

**ANIMAL LIVES**

A series edited by Jane C. Desmond, Barbara J. King, and Kim Marra

# Displaying Death and Animating Life

*Human-Animal Relations in Art,  
Science, and Everyday Life*

JANE C. DESMOND

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PART THREE

Animating Life:  
Cognition, Expressivity,  
and the Art Market

## “Art” by Animals, Part 1: The Transnational Market for Art by (Nonprimate) Animals

*One evening in April of 2011, I was sitting at a dinner table in a hotel ballroom, attending a fund-raiser for a local wildlife medical clinic. The event was sponsored by the veterinary medical college at my university. At least a hundred people were there, each having purchased a ticket, which included a chance to see resident wildlife up close—mainly, raptors like hawks and kestrels who served as educational ambassadors after their injuries, though healed, made it impossible for them to be successfully released back into the wild. An auction of donated items and experiences (a visit to a tiger sanctuary, ten bottles of wine) was about to begin.*

*The clinking of forks on china subsided, and an expectant hush drew over the room as one of the main auction items was carried up to the stage. It was a beautiful, professionally framed painting, two feet tall and three feet long, its white canvas covered with dots of purple, gold, and teal in light tones. The swift strokes of the artist had flown over the surface, leaving an impression of motion captured in the refractive properties of raindrops. It was the prize of the night.*

*The bidding started low, at around a hundred dollars, and then began to catch fire. Somewhere behind me, not visible from my seat, an auctioneer kept shouting out, “Yup! Yup!” each shout followed by a higher number as someone bid anew.*

*I'd thought about bidding on the painting—it was my favorite of all the auction items, its colors delicate but strong, their travel across the surface even, even pointillistic. But the bids soon rose beyond my limit. Still, the battle went on, pumped up by the encouragement of the auctioneer (a charismatic veterinarian who surely must have worked in the auction business in a previous career): "Imagine how this will look on your wall!" "Think about the animals and all the good your money will do them!" "One of a kind, ladies and gentlemen, one of a kind!"*

*Gradually, the field of bidders thinned. A lot of people had wanted this piece, but only two were willing to go the distance. The price kept climbing. It topped out at several hundred dollars, and finally the auctioneer's gavel dropped. "Sold to the bidder at table number three!" That was MY table, and as I twisted around to see who in the world had been making those bids, I was shocked to find my partner, grinning triumphantly. The painting, by Odin the Red-Tailed Hawk, was coming home with us! Jealous "oohs" and "aahs" floated across the room as another painting was brought up for sale. That painting, by a different bird, was nice, but it was smaller than the first one, the marks were less assertive, and the composition was less beautifully balanced in its mix of colors and shapes. The bidding for it never reached the same frenzied pace of the bidding for Odin's artwork. In fact, that painting outsold nearly everything else at the auction, including a week in Paris at a donor's pied-à-terre! Why?*

This snapshot of desire, money, and artwork captures several of the components that drive the expansive and expanding market for "art" by animals; "artists" include elephants, dolphins, apes, seals, horses, dogs, cats, and birds. The transnational market spans the United States and several other countries, and is anchored in local nodes of production and sale. However, it draws in international auction houses as well as online sites like eBay, and media reports of such sales span the globe, from Britain to India, the United States, and beyond.

In this chapter and the paired one that follows, I investigate this "art by animals" phenomenon as a counterpoint to the first two-thirds of the book, which focused on the display of dead bodies and the tensions that emerge in social practices meant to attribute subjectivity to only some of those bodies as a prerequisite for mourning. In those chapters, on taxidermy and human plastination, pet cemeteries, pet obituaries, and roadkill and roadkilling, my focus was on the materiality of the (primarily nonhuman animal) body and the ways that that materiality anchors or disrupts social meaning: in scientific discourse that simultaneously objectifies the body while touting a value-free search for knowledge untied to cultural or historical specificity; in the tensions

between bodily remains and mourning practices when the mourned is an animal, not a human; and so on.

Humans can be and have been constructed historically (and differentially) as both objects and subjects of knowledge, as sites of investigation and producers of new knowledge through those investigations. Nonhuman animal bodies are more likely to be thrust, physically, discursively, and epistemologically, into the "object" category, as museum displays like *Animal Inside Out* demonstrate. But other registers of belief and of practice contravene this denotation as object, although only partially, only with respect to specific animals or specific species, and only in specific times and places. In the aesthetic realm, some animals do indeed emerge poised on the cusp of being recognized as subjects producing objects.

In this chapter and the next, I examine the traces of these *living* animal bodies, activated and captivated in the transnational market for "art" by animals. Here the materiality of the animal being is still paramount, as I discuss in relation to items that get designated as "artworks" when they record the physical trace, static or moving, of a specific animal body: an imprint of fish scales pressed onto paper, the strafing lines left by claws on canvas, or a sinuous curve of paint drawn out by a side-winding snake—the trace of animal movement across a surface, an actual event, captured in the rearranged remnants of pigment.

