community gatherings, such as conventions, and online. They may design a “Conbadge”, a visual artistic representation of a Fursona consisting of an image of the Fursona and a name, to be worn on a badge clip.

¹ “Gatekeeper” is a metaphor referring to individuals who control access to a group. A gatekeeper can control access to jobs, whether media is distributed, or even subcultures or communities. A Gatekeeper is who gets job applications, gallery applications, access to clubs or fraternities, or admission to a university, to give a few examples.

² Makyo, “Leadership in a Decentralized Subculture, 20 March 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/03/20/leadership-in-a-decentralized-subculture/> (Accessed 25 February 2014).

³ Makyo, “Species Selection and Character Creation, 7 August 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/08/07/species-selection-and-character-creation/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

“Fursuiting” is most direct method of embodying one’s Fursona through the wearing of a mascot-like suit bearing the Fursona’s likeness. These Fursuits are high-quality, one-of-a-kind art pieces that can be either bought or made. The average cost can estimate up to several thousand dollars, and require hundreds of hours of labor to create.

The primary means of Fursona representation within the culture is through various art forms. Art constitutes the backbone of the Furry community, as it is through artistic mediums that the Fursona can be best presented. Art provides an expansive interface that spans both the everyday and the fantasy-driven imaginings. This is all in the effort to make the Fursona reflect a person’s individual interests. Art is so important to Furies that many people take up sketching as a means to work on their own Fursonas. A full 46% of Furies identify themselves as visual artists.⁴

The Furry subculture can be characterized by its openness to many different lifestyles. Due to poor representation and backlash by the media, however, Furies often have to fight being labeled as “sexual deviants.” Members of the Furry community openly express their basic states, hobbies, sexual orientation, gender, and even their fetishes, all of which is equally welcome within Furry culture. Differences between individuals matter little to the community; all that matters is if you are a Furry. It is up to the individual Furry to find their place in this welcoming community. As such many Furies form tight-knit groups of friends, both online and in the real world, many participate in online groups devoted to more specific aspects of Furry and non-Furry life. Furry is a community where one is welcome to find their place and feel safe in it.

⁴ JM, “Service, 4 February 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/02/04/service/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

I first became aware of the Furry subculture through my interest in art. As a young girl in middle school I came across an artist who had made velociraptor-human hybrid characters. I was hooked. While I did not start identifying as a Furry till a few years ago, it was from that moment onward that I was captivated by the allure of these Anthro creatures.

Being a Furry and subsequently partaking in Furry culture has since become a huge part of my life. I love the community and as such want to give back to it as much as possible by clarifying misconceptions about the culture, which is so often misconstrued through mainstream media. I chose to focus my Honors research project on the Furry community for this specific reason. I wanted to display the diversity and innate creativity within the Furry community, while also examining myself through my simulated identities, my Fursonas.

To do so I decided to focus almost exclusively on a specific aspect of Furry life, the role of Fursonas and Conbadges for the art portion of my project, and reflect on my knowledge both of Furry culture and as a Furry myself, within the paper. To be considered a Furry having a Fursona supplies an alternate visual representation. Online, the Fursona represents the individual much like an avatar, while still maintaining a level of privacy of not being the physical individual. For many offline gatherings, such as parties or conventions, the Conbadge becomes more essential as it brings the Fursona out of the mind and into reality on a small scale and makes it visible to others. These are artifacts that highlight the difference between our characters and our own selves while yet inextricably linking the two.⁵ We are no longer simply a Furry username and Fursona, but also a person connected to these identities. We are visually represented as both identities simultaneously.

⁵ Makyo, "Convention Mystique, 21 December 2011," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2011/12/21/convention-mystique/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

The culture of Furry is vast, with its own meanings and aspects. In order to provide a more accurate illustration of my community I will first recount what history of the culture is known to the Furies; how the culture came to be, and it's place in the greater structure of human culture. I will then move on explain modern Furry culture and it's many facets, along with my own insights into the Furry community. Lastly, I will detail my own Furry origins and my art. My overview will by no means be all-inclusive or fully comprehensive, but will ideally clarify many of the murky details of what it is to be a Furry.⁶

⁶ I am not a representative of the Furry community as a whole. I do not claim that the information I divulge is the only correct information on Furry. I will speak only based on my research and my own personal experiences.

Chapter 1: An Overview of Furry History

“Furry is a natural regrowth of an important part of human culture, one that has accompanied us for a long time, and will continue to accompany us for a long time into the future.”⁷

While the Furry community experienced an explosion in popularity coinciding with increased accessibility to the Internet, its origins are much older. With roots in science fiction, the term “Furry” itself was coined in 1980 at the NorEasCon II World Science Fiction Convention in Boston (August 29–September 1), according to Furry historian Fred Patten.⁸ It was the Anthro art from Steve Gallacci’s *Albedo Anthropomorphics* that started a discussion of anthropomorphic characters in science fiction novels. This led to the formation of a discussion group that met at other science fiction and comic conventions to discuss Anthros in science fiction, comic art, and animation.⁹ Thus the Furry community was born.

It makes sense that the Furry community would develop around science fiction conventions, as this was the first time individuals came together within this type of setting to share in their passions, passions often seen as bizarre or weird by the outside world. In the past the gatherings would have been far smaller and far more limited. Science fiction fans initially shared a similar stigma to Furies, and were seen as being obsessive and possessing strange interests. This stigma lessened as science fiction-based media grew in popularity, and became more accepted due the megahit television show, *Star Trek*. Conventions have since become a

⁷ Quentin Julien, “Performance in Animal Costume: An Ancient Art, 28 February 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/02/28/performance-in-animal-costume-an-ancient-art-english/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁸ Fred Patten, “Retrospective: An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966–1996, 15 July 2012,” <http://www.flayrah.com/4117/retrospective-illustrated-chronology-furry-fandom-1966-1996>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

⁹ Fred Patten, “Retrospective: An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966–1996, 15 July 2012,” <http://www.flayrah.com/4117/retrospective-illustrated-chronology-furry-fandom-1966-1996>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

staple of fan gatherings, be they for science fiction, Japanese anime, comic books, videogames, or Furies.

This convention gathering was, however, not the birth of the Furry as a concept. Arguably one could say Furies have existed for as long as humans have taken an interest in animals, as all animal-lovers share some aspects with Furies. This could include any ancient person who worshipped animals, shamans who have a totem or spirit animal, or even an individual from the 1960s who simply liked cartoon animals. In short, any individual who feels some kinship with animals has the potential to be a Furry.

For the rest of the 1980s the Furry community continued to expand and gain new members both through small local gatherings and online through various MUCKs and MUDs¹⁰ It wouldn't be until 1990 that the first official Furry convention was held. This was ConFurence 1 in Costa Mesa, California with a convention membership was 145, and attendance was 130.¹¹ Furry conventions and gatherings would continue to slowly grow in number and frequency over the years to the present day. Today, there are over 40 annual Furry conventions held worldwide.¹² Anthrocon, held in Pittsburg has been the world's largest Furry convention for several years running, with Anthrocon 2012 boasting over 5,000 attendees.¹³

2005 saw the birth of the Furry Community's most prominent website, FurAffinity. This was a free-to-use, Furry-centric website devoted to user-created content, featuring means of creating an art gallery, written stories, or music. It exists fully outside of class standards for art,

¹⁰ MUCKs and MUDs were early text-based interactive chatrooms for people with specific interests. These could be customized to not only present a descriptive paragraph of one's Fursona, but the environment could be unique as well.

¹¹ Fred Patten, "Retrospective: An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966–1996, 15 July 2012," <http://www.flayrah.com/4117/retrospective-illustrated-chronology-furry-fandom-1966-1996>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

¹² N/A, "List of Furry Convention Resources," http://en.wikifur.com/wiki/List_of_furry_convention_resources. (Accessed 31 March 2014)

¹³ Douglas Muth, "What Anthrocon is all About, 28 March 2006," <http://www.anthrocon.org/about>. (Accessed 25 March 2014).

instead focusing specifically on the generation of anthropomorphic art of any shape, quality, and content.¹⁴ Since its creation FurAffinity (or just FA) has gained approximately 750,000¹⁵ users and remains the most popular Furry website in the world.¹⁶

As Furry is a relatively young subculture, and many more participate in, rather than examine the culture, the act of detailing the history of Furry is largely left undone. Despite this, there have been recent endeavors to elaborate and critically examine Furry history within the last century. As of February 2014 a new term has been coined on the Internet: Paleofur. The term uses the prefix paleo- meaning “old” or “ancient” to describe pre-1980s Furrries, or individuals with Furry characteristics.¹⁷ This is fascinating, as no one has really attempted to find instances of pre-1980s Furrries in history; it has always been assumed by the Furry community that Furrries have always existed in some shape or form and it’s been left at that. For the first time the Furry community is starting to show interest in recovering their past. As stated before, these Paleofurs are not Furrries in the modern sense, but they do exhibit some distinctly Furry tendencies.

Winston Churchill is reported to have enjoyed dressing up in a gorilla suit to entertain children (early Fursuiting).¹⁸ He and his wife Clementine also had a fondness for pet names. Winston’s names included “Pug,” “Amber Pug,” and finally, “Pig.”¹⁹ Throughout their marriage Winston’s

¹⁴ Pierre Bordieu’s sociological report *La Distinction* states that aesthetic taste in society are dictated by a ruling class, and that even the tastes of lower classes exist only in relation to those of the higher class. Furry rejects this, creating art that is specifically for Furrries, and not for any class.