### Physical Trace as Subjective "Evidence"

In the aesthetic realm, we see not only the importance of the physical trace left, intentionally or not, by a living nonhuman animal but also the ways in which, for some specific categories of animals, that trace can serve as both (scientific and popular) evidence of and a utopian desire for the external revelation of a complex interior subjectivity. But first, to understand this phenomenon, we have to excavate the contemporary complex of institutions and relations that bring it into being.

Art production by nonhuman animals sits at, and reveals, a unique, complicated nexus of concepts and of communities who otherwise would not be engaged with one another: conservationists, (human) artists, gallery owners, comparative psychologists, primatologists, zookeepers, animal enrichment technicians, news reporters, the animals themselves, and the lay public. Each forms a node in the generation of meaning surrounding the phenomenon. I suggest that art making and the market it engenders form a particularly revealing intersection of

ideas, desires, practices, and interests that illuminate some of our defining beliefs about human-animal relations.

These beliefs are both broadly general and widespread (in other words, that humans are and are not "animals"), and specific to historical moments, places, and publics—a tension I plan to keep in view throughout this discussion. In this chapter and the paired one that follows, I argue that the concepts of "art" and "artist" are mobilized in the European-influenced world with reference to animals both to emphasize their difference from human subjects (a painting by a snake is not a Rembrandt, although it might resemble a Klee) and to assert their similarity, as is the case with unique primate individuals like Koko, Kanzi, Michael, Chantek, and other human-language-enabled apes who live in a "bispecies, bicultural" environment.

When I refer to "artwork" by animals here, I usually mean a drawing or painting made with crayons, chalk, or paints on a flat surface like paper or canvas, although some experiments are under way to develop sculpting opportunities for animals.<sup>1</sup> It's also possible to buy recordings of "music" by animals, such as those by the Thai elephant orchestra sponsored by New York City-based artists Komar and Melamid. Paintings, however, are the dominant works in this art market.

I explore this new market phenomenon, map its range and scale, probe the reasons for its expansion, and assess what's at stake for the multiple communities involved: the animals, their caretakers, the buyers, the promoters, and the scientists and news reporters who also engage with the phenomenon. Why has such a market emerged, why now, and what difference does it make to whom? What longer-term cultural effects might be in play?

To research this phenomenon, I draw on records of sales and sales promotions; participant observation at zoos and clinics; interviews with zookeepers and (human) art makers; analysis of online discussion boards, website images, and textual presentation; newspaper reports; and scientific articles by animal cognition experts. On the basis of these sources, I argue that "art" by animals is not merely an oddity of local significance but rather should be seen as a dynamic, growing field of commerce and scientific investigation that spans multiple countries across the globe. The motivations of producers, sellers, and buyers for engaging such artwork diverge considerably from those of the scientific community, however, except when the category is art by primates.

The range of practices and products associated with this phenomenon can best be understood as a continuum arranged along an ascending hierarchy assigned to animal species, with those most like humans

placed on the "high" end of the scale and receiving the most attention as well as commanding the highest prices for their work. Along this continuum of "art"—ranging from the squiggly smudges made by snakes to brush-painted, self-titled pictures by (human-)language-enabled apes—mark making, intention, knowledge of visual conventions, and active choice are the main components parsed by scientist and purchaser alike. The more likely the linkage between mark making and active aesthetic choice in that mark making, the greater the value attributed by both scientist and layperson, and the greater the amount of money attached to the resultant object.

"Art" is a historically and culturally specific concept, and I use it here in the senses it has accrued in Europe and in Europe's spheres of influence since, roughly, the Renaissance. Among the hallmarks of this conceptual category are its denotation of something separated from "craft," or the skillful production of items with practical use, and its association with a single producer, or "artist," who creates something "original" and expressive of his or her interior emotions, ideas, passions, and visions.<sup>2</sup>

In my consideration of art by primates, I highlight the activation of these hallmarks, but they are lacking among other species whose works should, I believe, be seen as "art," with a knowing embrace of the distancing, or "wink," that the quotation marks imply. However, in all cases, the final artwork—usually a flat piece of paper covered with paint marks—bears the physical trace of an action by a nonhuman animal, and this embodied trace is the key to how these items accrue value in the social and economic spheres. Among these markers of valuation are the sense of intimacy and authenticity that attaches to the physical traces of a specific animal's body and the extent to which these marks are taken as evidence of aesthetic choice by the animal producing the work.

In the next chapter, I focus specifically on art made by nonhuman primates, analyzing not only the market for such works but also the role they may play for lay purchasers and for animal cognition experts in assessing primate intelligence and the linkage of primate actions and abilities to human evolution. I point too to the crucial lack of cultural and historical contextualization that can attend these evolutionary assertions and ask, instead, what difference does or might it make for primates' perceived status when the artist is an ape? Is this art making a potential contestation of humanism?