¹⁵ There is some dispute as the accuracy of the number of users (750,000) since many individuals own one or more accounts on FA. For example a main account and a side-account used for Fursuiting. Also if a user wants a new username, they have to make a whole new account. Both of these examples could skew the official number, but this is the most accurate information available.

¹⁶ N/A, “Info,” <https://twitter.com/furaffinity>. (Accessed 25 March 2014).

¹⁷ Rabbit, “Paleofurs: The Anthropomorphic Fans of the Past, 21 February 2014,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2014/02/21/paleofurs-the-anthropomorphic-fans-of-the-past/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

¹⁸ Arthur Simon, “The Dream,” *The Finest Hour* 1, no.58, 1987-88.

¹⁹ C. Brian Kelly, *Best Little Stories from the Life and Times of Winston Churchill*, (Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing, 2008), 93-94.

name for his wife was “Kat,” a name she quite enjoyed.²⁰ Little drawings of cats adorn their many correspondences.²¹ Winston and Clementine often extended their pet names into actual roleplaying, describing the actions of their dog and cat selves through letters.²² What’s more, they gave names to their children, with the eldest earning the nickname “Puppy Kitten.”²³ Recent findings also cite Osamu Tezuka, the creator of anime classics such as *Astro Boy* and *Kimba the White Lion*, as a Paleofur. A recent finding of Tezuka’s stash of artworks reveals a large collection of Anthro mouse girls drawn in pinup poses.²⁴ Between these artworks and his already heavily laden animal anime, it is clear he had at least some inclinations towards Furry interests. Dan DeCarlo, creator of *Josie and the Pussycats*, *Sabrina*, *the Teenage Witch*, while not quite displaying anything Furry within his creations (save for maybe Salem, the talking cat), he and his wife were diehard friends of the Furry community.²⁵ During their lifetimes they attended countless Furry conventions as Guests of Honor. When Josie DeCarlo passed away in 2012, many Furies mourned her at Anthrocon, making and presenting videos about her life, and giving eulogies.

These are examples of Furry behavior that were lost to history and only recently been recognized as Furry. The Paleofur endeavor is just getting started, but if it is successful it could create the most comprehensive overview of furry history to date. The recovery and creation of a

²⁰ N/A, “Churchill and His Personal Life,” <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/myths/churchill-trivia/539-personal-life/>. (Accessed 5 April 2014).

²¹ William Manchester and Paul Reid, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Defender of the Realm 1940-1965*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1976) 18.

²² Rabbit, “Paleofurs: The Anthropomorphic Fans of the Past, 21 February 2014,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2014/02/21/paleofurs-the-anthropomorphic-fans-of-the-past/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

²³ Kelly, 94.

²⁴ Casey Baseel, “Daughter of Osamu Tezuka, God of Manga, discovers his stash of hand-drawn sexy mouse artwork, 29 March 2014,” <http://en.rocketnews24.com/2014/03/29/daughter-of-osamu-tezuka-god-of-manga-discovers-his-stash-of-hand-drawn-sexy-mouse-artwork/>. (Accessed 2 March 2014).

²⁵ Staeger, Rob and Wayne Suburban. “Invasion of the Furies, 26 July 2001.” <http://www.furryfandom.info/furies.htm>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

formalized history for the Furry community will undoubtedly become a cherished resource for all Furies, and perhaps serve as a rite of passage for the community to become a recognized subculture.

Chapter 2: The Modern Furry

“No one version of any community is going to fit any person 100% given that a subculture is made up of *at least* as many versions as there are members.”²⁶

Nothing is so true as the above statement when it comes to the Furry community. Everyone is able to find their own niche within it. The Furry community is one that is very tightly knit and insular to the outside world. Despite this, it is not a community characterized by exclusivity and secrecy. While Furrries speak openly about the community to many non-Furry acquaintances, many specifics remain unknown to the general populace due to endless accounts of misrepresentation in mainstream media. As a result, many Furrries refuse to talk to reporters, or go on television shows. I shall seek to shed some light on the community here, from the perspective of a Furry, myself.

Furry culture has successfully transitioned out of its First Wave, and into the Second Wave. The First Wave defined the Furry community, with its birth as an offshoot of the science-fiction fandom and its immediate production of original anthropomorphic content. Furrries explored the concept of what “being” a Furry meant, and set the stage for the discussion of Furry as a lifestyle, and Furry as a hobby, or fan group. Now in the Second Wave, Furrries are still considering what it means to be a Furry, but are also beginning to consider the culture and values of the community.²⁷

Since its official inception in 1980, Furry thrives in the modern day. There are many definitions that embody the word “Furry.” While I cannot fully define the word representative of the culture in its entirety, I will attempt to cover the most common approaches. It should first be

²⁶ Makyo, “Directions, 12 February 2014,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2014/02/12/directions/>. (Accessed 17 February 2014).

²⁷ JM, “The Second Wave of Furry, 3 December 2012,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/12/03/the-second-wave-of-furry/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

noted, however that Furry is a fairly post-structural culture. While I can define categories for the sake of definition and providing of context, they are not permanent, and can change as the culture grows and inevitably evolves, much in the way Feminism has over the years.

Furry can be a lifestyle, a culture to enjoy and partake in wholeheartedly. For them the Fursona is a representation of themselves (one which they might feel more attached to than their own human body). They may own a Fursuit (or multiple), commission Furry art, attend Furry gatherings, and adorn their home with Furry paraphernalia. For the lifestyler, Furry is intertwined with their life just as much as any sexual orientation, gender, religion, political affiliation, or job could be. For others it is just a hobby, or a mild interest; something to occasionally indulge in online. The hobbyist might have a Fursona as an online avatar, rather than as a comprehensive representation of themselves. They may or may not have Furry art, or a Fursuit, or go to Furry Cons. These individuals might even not consider themselves Furry at all, and perhaps refer to themselves as an Anthro Enthusiast, for example.²⁸ For them participation in the community is casual.

To non-Furs, definitions for the word “Furry” are equally varied, if not more so. Their definitions tend to hinge on their awareness of the Furry community. Individuals who have Furry acquaintances or have investigated the meaning of the word “Furry” on their own generally have a more positive outlook on Furrries. They tend to either understand what the Furry community is, or they at least liken it to fandoms like the Trekkies or the more recent Bronies.²⁹

If an individual has only passing knowledge of Furrries, usually gleaned from mainstream media resources, their perception is more likely to be negative. For over a decade mainstream

²⁸ Furrries will generally accept whatever term someone wants to use to describe themselves in relation to the community. An Anthro enthusiast, for example, will be accepted and referred to as an Anthro enthusiast.

²⁹ Trekkies are fans of *Star Trek*, Bronies are fans of *My Little Pony*. “Fandom” is the combination of the word *fan* and the suffix *-dom*, as in *kingdom*. This refers to a group of people who share and have camaraderie with those who have common interests.

media, and the vast majority of non-Furs who have gained their awareness of Furry through this media, have been heavily influenced by a single *Vanity Fair* article written by George Gurley in 2001 titled “Pleasures of the Fur.” The article revolves around the interviews he conducted with Furies attending Midwest FurFest. While the article does divulge some accurate information about Furry culture, such as it being male dominated, the article diverges into much darker, unrelated places, and is largely inaccurate. What’s more, Gurley maintains a tone of disgust and condescension throughout the entire piece, making it difficult to read at best, and revolting at worst.

Gurley begins with the time-honored description of Furies (we like animals and cartoons) and spirals downward from there, most notably speaking with a now infamous individual to the Furry community as a whole. This individual, Fox Wolfie Galen, is an avid Furry plushophile³⁰ who also experimented with bestiality in his younger years, and even went so far as to attempt to solicit sex with Gurley before the interview concluded.³¹ Gurley also interviewed a sex researcher, Katherine Gates, who spoke candidly about an outlawed form of pornography called crushing, which features large women crushing small animals, usually bugs or worms.³² In her book Gates documented strange sex practices, including the sexual aspect plushophilia (for this she also interviewed Fox Wolfie Galen).

The worst part of Gurley’s article isn’t that he diverts from covering the FurFest to interview people on these dark sexual practices--- it’s that he meshes these things together and treats plushophilia, bestiality, crushing, and rampant sexuality as the norm for Furry culture.

³⁰ Plushophiles are individuals who have an attraction to stuffed animals. This can be either non-sexual or sexual (this aspect is referred to as a paraphilia, or a fetish).

³¹ George Gurley, “Pleasures of the Fur,” *Vanity Fair*, March 2001.

³² George Gurley, “Pleasures of the Fur,” *Vanity Fair*, March 2001.

Even though there are undoubtedly individuals within Furry who participate in these practices, they are by far in the minority. Gurley goes out of his way to depict almost every aspect of Furry culture as sexual in nature.

Gurley's interpretation of Furry as a reviled sexual culture was latched onto by sensationalist media, and also created many stereotypes of Furrries for non-Furs. As this article gained popularity (and infamy from Furrries) television shows began to feature episodes based around Furry, and its perceived deviant sexual culture. An episode of *C.S.I* featured the murder of a Furry, and depicted scenes of "Furry" activities, namely an orgy, complete with laughably bad Fursuits. The reality television show *My Weird Obsession* had a similar segment on Furry, which was followed by a segment on a woman who compulsively eats couches.

In the modern day the term "Furry" is an unfamiliar concept to the majority of non-Furry individuals. Furry has lessened as a salacious topic in recent years as more and more people meet Furrries and realize the media representation is almost wholly inaccurate. It no longer garners looks of suspicion and negative stigma and is instead treated much like any other fandom.

In reality Furry is anything but a fandom. Fandoms, as a rule, are groups of people who share a common interest. These interests are almost exclusively based around entertainment media such as television shows, videogames, movies, comics, books so on and so forth. These fandoms rely on a company or individual to create new official content, or else that fandom would likely cease to exist. Furry, however, has no company or central media of interest. There

is no Furry canon to center the community around.³³ Rather, Furry is centered on an idea, a concept. It is the Furrries themselves who perpetuate the culture and create new content.

As Furry has no central leadership or media, there are also no real qualifications for what makes a Furry a Furry. Most will say the definition of Furry is “someone who likes animals, cartoon creatures, or animal-human hybrids, and usually participate in the Furry community.” A more refined definition perhaps is “Furry is a group of people who enjoy the connection between man and animal embodied in the concept of anthropomorphism.”³⁴ Really at the end of the day, however, a Furry is anyone who says they are a Furry.

Furry is better described as a culture; a culture born out of 1980s anime and science fiction, but it has since grown into a unique, self-sustaining entity. It could be that since its origins were already on the fringes of a fairly ostracized group of people early Furrries found it easy to ignore the things that would normally drive a wedge between people, and instead focus on what brought them together: the concept of Furry. As such the Furry community is one of great diversity and interconnectivity. It is a social community meant to be experienced with others.³⁵ Hemms, a fox guest contributor to the Furry meta-website [adjective][species] writes:

It immediately destroyed the social barriers that sometimes cripple the rest of the world. It normalized homosexuality; it legitimizes all other alternative sexualities; it liberated sexuality in general; obliterated the gender binary; it removed race as a playing factor to someone's acceptance; mixed far-flung lifestyles; made class unimportant, and; above all, made self-expression take importance over group conformity.³⁶

³³ JM, “The Structure of Furry, 9 December 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/12/09/the-structure-of-furry/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

³⁴ Makyo, “Participation Mystique 2—On Words, 8 February 2012,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/02/08/participation-mystique-2-on-words/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

³⁵ Makyo, “Interconnectivity, 22 February 2012,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/02/22/interconnectivity/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

³⁶ Hemms, “The Furry Dream, 6 March 2014,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2014/03/06/the-furry-dream/#more-1740> (Accessed 23 March 2014).

Furry considers self-expression and personal uniqueness paramount above all else. Without creativity there would be no Furry community. No Fursonas, Fursuits, Conbadges, or Furry art forms would exist. An entire subculture would have never been created. The Furry community exists as a means for people to safely experiment and find pathways around the “norms” of society, while allowing for their creativity to flourish.

Despite all of the aforementioned fascinating qualities the Furry community contains, until recently there had been very few actual outside studies done on Furry. This could be for several reasons. It could be so few studies have been conducted because Furry is seen as a fandom, and thus not taken seriously enough for research. It could be because Furies generally avoid the media, and would likely also avoid anyone wishing to complete a study on the Furry community. Lastly it is possible researchers are simply unaware of the existence of the Furry community.

This is a trend that is slowly changing. In 2003 the first incarnation of the “Furry Survey”, developed by Alex Osaki, circulated through various Furry Usenet groups and message boards.³⁷ It was a survey for which participation was voluntary. The only requirements were to be of eighteen years of age or older and to consider yourself a Furry. It compiled data from Furies in the form of statistics, something that has since become a staple of all subsequent surveys on Furry culture.

Today the Furry Survey has evolved into the Furrypoll, which exists online in a 32-question, fully anonymous format designed to provide statistics on Furry through gender, race, sexuality, occupation, age, and interests, etc. with results based on average, from about 7000

³⁷ N/A, “About,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/about/> (Accessed 26 February 2014).

participants a year.³⁸ After the completion of the 2008 Furry Survey, the results were compiled into a document titled “The State of the Fandom.”

There have also been a few studies completed outside of the Furry community, the first of which (and the most referenced) is “Furries From A to Z: Anthropomorphism to Zoomorphism” by Dr. Kathleen Gerbasi, a social psychologist from the University of Rochester. Beginning in 2006 Gerbasi surveyed individuals at each annual Anthrocon. At first the community did not particularly welcome her research. This is likely a result of the same avoidance many Furies have to mainstream media. It was only with the help of Dr. Samuel Conway, or as he is better known Uncle Kage, the chairman of Anthrocon, that she was even allowed to enter Anthrocon.³⁹ Uncle Kage would later state that he fully expected no Furies would participate in her survey.⁴⁰

Thankfully for the sake of Dr. Gerbasi’s research, he was proven wrong. In the end 246 individuals participated in her study. The study itself was directly related to the stereotypes presented by George Gurley in “Pleasures of the Fur.” Gerbasi wanted to prove or disprove some of the stereotypes the author cited. According to Gurley, Furies are mostly bearded, gay men who wear glasses. They like science fiction and work in computer science fields. They also liked cartoons as kids, likely had fox or wolf Fursonas, and wore Fursuits.⁴¹

Gerbasi’s research confirmed that 86% of Furies are male, did watch a significant amount of cartoons as a child, and enjoyed science fiction. She proved that the wearing of Fursuits, having a fox or wolf Fursona, being employed in computer science fields, having a beard and/or glasses, and being homosexual, were either only somewhat accurate or completely

³⁸Alex Osaki, “Furry Poll Results: 2008 Edition, 15 January 2009,”

http://www.klisoura.com/ot_furrysurvey2008.php. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

³⁹ This is unsurprising. Most Furry conventions have an outright ban on outside media, including news media and journalists. Anthrocon does sometimes give permission for a journalist to enter the con, but they must be escorted by two staff members.

⁴⁰ Gerbasi, Kathleen Nicholas Paolone, Justin Higner, Laura Scaletta, Penny Bernstein, Samuel Conway, Adam Privitera, “Furries From A to Z (Anthropomorphism to Zoomorphism),” *Society & Animals* 3 no.3: 197-222, 6.

⁴¹ Gerbasi, 5.

inaccurate.⁴² More recent results from the Furrypoll reflect Gerbasi's findings on homosexuality, stating that 22% of Furies are gay, and there seem to be more Furies falling into the bisexuality category.⁴³

Aside from polling Furies based on Gurley's stereotypes, she also presented questions pertaining to the repeated statement that the individuals Gurley interviewed felt they were the animals they chose as their Fursona.⁴⁴ These two questions were "Do you consider yourself less than 100% human?" and "If you could become 0% human, would you?". Of the individuals polled, 46.3% said they felt less than 100% human, and 40.8% answered they would become 0% human if presented with the choice.⁴⁵ Through these questions and their results Gerbasi developed the concept she tentatively dubbed "Species Identity Disorder." It describes some individuals as feeling "not completely human" or "a member of the wrong species."⁴⁶ Some Furies feel this so much so that they feel physical dysphoria.⁴⁷ This has been a topic of much debate over the years, less for its actual validity, and more for the term itself. There has yet to be further research into Species Identity Disorder, but many individuals dislike the term, because it uses the term "disorder" indicating there is something wrong.⁴⁸ There is also debate about

⁴² Gerbasi, 11-14.

⁴³ JM, "Only 22% of Furies are Gay, 5 August 2013," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/08/05/only-22-of-furies-are-gay/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁴⁴ This is likely on an emotional or spiritual level. This is not to be confused with Otherkin or Therians, though there are some similarities. Definitions for Otherkin and Therians vary, but generally these are individuals who feel they are part animal, or some other being, or were a different non-human being in a past life and still feel connection to this former being. For most it is simply an emotional or spiritual connection, but there are individuals who claim to feel as though they really are these other creatures, or get "phantom feelings" from non-human limbs.

⁴⁵ Gerbasi, 18.

⁴⁶ Gerbasi, 25-26.

⁴⁷ Physical dysphoria is a condition most often felt by trans* individuals. It is a feeling of being uncomfortable with your physical body to the point of distress. This dysphoria stems from one's image of themselves and their physical bodies not matching.

⁴⁸ Courtney Plante, "Furry Research: A Response from the IARP, 23 May 2013," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/05/23/furry-research-a-response-from-the-iarp/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

whether or not its similarity to Gender Identity Disorder is positive or negative.⁴⁹ Many feel that the hypothetical and yet untested nature of Species Identity Disorder takes away from the validity and importance of Gender Identity Disorder. Both Furies and the scientific community will need to address these discrepancies in the future in order for Species Identity Disorder to be tested and gain legitimacy.

Despite this ongoing debate, the concept of Species Identity Disorder adds validity to a recent discussion about if Furry should be considered a Queer identity.⁵⁰ The rationale behind this is, because of the Furry community's affinity for animals, and the desire to be seen as animal-human hybrids, shows that Furies diverge from the traditional species paradigm, much in the same way that Gender Queer individuals diverge from the gender binary.⁵¹ As JM states, "We're all different, but we all suffer from the same source of discrimination; we all cross, in one way or another, a societal boundary that is arbitrarily taboo."⁵² This statement also adds credence to the Furry-as-queer argument since Queer theory defines queer not only as a state of transition and becoming who you want to be, but also because furry is both marginalized and stigmatized, but accepts all components of itself as a culture.

Three years ago the creators of the Furry Survey launched a series of websites under the hub website [*adjective*][*species*]. This is a meta-Furry source that seeks to discuss and understand the many facets of being a Furry, and participating in the Furry community. The contributors come from all walks of life and create content about everything from good Furry

⁴⁹ Gender Identity Disorder is defined as the conflict between a person's physical sex, and the gender they identify as.