But for now, let me return to the realm of art making by nonprimate animals, as I begin to sketch the contours of the transnational market for animal art, starting with the unexpected work of one Tony Blair.

## Accidental "Art"?

For many of us, the name Tony Blair conjures up an image of the energetic, boyish-looking former prime minister of the United Kingdom (1997–2007). But there is another Tony Blair to be reckoned with in Britain, and this one is an artist—or perhaps the more accurate term is "ratiste," for Tony Blair is the name of a chocolate-brown rat. His works consist of modifications of "found objects," such as an avocado (craftily chewed to sculptural perfection, exposing the spheroid center of the pit) and a four-leaf clover (gnawed to the point of provoking its titular question, "Am I Still Lucky?"). Tony, now deceased, was owned by artist Helena Seget, who runs an art studio and mounted an exhibit of his works there. But his fame is widespread, thanks to the Internet. "Tony has gained international attention since Ms. Seget posted Tony's work on the Saatchi gallery's website. When his work went up against others in an online competition, he received 500 votes," wrote *Telegraph* reporter Megan Levy in 2008, indicating that members of the art-loving public were engaging with his works.<sup>3</sup> The cross between tongue-in-cheek and avant-gardist realms of the art world evoked in his creations gave Tony Blair a boost in his bid for celebrity, orchestrated by his artist-owner.

But Tony Blair is not alone as an artist among the Rodentia, as evidenced by the promotion of the "ratistes" associated with ScamperArt productions. The gobsmacking appeal of their work comes from its being done by *rats*. It's hard to imagine a type of being farther from the realm of the artist (although on the Scamperats website, the ratistes look very cute in their tiny French berets). Perhaps a sea slug or spider would be less includable under the rubric? But as mammals go, rats don't have a large fan base. Instead, they're often the target of mass extermination and, at least in Europe and the United States, are regarded as sources of disease and associated with filth and poverty. But in their anthropomorphized promotions of rat-produced artworks, the ScamperArt folks link visual art, wordplay, neoteny, or childlikeness, and ratness to produce a genre of "cuteness"—a culturally specific category of appreciation. The presumed silliness of the association of art making and rat being produces this recuperative cuteness, complete with little berets and the play on American presumptions of French pretension with the term *ratistes*.

The ultimate goal in producing these artworks and selling them is to benefit rats, as the Scamperats website indicates: "We donate a part of every sale to the Rattie Ratz Rescue Service. This organization is dedi-

cated to the rescue, rehabilitation and re-homing of our domestic rat-friends, and other small animals. Even better, become a loving foster or adoption home for our needy cousins!" Sales at rat lovers' events, like the Northern California Rat Community's Annual Holiday Pot Luck Costume Party (the rats dress up, not the people), or local public events, like the 2006 San Jose Art and Wine Festival, provide a way to link to a potential public of buyers.<sup>4</sup>

But none of us believes, despite the pictures on the promotional website, that the rats are daubing paint onto canvases with tiny brushes, carefully considering the placement of each color. This, despite the website's assurance that "history is replete with diminutive artists of great stature. Painters such as Toulouse-Ratrec, Pablo Ratcasso, and Thomas Hart Raton challenged their contemporaries, and left lasting marks on the art-world." And "vibrant colors and free-form shapes define the abstracts lovingly created by these 'ratistes' as they SCAMPER about!"<sup>5</sup> No. We know that the rats simply run across the canvas with their paint-dipped feet, leaving colorful traces behind that track their rapid little steps.

The results, bright nontoxic colors on white prestretched canvases, bear the marks of well-defined little sharp-toed feet and long curving arcs of dragging tails. My own (eighteen-by-twenty-four-inch) painting arrived well packaged in bubble wrap and featured a dramatic linear swoop of teal across the diagonal (a quick run with a dipped tail?), punctuated by fire-engine-red footprints rhythmically marching across the upper right quadrant—clear evidence of a ratiste on his or her way somewhere beyond the confines of the canvas.

These are works by what we might call "unwitting artists," not contemplative ones. A whole category of "art" is produced by such beings, including my beautiful Odin the Red-Tailed Hawk painting, which was created by the bird's toes and wing tips carrying drips and drabs of color across a white expanse of paper. Where an animal's body leaves an identifiable mark—the multi-toed imprint of a rat foot, for example—we see the artwork as the evidentiary result of animal presence, animal movement through space for a purpose other than leaving that mark. The "art" is a byproduct of animal movement, not the purposeful result. The resultant entry of the objects so produced into the art world depends on their nomination to be so included. That nomination is made by humans, like rat lover Helena Seget, who promotes the "works" of Tony Blair for their sculptural properties.