⁵⁰ Queer is the term used to describe any individual who is outside traditional gender, sexuality, or as some argue, species.

⁵¹ JM, "Furry as a Queer Identity, 14 October 2013," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/10/14/furry-as-a-queer-identity/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁵² JM, "Furry as a Queer Identity, 14 October 2013," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/10/14/furry-as-a-queer-identity/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

movies to watch, to Furry folklore and mythology, to contemplating Furry literature (*Gulliver's Travels* is a favorite),⁵³ to the discussion of recent Furry events. This is also the same website that sparked the Paleofur discussion mentioned earlier. Though *[a]/[s]* is only a couple of years old, it has already become the definitive resource for anyone who wants to be educated on the state of the Furry community.

Aside from participation in the Furry community online, a large part of Furry culture is the convention.⁵⁴ These Furry conventions are ostensibly a culture of their own. This feeling is especially strong when at a large convention that takes over an entire hotel or convention center; it's like stepping into another world.⁵⁵ Here Furrries come together to enjoy each other and revel in being a part of the community for a weekend. Conventions will host all sorts of events that cater to Furrries. There are panels run by both con attendees and Guests of Honor alike. These can be about anything Furry. There are usually panels relating to the convention's theme⁵⁶, panels run by Guests of Honor (usually focusing on their work), and How-to panels for everything from Fursuiting to art to puppeteering. Many Furry cons host a dance competition or even a nightly rave. The Vendor room, Artist Alley, and Art Auction become a hotspot for the buying and selling of Furry paraphernalia. Furry movies are viewed, music concerts are held, comedy acts are put on, and even in some cases, a puppet show. Two of the most attended events for Anthrocon is *2's Rant* and *Uncle Kage's Story Hour*. 2 is a gryphon and perhaps the closest thing

⁵³ JM, "Horses and Houyhnhnms, 30 January 2012," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/01/30/horses-and-houyhnhnms/>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

⁵⁴ Or "con" for short.

⁵⁵ JM, "Cons & PCD: You Can't Go Home Again, 26 November 2012," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/11/26/cons-pcd-you-cant-go-home-again/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁵⁶ Some conventions don't have a theme, but many Furry cons try to keep a changing theme so there can be specialty panels every year. For example Anthrocon 2012's theme was "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Anthrocon 2013 had the theme of Motorsports, and Anthrocon 2014 with focus on Secret Societies.

the Furry community has to a celebrity. 2, or Matthew Davis, made a name for himself on the internet by making a series of rants which can be listened to on his website. These rants span a variety of accessible topics that are easily relatable to anyone Furry or otherwise. It goes without saying though that Furrries make up a large part of his dedicated listener base. At Furry conventions he usually does a rant, in which he'll talk a stream of consciousness pertaining to his experiences in Furry. During *Uncle Kage's Story Hour* the man himself relaxes on stage in his beloved wicker chair and, while drinking a glass of wine, retells his stories of experiences at other conventions, and his experiences as Anthrocon Chairman. These tales vary in theme from sharing a delightful tale of how an elderly woman working for call desk at the Westin Hotel (the hotel affiliated with Anthrocon) called him to thank him personally for "bringing the Furrries to town" to a hilarious recounting the many foibles of running Anthrocon. While these stories may or may not be funny, Uncle Kage's wit and delivery turns each tale into comedic gold. Despite Furry culture not having much of a compiled history, both of these events, which focus around storytelling, indicates that Furrries have a keen interest in the recounting of Furry experiences. We find these stories both funny and heartening. 2 and Uncle Kage are also talented comedians, being able to mesh wisdom and insight with wry wit and humor.

Along with the normal Art Auction a Charity Auction also takes place. For this auction artists donate their works of art, and the proceeds go entirely to the convention's animal charity.⁵⁷ Furrries donate very heavily to these charities, both through the Charity Auction and through normal monetary donations. Between the years 1999 and 2009 Furrries donated \$490,000

⁵⁷ For example, Anthrocon 2013's charity was *Equine Angels*, a horse rescue based in Pennsylvania. The charity changes every year.

to animal charities through conventions alone.⁵⁸ [Adjective][species] states that in 2012 Furry charity donations broke \$1,000,000.⁵⁹

There are also informal, shared-interest Meet-n-Greets similar to panels for dedicated *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* fans. In Furry these gatherings are usually organized by what type of animal your Fursona is. Avians will have their own Meet-n-Greet, as will Felines. Canines make up such a large percentage of the Furry community that they often split into smaller Meet-N-Greets, like one specifically for Wolves or Foxes. Recently Huskies and German Shepherds have gained a lot of popularity, so they have their own combined Meet-n-Greet as well.

While there is a lot of overlap between a Furry convention and a more mainstream fandom convention, one event stands out as being uniquely Furry. This would be the Fursuit Parade. For this event all convention attendees who Fursuit line up and walk around the convention center while wearing their beloved suit. This is a chance to show off these often multi-thousand dollar costumes. The Fursuit Parade is easily one of the most popular and fun events of the convention. Everyone stops what they're doing and comes to see the Fursuiters. Anthrocon's Fursuit Parade easily has one thousand participants (out of a total con attendance of 5,000).

As previously stated, most Furry conventions prohibit journalists and mainstream media from entering. In fact, entry to most conventions is granted only to those who pay a registration fee. Anthrocon, in contrast, breaks both of these general rules. Anthrocon will allow journalists and news media under specific guidelines (as previously mentioned). This con also has a startlingly good rapport with the populace of Pittsburgh, the city con calls home. Uncle Kage

⁵⁸ Laurence Parry, "2009 charity donations down; \$490,000 raised this decade, 10 January 2010," <http://www.flayrah.com/2869/2009-charity-donations-down-490000-raised-decade>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

⁵⁹ Makyō, "On Giving, 19 December 2012," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/12/19/on-giving/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

often tells stories of how complete strangers will thank him for “bringing the Furrries to town”. Unlike many other cities that host cons, Pittsburgh loves the Furrries. Anthrocon, according to Uncle Kage, injects about 2.5 million dollars into the local economy in just a single weekend.⁶⁰ Many local businesses support the convention heavily, giving special discounts to con members and hosting special events. Bars host “Furry Happy Hours” during which there are special discounts on drinks and food. These are very popular and it is quite common to see Fursuiters enjoying a martini (with the aid of a straw, of course). Furnando’s, a local sandwich shop, owes its entire existence to Anthrocon Furrries. This shop has become a quintessential part of Anthrocon, serving food to the Furrries in “dog bowl specials” (and yes, they do come in dog bowls). When Furnando’s was ready to go out of business right before Anthrocon 2012, the Furrries donated \$21,000 to keep Furnando’s open.⁶¹ Even though the business did end up closing, it created a special deal with the new owners to reopen Furnando’s every year, just for Anthrocon. According to many Pittsburgh citizens, they just like seeing the Furrries having fun. Given the city’s general interest and enjoyment of the Furrries being in town, Anthrocon opens its doors to the public specifically for the public to come and watch the Fursuit Parade, making it an even more acclaimed event.

Furry is an amazingly diverse community. It brings together individuals from all walks of life, and does its best to accept everyone. Furrries in general avoid erasure of any group of people, even if an individual’s interests don’t quite match up with the interests of the group as a whole. As previously stated, despite being a largely inaccurate article, “Pleasures of the Fur” did feature

⁶⁰ Laurence Parry, "Anthrocon 2007 draws thousands to Pittsburgh for furry weekend, 17 July 2007," http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Anthrocon_2007_draws_thousands_to_Pittsburgh_for_furry_weekend. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

⁶¹ Douglas Muth, “Furnando’s video and picture thread, 21 April 2012,” <http://www.anthrocon.org/node/7945/furnando-video-and-picture-thread>. (Accessed 31 March 2014).

some elements present in the Furry community (no matter how large or small these elements might be). Plushophilia and Zoophilia both make up a not-so-small group in the Furry community.⁶² According to recent statistics from the Furrypoll, 8% of Furies identify as plushophiles,⁶³ and 13-18% self-identify as zoophiles.⁶⁴ While not every Furry accepts or even understands either group, they are both not-insignificant parts of the Furry community.⁶⁵ [Adjective][species] has recently made an effort to increase awareness and education of zoophiles and plushophiles within the Furry community, stating that even if one does not agree with these lifestyles, they are a part of the Furry community and therefore should not be ignored. As a group of individuals who have stood against castigation by mainstream media for decades, every group within Furry deserves acknowledgement by their Furry counterparts. As such Furry accepts its many sexualities and sexual proclivities.

In this same vein, Furry also makes a point to be aware of disability within the community. Disability is something to not be ignorant of, but not focus on. As Bloocat states, “...I think people just need to disregard the disability/wheelchair. Think of it as meeting a person, rather than a disabled person.”⁶⁶ Many Furry events go the extra distance in acknowledging and aiding those with disabilities. For example, Anthrocon 2013 had two sign language translators for major speaking events, namely 2’s Rant and Uncle Kage’s Story Hour (both mainstage events in which these two tell comedic stories). For me this was remarkable in and of itself, as in

⁶² See footnote 28 for a definition of Plushophilia. Zoophiles are individuals who have an attraction to animals.

⁶³ JM, “Love for an Inanimate Object, 11 March 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/03/11/love-for-an-inanimate-object/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁶⁴ JM, “Why Zoophilia is a Furry Issue, 14 January 2013,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2013/01/14/why-zoophilia-is-a-furry-issue/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁶⁵ It is worth explaining there that no every plushophile or zoophile is interested in these things in a sexual way (paraphilia, sexual fetish), but many are. It should also be noted that there is a difference between being a zoophile, and practicing bestiality, which is animal abuse.