This "accidental art" is not new. As Thierry Lenain notes, the famous Japanese painter Hokusai bested his opponent in an 1806 paint-

ing contest by drawing a rolling blue line on a long horizontal scroll and then topping it with the paint-dipped footprints left by a hen that he had encouraged to walk across the paper. For Hokusai's audiences, the visual references of the curving blue line and russet triangular shapes were clear—burnished autumn leaves floating on water, as the painting's title bears out: *Maple Leaves Floating on the Matsuta River*.<sup>6</sup> But in this case, Hokusai, known for his creative, nonconformist stances, was just using the hen as a living, moving paintbrush, a figurative extension of his own arm, and activating a visual genre of referential symbols—curvilinear waves and point-tipped leaves—well known to his audiences. The actions of the hen, and the hen herself, were hardly the focal point. No profiles of the hen as "artiste" were produced. But even here, the animal inserts herself into art history, for the exact pattern of her steps, their rhythmic spread, the quality of contact with the ground—firm or tentative, quick or slow—all influence the final product, the paint recording bodily movement and directional intent of that long-ago, unique, individual hen, whose strut across the scroll remains tangibly imprinted.

A few contemporary artists use this approach, that of the unwitting animal artist, somewhat differently, to interrogate human-animal relations and to produce artworks that are collaboratively generated. These creations are dependent on both the work of the human artist and the physical engagement, whether through sliding or biting, of a living animal interacting with a shared object or surface. For example, the avant-garde duo Olly and Suzi, based in the United Kingdom, have traveled to extreme environments like Antarctica and the Amazon basin, placing themselves as much as possible in animals' worlds to achieve this collaboration. They've even courted danger, the extent of which is etched in the teeth marks of a shark's bite on submerged fiberboard or the slither-slide marking of an anaconda on a canvas in the wild.

Ron Broglio, writing about these events, argues that the sheer physicality of animals refuses to be easily consumed and repurposed by human artists for their own expressive ends. Instead, Broglio suggests, the resulting artworks render an alternative economy of relations to animals, one in which the animals leave their marks by "biting back."<sup>7</sup> While Olly and Suzi emphasize shared cross-species surfaces, the mark making of the animals also leads us toward an imagining of intent, and direct action. Steve Baker states that the artists see their concerns as articulating the immediacy, specificity, and "intense unfamiliarity" of each encounter with an animal.<sup>8</sup>

The artworks described above are quite different from the ones I discuss here. Most especially, the art in these two chapters is produced under conditions of captivity, and the intended audience is not an elite with high cultural capital, attuned to the avant-garde artworld. A much wider range of the public purchases the works I discuss, from wealthy collectors to those more middlebrow patrons seeking unique home decor and claiming to know nothing about art. The human presence in the production of these animal-made artworks is (with just a few exceptions) not the focus of the event of art making or the final product.<sup>9</sup> And yet, art-made-with-animals and art-made-by-animals coexist in a wider matrix of visual representation, ideas about animals, ideas about art, and structures of commerce.

For the vast majority of the artworks that I discuss in this chapter, a unique animal leaves its anatomical and kinesthetic trace on something that is then conceptualized and sold as "art," but with a wink that acknowledges that the "painting" animal has goals other than artistic expression. This intent, expressivity, and knowledge of aesthetic conventions—or the lack thereof—comprise a key issue that emerges only in paintings by primates, and I consider it in the next chapter. I've been arguing that nowadays, art production by animals is not just an isolated event but part of a larger phenomenon uniting visual product with commerce. Just how does it work?

Like most sectors of the art market, the animal art market operates on a principle of rarity. Only a few members of a few species have produced "artworks." Among the painters: Tillamook Cheddar, a fox terrier in New York City; Gambi and Premja, two Lithuanian dolphins; several elephants in Thailand; and Cholla the horse, Rosie the rhinoceros, Koko the gorilla, Alexander the orangutan. To apply pigment, some of these artists rub canvas with their lips; others scratch with their claws, or hold a paintbrush with their trunk or clenched between their teeth. Artworks by these artists are offered for sale on Koko's website, in Thailand at an elephant sanctuary, in Brooklyn at the store Tillie Ltd., at the Sea Museum Dolphinarium in Klaipeda, Lithuania, through major art auction houses like Christie's in New York, at zoos, and on eBay auction sites.

### The Scope of the Phenomenon

It's difficult to gather reliable evidence about how many animals currently paint in the United States, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Japan (the

four geographic areas I am aware of with press reports of contemporary painting animals). Most of these instances stem from an individual trainer's, owner's, artist's, or zookeeper's initiative, as was the case with ratiste Tony Blair. However, anecdotal evidence is plentiful and can be gleaned from web links to sanctuaries, local press reports, articles on enrichment practices for captive animals in zoos and research facilities, oral reports from keepers and primatologists, and discussions on web forums among zookeepers and zoo scholars and aficionados, such as the Zoo Keeper's discussion list of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

While I cannot confidently estimate the total number of animals painting in the United States today, it's clear that the phenomenon is widespread and growing. By one estimate, about thirty elephants were painting in US zoos in the year 2000.<sup>10</sup> Art making by a variety of animal species is taking place today at sites like the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, the Indianapolis Zoo, the Virginia Zoological Park, the Great Ape Trust in Des Moines, the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center Department of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery in Houston, the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, the Milwaukee Zoo, Jungle Friends Monkey Sanctuary in Florida, Chimp Haven in Louisiana, and the Wildlife Medical Clinic at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, to name just a few.

Paintings by animals clearly aren't anything new, and some earlier celebrity animal "artists" have developed their own following. Ruby, an Asian elephant born in Thailand in 1974 and a longtime resident of the Phoenix Zoo, started painting as an enrichment exercise in 1987, to give her something stimulating to do. She followed in the (large) footsteps of Carol, an elephant kept at the San Diego Zoo, who had painted in the 1960s. Ruby continued painting when she wanted to up until her death in 1998, and her abstract creations with sweeping brushstrokes are estimated to have raised up to \$100,000 a year for the zoo.<sup>11</sup> Her most expensive painting sold for \$25,000.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, even though several of these painters are elephants, we can't assume that these works sell for "peanuts." Nonetheless, the full dimensions of the market for art by animals are hard to ascertain.

### Economic Dimensions of the Art Market

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums, which offers accreditation to leading zoos on the basis of their meeting criteria in management and

animal care, does not keep any statistics on art by animals, nor does any other official body. A few sales by celebrities like Ruby garner widespread publicity as a result of media coverage of major auction houses. However, most paintings are sold more modestly, and figures on the majority of sales of animal artworks are hard to come by. Occasionally, a newspaper article that brings discussion of art by animals into the public sphere and also offers conceptual frameworks for interpreting it provides a peek into the economics of the deal. It's important to frame an understanding of the prices these works command within the overall concept of "philanthropy"—here democratized, putting it in reach of many zoo visitors—because the proceeds from most sales of paintings go toward the support of zoos; in some cases, such as the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, these funds go directly to the unit whose animals had produced the artwork.

In 2007, the Hampton Roads, Virginia, newspaper the *Virginian-Pilot* printed a feature on animal art produced at several sites in the state: the Virginia Zoological Park in Norfolk, the Virginia Living Museum in Newport News, and the Virginia Aquarium in Virginia Beach.<sup>13</sup> We can take this set of sites to exemplify how the market works in zoo and sanctuary gift shops around the country. One of the stars profiled in the piece is Munchkin, a South African black-footed penguin at the Virginia Aquarium who's about the size of a duck. Her art offerings are created as a byproduct of her web-footed jaunts across white paper, her feet dipped in nontoxic purple paint by her keepers. Although only about half her footprints make it onto the paper, it's enough for her keepers to cheer, and Munchkin, apparently enjoying the task, waddles quickly across the floor, shaking her head in what is taken to be a sign of contentment. Mounted and framed, such "Penguin Prints" go for \$50–\$70 in the aquarium gift shop.

Seals also sell at the Virginia Aquarium. They're trained to touch preloaded paintbrushes to canvas, leaving sweeping swaths of colorful paint, and their works fetch higher prices than penguin art. Framed as "Seal Signatures," the creations cost from \$90 to \$180 in the gift shop; images are also printed onto T-shirts and mugs. Visitors really like these items: in sales of Seal Signatures alone, the aquarium rang up about \$15,000 in less than two years, from the fall of 2005 to the summer of 2007. At the nearby Norfolk Zoo, a fund-raiser in April of 2007 raised about \$5,000 from art made by the zoo's elephants. These sums may not seem huge, but for a nonprofit organization, every thousand dollars makes a difference. The overall impact of the sales can be considerable.

And, still focusing on this one region and time period in Virginia,



even more fund-raising art by animals surfaces. In August of 2007, Prince George Art and Frame hosted "the first mid-Atlantic showing of art by elephants in Thailand, Cambodia, and Indonesia."<sup>14</sup> Proceeds benefited the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project based in Thailand and headed by human artists Komar and Melamid. Two hundred art and elephant lovers showed up to peruse twenty-five paintings priced from \$450 to \$600 each.

This selection from just a two-year period in a single region of southeastern Virginia indicates that art making by captive animals is being sold in a variety of venues, including not only animal-oriented organizations like zoos but also art-oriented venues like galleries. These sales bring in a significant, if not huge, amount of money for nonprofit animal-related institutions, and their market, as demonstrated by the sale of the Thai elephant paintings, is both local and transnational.<sup>15</sup>

We know from these types of reports that art by animals is being produced and presented for sale all across the United States and in some other countries as well. But how do people actually perceive these artifacts? Why do they buy them? Do they distinguish between the species of producer and the final product? What sorts of aesthetic judgments are involved in purchasing the art? How do purchasers integrate these unique items into their domestic lives and their relations with others?