⁶⁶ JM, “Furies with Physical Disabilities, 5 November 2012,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/11/05/furies-with-physical-disabilities/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

my many years of con attendance, I have never seen ASL translators, or even the recognition of the need for such translators at a convention. As a hearing-impaired person seeing these translators working so tirelessly to convey what was going on (and being delighted in the female translator's sassiness in her signing), gave me pause for thought. Because my disability is minor—wearing a hearing aid returns my hearing to normal—I often forget that I actually am disabled. It then dawned on me just how good it felt to know that the largest Furry con in the world was not only acknowledging a disability, but actively working to help those individuals better enjoy themselves at the con. It was incredible. The other con attendees seemed delighted by the presence of these translators as well, so I imagine they will now be returning to Anthrocon every year. I can only hope that other conventions follow suit.

Aside from its primary function of being about animals, it also operates largely off of the concept of joy and fun. Furies, I have learned, almost never take themselves seriously. We know we're often the butt of jokes, and we often tend to use that to our advantage. We will often be the first to make fun of ourselves. When an individual joins the Furry community they tend to choose a Furry name and a Fursona animal. These names and animals can be anything, but oftentimes these names and Fursonas are chosen for silly or self-deprecating reasons. For example, my boyfriend (or mate within the Furry community) Woolf is a fennec fox. He intentionally chose the name "Woolf" because of its normative nature (a true rarity in the Furry community) but it is also funny because he is not a wolf. I chose the Furry name "Whisski" (with an alternate spelling from the actual alcoholic beverage *whisky*) because my parents named me Jacqueline Danielle, the feminine of Jack Daniels. I once had a boyfriend who wanted to be a lion Furry because "male lions are lazy, and I am lazy." Frost the husky chose a husky because

“they’re like the frat boys of the animal world.” Sometimes ironic reasons for Fursona species and Furry names create stereotypes. For example, because foxes in folklore and cartoons are often seen as sultry and sexual, fox Furies are also joked about as being hypersexual. Huskies and skunks are “the new foxes” (more so in that they are very popular for Fursonas and less about the promiscuity) and German Shepherd Furies are almost guaranteed to be in the military or police force (this is reflected by German Shepherd dogs working in these fields as K-9 units, also German Shepherds are seen largely as quintessential military dogs). Furies with mythical creatures for Fursonas, such as dragons, gryphons, and unicorns, are seen as individuals who want to be seen as so unique and special a real species of animal isn’t good enough for them.

Whether any of these stereotypes have any basis in the animal kingdom or within Furry itself, we will happily joke about them. We are all about having fun, and if that means joking about ourselves, then we will be happy to do so.

Fursuits bring a Fursona to life, and also allows the wearer to become an entertainer. Many Fursuiters will adopt an entirely different personality while wearing a Fursuit, to better showcase their character. They will entertain strangers and children with their antics. Despite being fully encased in a faux fur and polyester suit with an incredibly limited visual range, many will Fursuit for hours on end, kept going by adrenaline and the high “creating magic”. This magic, is the joy of bringing a character, a Fursona to life on a very real scale. Children will believe you are, in fact, a giant talking puppy for them to play with. A Fursuiter is a living illusion, making Anthro’s real. As such one major taboo exists in Fursuiting—never remove your head. This “ruins the magic,” in the sense that, when the Fursuit head is taken off and a normal person is revealed, it ruins the illusion (and can potentially really frighten kids, whose suspension of reality has been shattered). I can say from experience that after a while you no longer notice

the sweat or your own personal exhaustion, and instead just focus on enjoying yourself in the moment. Even for those who don't use Fursuiting as a means of entertainment and instead wear a Fursuit just to look like their Fursona, it is still a transformative experience. The act of putting on a costume to assume a different appearance can make the wearer behave differently to better fit this new physical self.⁶⁷ Or, as Rabbit best explains,

For Fursuits are magical, you know. Anyone who's ever worn one in public understands this, all the way to the innermost depths of their soul. The human mind is built to function via the complex interaction of symbols, and few objects carry more symbolic weight than a Fursuit. Putting one on messes with your head—and those of others—by eliminating or masking you and how you fit in. Your hairstyle, your clothing, your posture, your gait...even your face, the most important identifier of all, is whisked away. No one can even tell if you're male or female. All the social markers so vital to everyday hominid life are tossed to the winds...⁶⁸

Regardless of whether we act differently or not, we become our Fursonas. We become those animal-human hybrid forms. We become something else.

It is easy to see why Furry is so interesting and diverse, and possibly why it is also so misunderstood. Furrries are interested in a thing many people have trouble understanding. Furry is a community and culture based around a concept, rather than a specific show or other entertainment media. Though this is by no means a comprehensive analysis of Furry culture, I feel that I have sufficiently introduced and described Furry enough to move on to my own personal experiences and art pertaining to Furry culture.

⁶⁷ Makyo, "Dressing Up, 14 December 2011," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2011/12/14/dressing-up/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

⁶⁸ Rabbit, "Fursuit Magic, 12 October 2012," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2012/10/12/fursuit-magic/>. (Accessed 25 February 2014).

Chapter 3: A Reflection on Furry through Experiences and Art

“What exactly are these people fans of? Comics? Animation?” –Rob Paulsen
“Actually, they’re fans of each other.” – Mark Evanier⁶⁹

Furry has become a huge part of my life and is the community I feel the most dedicated to. This has encouraged me to talk frankly about my story in a language that reflects a more personal lens. Unlike many others who stumbled upon the Furry community, when I first came across the concept of Furry while looking through online art galleries, I did not leap headfirst into the community. For many years I remained at the farthest fringes of the group, enjoying the art and making friends who identified fully as Furriers, though I, myself, did not fully participate. I was, at the time, scared of the stigma of the Furry community, and scared that my friends and family would not accept my interests.

Despite not identifying as a Furry right away, I certainly had many of the characteristics of one. Many of my earliest memories and interests revolved around animals. Almost all the toys from my early childhood were animals; I would even draw animals on wood which my father would jigsaw them out for me, so I could create my own creatures with a higher accuracy level for what I wanted. I vividly remember being fixated on parrots, horses, and, once I reached Kindergarten, mice.

Our house always had at least one cat and one dog, but usually more. At my mother’s preschool we always had pet fish, guinea pigs, hamsters, etc. In the Spring we would incubate chick or duck eggs in the classroom, and watch them hatch and grow. Mom would take frog eggs from our pond and we’d care for them as they grew from tadpoles to tiny Peeper Frogs. She’d

⁶⁹ Laurence Parry, "Anthrocon 2007 draws thousands to Pittsburgh for furry weekend, 17 July 2007," http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Anthrocon_2007_draws_thousands_to_Pittsburgh_for_furry_weekend. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

scavenge the countryside looking for Monarch Caterpillars to bring to the classroom so we could witness their metamorphosis. These are things that she'd do to teach her young students about the natural world, a practice that she continues today. Even when I switched preschools I still had exposure to new animals. I fondly remember my new preschool's classroom pet being a Zipperweb Spider we called "Spinny Webster," imbuing me with at least a casual interest in insects and arachnids. When I began Kindergarten my elderly teacher Mrs. Gibbs told us stories of when she was a child her older brothers would torment her with mice. Somewhere along the line she stopped fearing mice and actually came to like them. I suppose it was because I really respected and admired my teacher, but I began to obsess over mice, so much so that I began to keep mice as pets.

Today, my house is swarming with animal life; a dozen or so cats that we have taken in over the years, and Praying Mantids that live in our shrubbery and I only dare to handle. I listen to the cacophony of frogs in the pond in springtime and the endless bickering of the hummingbirds in the summer. At the apartment that I share with my three-year-old Pembroke Welsh Corgi, Garrus, I am constantly enamored with the local mockingbirds and their ever-increasing song variety. Not unlike how the rhizomes of plants twist and connect to one another, these myriad instances have interconnected over the years to form my immense love of animals.⁷⁰

Fictional animals, especially those in animated features, have also greatly influenced mine and others' decisions to become a committed member of Furry culture. While Dr. Gerbasi

⁷⁰ Rhizome Theory was developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. It uses the term "rhizome" and "rhizomatic" to describe data entry that has no beginning point or end point, as opposed to linear structures which have a beginning and an end. My experiences with animals are limitless and intersect to form my affection towards animal life.

confirmed that Furrries tend to watch more cartoons than the average person, I feel cartoons starring animals have more to offer. *The Lion King*, the first animated feature I had seen, is also a movie that has served as a touchstone for many Furrries, gaining a massive fanbase and providing fodder for many Fursonas. *Lion King* panels still proves popular at many Furry cons. While I loved *The Lion King* I was captivated by *Balto*. While I was far more interested in the animated wolf-dog, I did feel some attachment to its real-life counterpart. When I visited New York City with my family as an eleven year-old, I forced them to embark on a trek around Central Park to help me find the statue commemorating Balto's achievements. When I found it, I broke down in tears of joy for seeing the monument dedicated to my canine childhood hero.

The Lion King and *Balto* were two animal films that I was particularly attached to, but my entire childhood was inundated with animated cartoon animals. *The Land Before Time* films were a popular series with me. I was scared of the *Secret of Nimh* for the scene in the lab but would watch it time and again regardless. *The Adventures of Frog and Toad* would help me establish a love for clay-mation. Cable television shows such as the *Thundercats*, the *Looney Tunes*, and the *SWAT Kats* would captivate me for hours.

A Furry's penchant for cartoon animals is almost unsurprising, given that for many they were our earliest role models and teachers. A giant yellow bird taught us the alphabet and a friendly purple dinosaur taught us about friendship and camaraderie. A bunny, duck, pig, cat, canary, and skunk (to name only a few) made us laugh. On commercial breaks a sporty tiger named Tony sold us cereal while a suave orange cheetah in sunglasses convinced us to buy his snack foods. We grew up surrounded by these loveable creatures. We were taught as children that they were our friends, or teachers, our babysitters. I also feel that part of the affection for cartoon animals comes from human folklore. Anthropomorphism and mythology are deeply

intertwined.⁷¹ In many cases an animal in a myth or folktale would represent a human archetype, such as the Kingly Lion in Aesop's Fables. From childhood on we have been taught foxes are cunning or sultry, lions are royal (and possibly cowardly), cats are overly-curious, coyotes are wily, rats serpents, and hyenas are likely evil, and bunnies are perhaps the wittiest of all. These anthropomorphized animals are character archetypes who by their very appearance, explain some of who they are. They are simple, and therefore amusing for young minds. Furrries are more open about their attachment to these cartoon animals, though in reality it is not much different from anyone with a tattoo of Tweety Bird or a shirt with Mickey Mouse on it.

Now that I have explained the origins of my own Furriness, I will depict my involvement in the Furry community. I must first say I am not like many other Furrries in that I no longer have a single set Fursona. When I was first enamored with the idea of Anthros I created a clouded leopard girl named Asta. I quickly abandoned Asta when I dreamed of Raze, a bright blue three-tailed fox/wolf hybrid. I kept Raze for years, changing her appearance marginally as I saw fit. She changed from being a fox/wolf hybrid to being a fennec fox/wolf/velociraptor hybrid. At that point I realized I saw her as more of a character and less as a projection of myself (also that I was getting obsessed with making her as unique as possible through an ongoing combination of hybrids), so I retired her in my senior year of highschool.

For the next few years, up until my junior year of college, I went through dozens of Fursona designs, trying to find one that was right for me. I never really found one that fit me perfectly. I felt that, in order to be whole, and to represent myself online, I needed a Fursona. I felt that if I could just make the perfect Fursona my life and my art would fall into place. I

⁷¹ Makyo, "Furry Mythology, 26 February 2014," <http://adjectivespecies.com/2014/02/26/furry-mythology/>. (Accessed 5 March 2014).

needed “the one.” It was the same sort of soul-searching that make many young individuals try tarot or using a Ouija board, or even embarking on meditation to find a spirit animal. I felt like I didn’t know myself, and that creating the perfect Fursona would be the way to finally know myself. I realize now in the retrospect that I was overthinking my Fursona.

In the Fall of junior year I had something of a startling realization: I had spent years trying to come up with a Fursona I liked, to no avail, and felt somehow less whole because of it. I liked Furry art and most of my favorite artists were Furies who made almost exclusively Furry art. I realized that I was, in fact, a Furry.

It was like I was finally starting to understand myself. I quickly chose a new Furry name, deciding on Whiski. From there I fully inundated myself in online Furry culture. I still had trouble creating a singular Fursona I liked, but I found that it was quite easy for me to have multiple Fursonas. I liked so many different animals that having several Fursona’s of all different species felt far more comfortable for me. Over the next year or so I created several Fursonas, each with their own name and personality to represent a part of me. I even began designing a Fursona around my Furry name of Whiski, though that is still a work in progress. All of these Fursonas are subject to change, and yet thanks to them I feel more comfortable and sure of myself than I have ever been. It is wonderful and a bit frightening to think how, through these simulacra, an individual can come to terms with themselves better than they would be otherwise.⁷² These Fursonas are both me, and yet not me; and they make me whole.

Once I decide to focus my Senior Honors Project on Furry culture, I knew I wanted to work almost exclusively with my Fursonas since they are a symbol of myself and also examples

⁷² Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* poses his theory that humanity has created an entirely simulated culture. Here I refer to my Fursonas as simulations of myself, both a part of me and yet not a part of me. The argument has also been made that everything an artist makes is simulacrum, as each work of art has a piece of the artist within it.

of the diversity within the Furry community. I also liked the idea of expanding on the definition of the Furry Conbadge, despite enjoying the basic Conbadge for its utility and simplicity. I felt this was a good time to press the limitations of the Furry Conbadge, as well as expand myself and my abilities in different directions. For each piece I chose to focus on the integral parts of the Conbadge: The Fursona's name, its depiction, and some of its personality, as well as being a wearable art piece. Aside from these few key parts of a Conbadge, I moved the Conbadges in whatever direction I saw fit.

Jasdesi Fursuit – Fullsuit. Resin Head Blank, acrylic eyes, resin jawset, silicone tongue. Silicone pawpads, resin claws, elastic, foam, fur, polyfil. PVC and duct tape dummy mannequin display stand.

Jasdesi is one of the outliers from the Furry Conbadge theme while also being the centerpiece of my exhibition. She is the Conbadge taken to the most extreme level—a Fursuit. I decided to undertake the role of being a creator, designing a character and bringing it into reality in the most real terms possible. Jasdesi is my creation.

Jasdesi, or Jas, is part of a fictional alien species called Sergals which are one of several created by FurAffinity user Mick39. They inhabit her alien world called Vilous, and are the most prominent race featured in her novella about the world. Her work became popular enough that she made them an open species so anyone to make their own Sergal.⁷³ They are now one of the most popular fictional races on FurAffinity, so much so that they are officially recognized in the

⁷³ The terms “open species” and “closed species” is a sort of Furry copyright term. These terms are used by individuals who create their own fictional animal species, such as Mick39 and her Sergals. These terms demarcate whether anyone can make their own character in the species (open), or if they cannot (closed) and operates off an honors system.

list of possible animals species you can search when looking through galleries. I instantly fell in love with these wolf/shark/bird hybrid creatures when I was first introduced to them, shortly after I began recognizing myself as Furry. Since then I had always wanted to create a Sergal Fursona, but I never settled on anything I liked. I decided creating a Sergal Fursuit would change that. Being a fictional creature also added another level of challenge to the design of a Sergal Fursona and accompanying Fursuit.

Once I settled on a design I began the arduous task of creating the Fursuit. For me this was a particularly monumental endeavor being one of my first sewing projects using a machine. Working with fur posed another new challenge; it is an unforgiving medium, and expensive, leaving next to no room for error. Despite the large potential for making mistakes I was thrilled to be working on this project. Building 3D objects is one of my greatest joys, and so creating an amalgam of building and sewing, concluding in a wearable art piece—brought me unparalleled joy.

Upon the completion of Jasdesi's parts, I made the decision to wear her at my gallery opening. While she would look amazing, and convey the concept of being wearable art, I felt that it was of the utmost importance to bring her to life, and have the gallery visitors interact with her. With some careful coordinating (and assurances to the ArtWorks Gallery staff that I knew what I was doing) I was able to achieve this ideal. For the duration of my opening night at Artworks I wore Jasdesi to converse and interact with the gallery visitors.

While I did not adopt a different persona while wearing Jasdesi (as she still has yet to truly solidify a personality), the act of wearing her was indeed transformative for both myself and the people interacting with Jasdesi the Sergal. While inside a Fursuit, I often become more energetic, and bouncier, making larger movements with my body. My movements become a

caricature of human movement, to better bring the Fursuit to life, much like how a cartoonist will over exaggerate movements to make them ultimately more lifelike. If anything, this fell into the realm of using a Fursuit to entertain others. When confronted with Jasdesi, people reacted in awe and also in confusion. No one quite knew how to approach her; Jasdesi isn't human, and even though they knew it was a human in a suit, she was still lifelike enough to cause them to reconsider this undoubtable fact. The aspect of Jasdesi that threw off the most people were her eyes. They knew they weren't my eyes, but would always look into them for eye contact. Even when faced with an obviously inhuman creature, we still look to the eyes for human contact.







Whiski – Videogame Case, Canvas, Computer Parts, Gel Medium, Acrylic Paint.

Whiski is my primary Fursona, my namesake, and is also by far my most ambiguous Fursona, due to having undergone so many transformations in a very short amount of time. Reasonably, I can say she's gone through a major change about every six months for the last two years. Suffice to say, I'm fickle, still desiring to make her perfect. Her current form reflects my changing tastes while holding on to some of my more consistent trends in Fursona design, as well as my recent involvement with Postfurry, or the postmodern Furry movement. Postfurry pushes the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic in Furry. A Postfurry Fursona would very likely be inorganic in some way, for example being a robot, a synthetic lifeform, or an Artificial Intelligence.⁷⁴ It also explores taking inorganic objects and anthropomorphizing them into Anthro-like creatures, for example, a fox made of a lava lamp, or a disco ball made animal, creating an almost biomorphic living being.⁷⁵ Postfurry is a niche movement, but it is one that puts a great deal of emphasis on tackling the possible origins of Anthros. How would they become a part of our reality? One of the most common answers is "created by humankind as some sort of servant." While this is not the only origin story Postfurry utilizes, but it is one of the most popular.

This version Whiski is a hybrid of new and old. I returned to my roots in some ways, giving Whiski the three tails of Raze, and her long hair. She is once again a fox/wolf hybrid. From there she departs for new, Postfurry attributes. She was designed during one of my pink-obsessive phases, and so her main pelt color is a bright, bubbly pink. A multicolored goo leaks

⁷⁴ Robots are generally seen as being fully mechanical, whereas a synthetic lifeform would have artificial organs that resemble organic tissues.