It's not easy to find answers to these questions, since gift shops at zoos and galleries are unlikely to release information about who their clients are and what they have purchased. However, an online discussion list of zoo aficionados provides a glimpse of how, in their own words, people who buy these paintings value them.

Judging from comments on the ZooBeat discussion list—an English-language forum for those passionate about zoos and conservation—many purchasers echo the taxonomy of intellect that I mention above, which places turtles at the bottom, elephants and cetaceans toward the top, and nonhuman primates at the pinnacle. Somewhere between turtles and dolphins lie cats, dogs, and horses.<sup>16</sup>

One of the very active forum regulars, "Patrick" from Melbourne, Australia, puts it this way:

I think it loses its punch when you start talking dogs and turtles. People probably like to think that the animals somehow not only know what they are doing and have a self-awareness that they are in control, but also make decisions based on their own artistic esthetics.

Now, regardless of whether or not this is true, I expect people like to think it is and thus the whole concept is somewhat undermined when you start offering art by species that are not generally considered by the public as being "hyper-intelligent".

ask anyone what the smartest animals are and they will no doubt mention the great apes as well as elephants and dolphins. maybe if your lucky, a monkey or parrot.

but a turtle? now that's pushing it . . .!<sup>17</sup>

This post is followed by a quip from the list moderator, "ZooYouth-Ben" from Adelaide, Australia, who writes, "Dip a turtle in paint and get it to walk across a canvas, turtle painting done!"

A newer member of the forum, "Jo" from Adelaide, who works with animals as a researcher, asserts, "I think people buy it [art by animals] because it is a tangible connection to an animal they may never see up close. Also, it is a unique piece of art, because the number of animals doing it is far less than humans. the raising money for conservation/direct benefit to that animal also is a factor."

A commentator from Auckland, New Zealand, "NZ Jeremy," shares in some of these rationales when he writes about his desire to buy a painting by an elephant or chimpanzee at the Auckland Zoo as a present for a friend, but found them too expensive (ranging in price from AU\$300 for the chimp art to AU\$700 for the elephant paintings). "Why did I almost buy that one for mi lady . . . ?" he asks. "Well because we both love the zoo and the animals . . . having the painting on the wall would not only be aesthetically pleasing but would also remind us of our favourite place and, let's? face it, when friends came over, [would allow us] to say, "guess who painted that!"

But he goes on to refine the motivation more precisely: "Personally I wouldn't buy a painting that's proceeds were not going to conservation and that wasn't done by an animal that could not (potentially) recognize that it represents something, i.e. as likely Elephants, Great Apes and some Cetaceans can."

A final comment in this string of exchanges raises yet another motivation. "Rookeyper," from Fort Wayne, Indiana, writes, "I personally have no illusions that the Christmas ornament that I have 'painted' by a rhinoceros at the Cincinnati Zoo is a work of art. The novelty of having that on the tree, explaining it to my grandchildren and by the way mentioning the plight of rhinos in the wild makes it valuable. The same goes for most animal art—it's a way to both raise awareness and also raise some cash for conservation or the individual institution."

Such a selection of comments can in no way be considered a scientifically devised representative sample of those who purchase art by animals, because the interlocutors on the ZooBeat forum (later renamed ZooChat) are more informed about issues facing zoos and their animals today than the general zoo-going public is.<sup>18</sup> Yet by virtue of their interest and level of awareness, they may be in a good position to articulate people's motivations for making these purchases.

Several themes are clearly revealed in the exchanges quoted above: the link between animal art and conservation donations; the link between the physicality of the individual animal artist and the work itself; pleasure in the element of novelty or surprise attached to the item and the ability to use that to connect with and/or educate other people; and the ability to bring a sign of the owner's passions for "wild" animals into the home. The purchasers retain a notion of a hierarchy of what they presume to be the capacity for self-reflexive intent possessed by some animals and not others, closely connected to human assumptions about animal "intelligence" as purveyed in public discourse. The comments also reveal both the attachment of ideas about uniqueness and aesthetic pleasure to the art objects in ways that reflect wider assumptions about human art and artists, along with an ability to separate real "art" (which is the product of artistic intent) from nonart that is called art (for instance, the rhinoceros's painted ornament) while still embracing the idea of animal-produced visual items as having value in an economy of exchange.