⁷⁵ Biomorphism is an art movement with a focus on taking naturally-occurring elements in nature and applying them to non-organic structures or objects. In this sense giving a lava lamp a fox-like form is an extreme form of biomorphism.

constantly from her eyes—a malfunction that no one can figure out or fix.⁷⁶ She is completely synthetic, both inside and out. She is both something I can play around with, and use to exhibit some of my greatest interests, such as grotesquerie and synthetic technology. Despite her fantastical attributes, I feel that she would be me in essential personality.

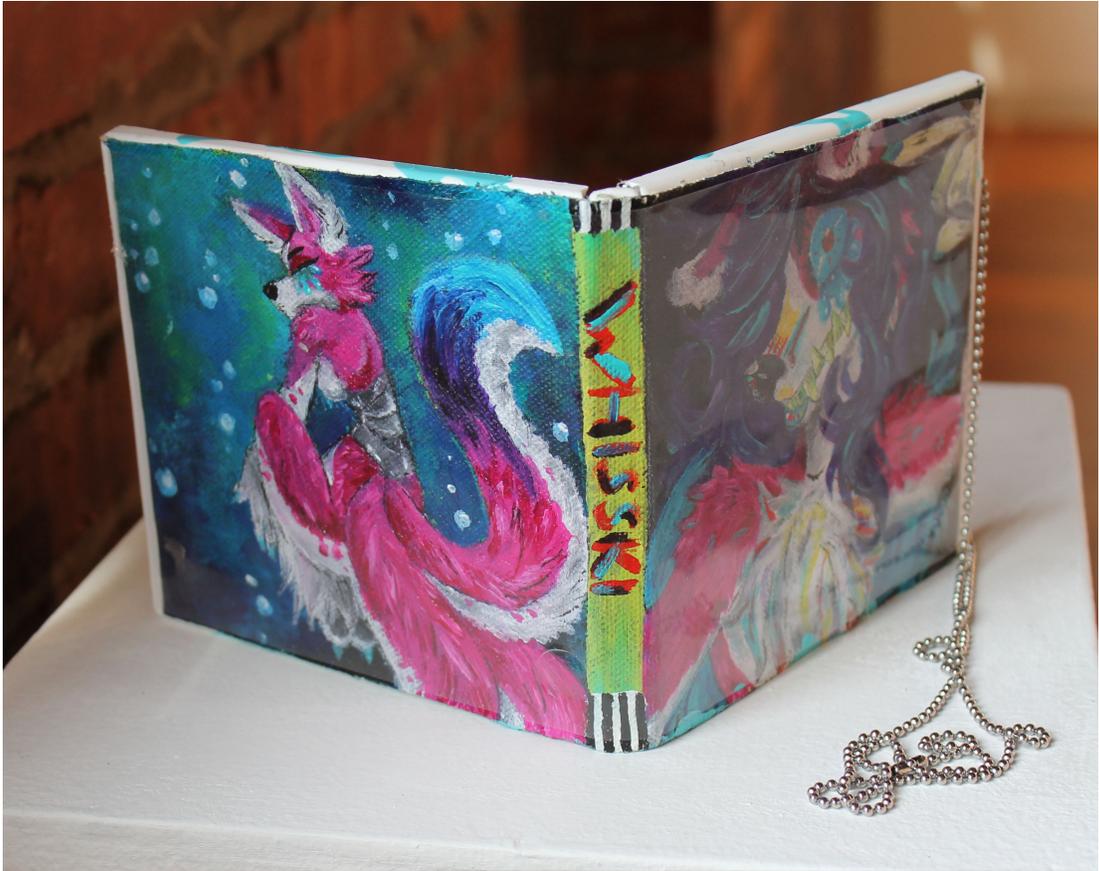
For her Conbadge I wanted to highlight these particular interests. Using the outer case from a videogame cartridge, I proceeded to create an interactive, wearable Conbadge. The outside presents two depictions of Whiski, one grinning toothily at the viewer, the other of her floating serenely within a watery domain, likely some sort of rejuvenation chamber (this notion highlighted by her exposed metal parts on her torso). The interior of the piece is a jumble of synthetic guts and circuitry. Using computer parts and gel medium I constructed an abstraction of her insides, along with some visuals I find pleasing, such as an eye that gazes balefully out at the viewer from beneath her ribcage. This eye is held within the confines of a screen, which is connected by wires to a circuit board. This fusion of my Fursona, technology, and the grotesque creates a bizarre image I am very attracted to, and strive to reflect in my work. “Orifices and Bodily Waste” by William Ian Miller details the relationship between human orifices and what we could consider to be filth or waste. In this Miller describes the eyes as being the only orifice we view as “pure, windows to the soul”, unlike all other orifices that lead to our innards, which are often seen as gross or filthy. We connect eyes to purity, despite them being filled with jelly and viscera. Whiski’s eye’s take this juxtaposition and makes it visual, along with the placement of a “pure” eye in her very bowels.

Overall this piece depicts Whiski as the transient, not-quite-there being she has become through her many transformations, and also hearkens to my many odd tastes. One of the many

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joys of Furry is the ability to take these tastes and incorporate them into the design of a Fursona, which I did wholeheartedly.





Achlys – Resin, Acrylic Paint, Elastic, Hot Glue, LEDs, Felt, Foam, Faux Fur, Airbrush Paint.

Achlys is, at its core, a monster.⁷⁷ There is no other way to describe it. Achlys is a monstrous being that holds all of my most negative qualities, whether I choose to represent them or not. This is a hulking, massive creature that I originally created while pondering one of my favorite videogame series, a survival-horror series called *Silent Hill*. Silent Hill is the name of a town in the backwoods of West Virginia that calls people to it who have usually committed some horrible sins, usually murder. The town is in many senses a sentient being. When a “sinner” enters the town, the town creates monsters to attack and harry them. These monsters are representations of the person’s inner demons, such as lust for women or repressed masculinity.⁷⁸ Silent Hill seems like a town designed to torture the individual, a sort of punishment or damnation, but (provided you get the good ending in the game) it is actually a town of trial. Should the individual survive the horrors of Silent Hill, then they have likely undergone some sort of redemption, and can carry on with their lives from the horrors of their past (the going theme is that the murders were almost entirely accidental, or a mercy killing). I don’t know what it is about this videogame series that I am so attracted to, perhaps the monsters, or the backwoods town (one that greatly reflects my own upbringing), but for years it has engrossed me, and has served as a major inspiration in my art. It was upon thinking about what my own possible experience in Silent Hill would be like that I created Achlys. While most

⁷⁷ Achlys is pronounced “Ack-lees.”

⁷⁸ In *Silent Hill 2*, the protagonist, James Sunderland copes with the aftermath of his wife’s death, struggling between feeling dutiful to her (especially when presented with the possibility that she is still alive) and his repressed masculinity and sex drive. As with most of the monsters he encounters are feminine in form, and many are scantily clad. Conversely, the main adversary of the game, Pyramid Head, represents not only James’ punishment for his unfaithful thoughts, but also is brimming with testosterone, something James wishes he could achieve.

monsters in the *Silent Hill* games are humanoid in appearance, Achlys reflects my love of animals, and my Furry nature. The name Achlys is derived from the Greek goddess of the same name, who is one of the goddesses of death and “the fog that clouds the eyes upon dying”. Despite having the name of a goddess, Achlys is fully genderless. I chose this lack of gender to better highlight it being more of an entity or force of nature. Therefore it simply exists, and is not tied to any set gender or gender role. It allows Achlys’ actions to be without a gendered basis.⁷⁹ Achlys also reflects my viewpoint my own gender and sexuality, as being things that comprise me, but I don’t feel any huge attachment to.⁸⁰ I am overall comfortable with my own feminine form, I experience no physical dysphoria, but recently I have been leaning towards a gender-neutral image of both myself and some of my characters. Where this comes from I cannot say, but it is common within the Furry community for individuals to explore different genders and sexuality at some point or another, so this is not unusual.⁸¹ Sometimes this manifests as a Fursona that can switch gender, or having multiple Fursonas of different genders and sexualities. The latter is the route I opted for.

As previously stated Achlys is a monster, one that thrives on violence and chaos, rather than reason. Achlys is the embodiment of my impulses, or, what I would be like without impulse control. I am generally a happy person, but my primary means of stress-relief is venting, or ranting. As such I keep a lot of anger very close to the surface and expel it as a means of coping with the many stresses of my life. Achlys is that anger, and what would happen if I expelled it in

⁷⁹ Some gender biases around violence are that men are more violent when angry, or that women are angrier when on their period. I wish to avoid these stereotypes and instead present Achlys as a being that exists solely for the sake of causing chaos and violence, rather than have any reasoning or motivations behind it.

⁸⁰ My thoughts are very much in-line with Judith Butler’s book *Gender Trouble* which presents gender as being performative, rather than cultural. There is no defined identity behind what we use to express gender, instead only the illusion of a stable gender identity (one society accepts). She calls for people to trouble their gender and question the performative nature of gender in society.

⁸¹ Makyo, “Boys, Girls, and the In-Betweens, 16 November 2011,” <http://adjectivespecies.com/2011/11/16/boys-girls-and-the-in-between/>. (Accessed 26 February 2014).

far worse ways. To keep myself sane, functional, and overall happy, I expel this from my being as I would any filth or excretion, and reject it in order to move through life.⁸²

Since Achlys is a primarily violent existence, I sought a way to show that in its Conbadge. I settled on the idea of creating a headdress of Achyls, complete with faux fur, resin teeth, glowing eyes, and a flowing mane (compliments National Fur Tech). In many cultures and religious practices, such as in ancient Aztec or Native American cultures, the wearing of an animal pelt headdress is common. I find these headdresses really beautiful and haunting. At the same time, I recognize these animals had to die in order for the headdress to exist, meaning at some point the animal likely experience pain. I felt applying the imagery and background of an animal headdress to Achlys would highlight it's nature, one of beauty and violence. To add another level of implied gore I wrapped a mannequin head in red yarn which for the headdress to rest on. This was put on a pedestal and then I draped the excess yarn around the base. This created a titillating illusion of viscera that was really just yarn. The red yarn (or thread) itself is a common image in relation to the concept of fate in Japanese culture. Often, a red thread winds itself between two individuals in an image. In the end it also had a sort of bondage-effect, being both bound up in the yarn and potentially bound by fate. I feel Achlys is bound by fate in the sense that it will never be anything more than an entity of chaos.

⁸² The expulsion and rejection of filth from the human body is the main topic of Christian Enzensberger's *Smut: An Anatomy of Dirt*. In this he discusses the twenty-five forms of excretion and how the rejection of filth in capitalism has lead to sterilization of our society.



Community Conbadges – Cardstock, Prismacolor Markers, Copic Multiliner Pens, Badge Clip,
Laminate, Gel Pen.

While working on the various art pieces for this project I desperately wanted to show some of the diversity in the Furry community beyond my own predominantly canine Fursonas. My project is all about art and the Furry community, and yet my Fursonas are not nearly as diverse as I would like. I decided to take a somewhat unique approach to solving this problem. I contacted almost every Furry I knew on a somewhat personal level, and asked for their permission to display their Fursona in my gallery. I would make a traditional Conbadge that they would receive after the gallery was completed. I expected a lot of people to either reject my proposal or ignore me, but every single person I asked agreed! It was an incredible feeling. Many of these Furies I looked up to as role models and admired as artists. To be entrusted with displaying their Fursonas to complete strangers was a very humbling experience. It really reflected the sentiments shared by the entire Furry community. We generally trust and like each other, even if we're strangers. My community Conbadge series shows that we are all different individuals, with our own interests and lives, and yet unified as Furies.









Citrine – Gameboy Color Case, Computer Parts, Sculpey, Faux Fur, Nail Polish, Acrylic Paint,
Apoxie

Citrine the Orange Husky is another hearkening to Postfurry, albeit from a different angle. I first came across Citrine as a fursuit being sold by the maker Drakonicknight a few years ago. I fell in love with her design and so bought her, making her my first Fursuit.⁸³ Citrine and I have developed together since then, developing her personality a little bit more each time I wear her. To me she has always been incredibly sporty and athletic, and would likely feel at home within a bustling city, is very friendly and gets along with everyone; two ideals I strive to achieve in myself. Over time I started to think about her origins and decided that her general spunkiness fit well with many videogame protagonists. I thought it would be fun and cute to make her a being from out of a Gameboy Color videogame system. This was my first videogame console as a child, and so the level of nostalgia, mixed with my interest in Postfurry, made a heady concoction that I immediately applied to Citrine. In the real world she is simply a Fursuit, but in my mind she is a digital being.

Citrine's Conbadge is just as bright and colorful as she is. I took an old Gameboy Color console and first gutted it, a process that made me nervous and giddy in equal parts. Once it was hollowed out I carved Citrine's likeness on the inside, painting her with acrylics and accentuating her brilliant red hair with faux fur. On the outside I attached wires and computer parts to show off her digital origins, and scrawled her name as big and bold as I could. This Conbadge is designed to be worn off a belt or bag, making it a unique badge, but not obtrusive.

⁸³ This is a common practice within the Furry community. An artist will create a design, be it a digital image or a fursuit, and then sell the piece along with the rights to the character.



Sunny – Denim Vest, Dye, Acrylic Paint, Patches

Sunny the mare, while not as direct a reflection of myself as Whiski, still hold many of my goals and aspirations, as well as positive and negative traits. Sunny has been, from her inception, a workaholic. This is a trait I pride myself on, even though it causes me untold amounts of stress. By being a workaholic I can guarantee to get my work done and done well. Sunny feels much the same way. She runs her own fashion label, called *Solstice/Equineox*, a line of clothing designed for Ungulate Anthros, or Anthros with hooves. When I was younger most of my art was related to fashion. For a while I even wanted to be a fashion designer, despite having no talent with a needle and thread. Sunny, while being a creature devoted to creativity (as am I) hearkens back to my perpetual love of fashion. She is, as her name indicates, very bright and cheery, but she is also nervous, shy, and in a near perpetual state of being overworked (all her own choice, mind you). She also holds very strong feminist views, such as a rejection of physical standards, the concept of bodily autonomy, and an end to cultural misogyny. She centers her designs upon making women strong and feminine simultaneously. To her a strong woman is a beautiful woman, and vice versa. Sunny reflects my creative side, along with my many neurosis (overworked) and insecurities (shy, worry, nervousness). She holds my love of fashion, and my feminist ideals while being by far my most feminine Fursona, identifying not only as female, but also presents herself as decidedly feminine with her clothing.

Sunny's Conbadge is most appropriately, an article of clothing. Using a purple-dyed denim vest (Sunny's favorite color), I created something of a feminist biker jacket, creating the perfect hybrid of the tough, masculine "biker" clothing and more feminine aspects all while

proclaiming an artistic, feminist message. I painted Sunny on the back of the vest, depicting her in the universal “Rosie the Riveter” pose while wearing a dress, creating a dichotomy between Sunny’s physical appearance and her ideals which are exemplified through her pose and the patches she wears, thus fleshing out her character. I then adorned the rest of the vest with various patches I’ve collected, some artistic, some feminist, some a mix of the two. Sunny’s Conbadge is a piece I feel I will likely continue adding to over time.



Sublimation – Oil on Canvas, 36” x 44”

My oil painting, titled *Sublimation* is not a representation of my Fursonas, or any Fursona. It is a representation of a concept of what it is like to be Furry and why. It explores where human ends and animal begins. I feel a lot of us are closer to being animals than we like to think. Furrries are generally more aware of this than others, some even choosing their Fursonas based on animals they feel closest to. I have certainly felt far more animalistic when I am angry. Once I was so mad I felt like I was snarling. This is an odd feeling, feeling so like something I am intrinsically not. But I also find it sort of liberating, to know that maybe we are more primal than we like to let on.

I also used this painting to showcase some of my favorite visual imagery---slime, goo, and ooze. I find the idea of such substances very appealing, both visually and in a tactile sense as well. I played with silly putty a lot as a child, and took great joy in letting it drip out of my hands. I imagine these substances to feel a similar way in my art. I also feel it provides a visualization for being immersed in a culture, or being overcome with more primal urges. Through the introduction of Furry culture to my person, I have become something better, something greater.



Conclusion

The concept of Furry is still relatively new in the world, but its roots stretch far back into the past, to the beginnings of mankind's interaction with animals. Early Man saw animals as both companions and fierce beings beyond our understanding. The earliest humans painted these feared and respected animals on cave walls, and looked to them for spiritual guidance. The walls of the Lascaux Cavern in France are adorned with images of Spirit Animals that the shamans of tribes would interact with.⁸⁴ These were animals that were not hunted, and instead revered. In trances the shamans of these early cultures would become human-animal hybrids called Therianthropes. In the Lascaux cavern one such bird-headed Therianthrope lies beside a wounded bull.⁸⁵ Animal-human hybridization underlies the concepts of Native American totem animals, African trickster gods, and Egyptian deities, all of which were either anthropomorphized animals or human-animal hybrids.⁸⁶ The anthropomorphization of animals on either a daily level of feeling love from a pet, or on the more fantastical scale seen in fables or mythic tales, is also an intrinsic part of human culture.

Furry culture has taken these ancient customs and adapted them to modern life. By being a member of the Furry community we recognize the importance of animals in human history, and see some parts of the animal world reflected in ourselves. We craft new personas and alter-egos at whim, take on a new name of our choice, and present ourselves as entirely different creatures. We commission art of our Fursonas and bring them to life through Fursuits. We attend Furry

⁸⁴ Charles Maddox, "Paleolithic Cave Paintings," Lecture, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, January 22, 2014.

⁸⁵ Charles Maddox, "Paleolithic Cave Paintings," Lecture, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, January 22, 2014.

⁸⁶ Melissa Meinzer, "Animal Passions, 29 June 2006," <http://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/animal-passions/Content?oid=1337258> (Accessed 26 February 2014).

conventions devoted to enjoying our culture and wear Conbadges to show who we really are. We are hybrids, not just as Anthros but as people; we are a mix between a fandom and a culture. We attract the public eye as much as we repel it. We thrive on the creativity of each other and are fans of one another for it. We reject many negative aspects of society, such as sexism or racial segregation, and instead accept everyone from all walks of life. We have no leaders and so can choose the direction our community wants to take. We take our imaginations and bring them to life.

I am a Furry. I am fascinated by my own culture, and revel in it. I find the Furry community to be the most diverse, accepting, and fun community out there, and so I call it my community. I may fragment myself into many different Fursonas but I have never felt so whole. Every day I am enthralled by the beauty and creativity that exists within Furry culture, and I will continue to devote my life to both partaking of and contributing to this beauty. By chronicling some of what it means to be Furry, and by presenting myself and my art within Furry culture, I hope I have shown some of this community's beauty as well.

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