So for these online posters, the idea of "art making" by animals varies depending on the species creating the product. This isn't an aesthetic judgment, with turtles making "bad" paintings and apes being "good" artists. Rather, the calibration has to do with the notion of the animal's *intent* (and perceived possibility of forming intent) to make an aesthetic object, and to make that object through selective aesthetic choices about color, line, shape, and composition. Of the resultant products, 99% would be termed "abstract" (that is, nonrepresentational) art, sweeping strokes of color like 1950s abstract expressionist works, the appeal of which thus depends on an acceptance of nonrepresentational images as "art" by a wider public in the post-World War II era.<sup>19</sup>

### Who Doesn't Paint?

Most of the animal artists discussed above are charismatic "wild" animals kept in captivity: elephants, seals, penguins, chimpanzees, even

the occasional rhinoceros, who, if not exactly charismatic, is imposing and rare. Others, like the ratistes, ambush and delight us with surprise, given their general status as unwanted pests. Pets sometimes paint, sometimes for philanthropic reasons, as when a local humane society fund-raiser features a "painting station" for dogs, like my local Champaign County Humane Society did, cashing in on the trend. There are even commercial kits, adorned (of course) by photos of a dog in a beret, that let your "poodle [who can] doodle" create canine canvases at home. They come complete with nontoxic paint, paper, and a frame for display.<sup>20</sup> Cats had their own artistic moment a couple of decades ago in the glossy, coffee-table book *Why Cats Paint* by artist Heather Burch and art critic Burton Silver. With its knowing reproduction of the erudite language of art critics ("Bootsie's painting has a refreshing rawness which enables the viewer to experience the physicality of the artist's deep relationship with process"),<sup>21</sup> this tongue-in-cheek book featured lavish color photos of cats in action, scratching paints on canvas. But this too was based on the "wink," the "I know very well and so do you, but . . ." construction of an insider's self-congratulatory text, oscillating between parody and promise (are the cats actually painting, like the action photos imply?). But beyond the "wild" animals in captivity and the Pup-Cassos at home, there are revealing gaps in the market for art by animals.

The dividing line between "wild" and "domesticated" operates here, but is transected by other categories of value. For example, there is a near total absence of paintings by animals raised for food, like cows or chickens.<sup>22</sup> Such a linkage of art makers and foodstuffs would jar, presumably because an individual subject (a he or a she) produces art, while an object (an it) gets eaten. Also, we generally don't find paintings by animals like squirrels, tarantulas, worms, centipedes (lots of footprints possible there), rabbits, kangaroos, sloths, lobsters, slugs, deer, cougars, armadillos, snails, or alligators for sale.

In some cases, size renders such paintings impractical and unsalable. Imagine the size of a scroll of paper needed to catch the footprints of a hopping kangaroo! And perhaps the physical construction of an armadillo shell would cause the paint to be dragged around in an unattractive (unsalable) "messy" blob as the animal ambled across a piece of paper. Or perhaps the charisma factor is low, or the "eeew" factor is high, which could be said about slugs, snails, worms, and centipedes. (Even if a tarantula could be made to collaborate in a "painting," many people don't like arachnids, and their hairy fright factor militates against their fund-raising ability as painters.) The main painters are either pets or

charismatic wildlife in captivity, and this indexes a calculus of trainability, charisma, and, for lack of a better word, charm or appeal in the cultural matrix of desirable-undesirable animals.<sup>23</sup> All these factors make the huge and hugely popular paintings by Koopa the turtle all the more arresting.

### Turtle Artist Koopa: A Case Study

On the human-calibrated intelligence scale, turtles generally rank quite low. Their slow, awkward gait on land gives them a prehistoric, soporific look that contrasts with our human notions of quick-witted intelligence and creativity. In addition, their charisma factor is modest, for unlike mammals, they can't change facial expressions in a way humans recognize as meaningful, their hard shells aren't warm and cuddly, and they do not appear, to most humans at least, to be very interactive either with their environment or with people. Nor have I ever seen a "trained" turtle. They seem stolid, solid, and merely reactive, able, as a last resort, to totally withdraw from the world into the protection of their hard carapaces, the ultimate refuge of disengagement.

But Koopa, the twenty-five-year-old Gulf Coast box turtle named for a character in the Super Mario Bros. video game, defies these presumptions.<sup>24</sup> With his bright-red eyes, inquisitive head movements, interactive responses to his owner's physical and vocal communications, and a swift almost jaunty style of chugging across the carpet—revealed in his videos on YouTube—Koopa projects a very distinctive persona. He is a big turtle, almost a foot long and standing six inches high, has a tawny shell, and produces big paintings—up to three feet long and two feet high—that fit well over a sofa, and are so pictured on his TurtleKiss-Designs website that sells them. Also available on eBay, most of Koopa's paintings have sold in the \$100 to \$150 range, but several are priced much higher, including an asking price of \$1,200 for one piece.

Koopa has quite an international public, generated by extensive media coverage. He has been featured in the 2006 and 2013 editions of *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, and news stories have appeared domestically and abroad—for instance, on BBC World News, CBS News, and Univision and in the *Taipei Times*, the *Miami Herald*, and the *Age* (Melbourne), increasing the market for his work.<sup>25</sup> Today, his works hang on walls in all fifty US states and in Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, Bahrain, and the United Kingdom. And they aren't just hidden away in

homes; Koopa's work is on public display in schools, libraries, galleries, government buildings, and offices.

Part of Koopa's celebrity is based on his uniqueness: a Google search turned up no other painting turtles. His anthropomorphized public persona, artfully crafted through visuals and text posted on websites ranging from YouTube to Myspace, is also part of his appeal. His interests include mirrors, things shaped like turtles, hats, painting, long baths, helping in the vegetable garden, and starring in films made by his human keeper. Although he is "not sure" about his sexual orientation, Koopa describes himself on his Myspace page as a "swinger." He lists his occupation as both "professional artist" and "box turtle."<sup>26</sup>

But the ultimate reason for his popularity is the collision of our incommensurate expectations: the stunning painterly sophistication of his artworks collides with the fact that a turtle created them. Add to this astonishment the highly individuated, charming persona so carefully created by his keeper and you have a star worthy of international media attention. However, as the eBay website observes in offering *Hullabaloo*, Koopa's 765th canvas, painted in November 2007: "Don't let the cuteness of the artist fool you—this is an investment-quality original painting complete with photo documentation, articles, and a Certificate of Authenticity." These accompanying materials attest to fine-art uniqueness. They guarantee that the piece is an original, not a copy; document its provenance and ensure that it is not a fake sneakily attributed to the artist; and assert its worth as a financial investment, a commodity with a changing value in the art world. Indeed, underlining the commodity nature of the paintings, Koopa's TurtleKiss website FAQs state, "Buyers of Koopa's art can expect [its value] to rise as he gradually receives recognition as a collectible artist. His artworks currently sell for over 400% more than they did his first year." Authentication is required because, without it, no one would believe that a turtle had painted the pieces.

Koopa has created hundreds of paintings, but of course he doesn't accomplish this alone.<sup>27</sup> While it's true that Koopa is the one to physically spread paint on the canvas, and that the resultant multihued mixes of color could, perhaps, only be achieved through his unique bodily build and gait, the role of his artist-keeper Kira Ayn Varszegi is crucial. Her actions and choices are central to the striking visual results, even if she never physically touches the paint on the canvas. These are truly collaborative works, although probably only Kira regards them as such. She chooses the colors, primes the canvas with a

background color, decides where on the canvas to pour blobs of color for Koopa to walk through, positions and repositions the turtle so that his paths result in pleasing blends that cover the entire canvas, and decides when the painting is finished.

According to an apocryphal story, Koopa's art career started one day in 2003, when Kira left her canvas and oil paints on the floor while she took a break. Koopa, free to wander at will around the apartment, scuttled across her palette. As Kira notes, "After returning to my palette, I noticed that Koopa had produced a near perfect gradient [of colors] and added some nifty claw marks. I knew I had to find a safe way for him to paint after that."<sup>28</sup> Soon after, she found some nontoxic, water-based paints and acclimated Koopa to being rinsed off in the shower so that he could remain calm and unstressed throughout the process.<sup>29</sup>

As Kira explains, "I openly admit that all our paintings are collaborations. Without my knowledge of color blending and composition the paintings would turn out awful. Koopa does all of the actual 'painting,' but it's also because of how the canvas is prepared for him that the paintings end up looking nice."<sup>30</sup> As the painting unfolds and Kira documents the process for potential buyers with her digital camera, she is constantly making judgments about which parts of the canvas would benefit (aesthetically) from more color blending and which are best left alone. In a sense, Koopa becomes her paintbrush, but one that she does not fully control, since she only decides the direction in which Koopa will head when he is on the canvas.

But keeping the color mixing from becoming muddy requires a human artist's eye as well as careful placement of the blobs of pigment on the canvas. For example, placing red and green blobs side by side and allowing Koopa to walk through them, thus mixing them together, would result in a muddy brown color. Kira also monitors Koopa's movements so he doesn't spend too much time "overblending" one part of the canvas to the neglect of others, picking him up and placing him at the other side of the canvas, then letting him walk freely across its surface again and again until the entire canvas shows blended strokes of pigment.

The results are truly striking. Koopa's works tend toward the bright primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, blended into long swirls reminiscent of van Gogh's skies. The completed canvas is totally covered with layers of paint all the way to the edges, with no raw canvas showing through. Unlike the individual sweeping strokes on a white background typical of so many animal paintings, Koopa's paintings offer a densely worked, multilayered surface thick with pigments. For exam-

ple, his five hundredth painting, *Celebration #5*, thirty-six inches long and eighteen inches tall, features a basic palette of turquoise, sea green, and ochre, with highlights of bright pink, brick red, and white, especially in the central area of the canvas. The resultant effect is of a fire set amid the ocean.<sup>31</sup>

This piece typifies Koopa's style.<sup>32</sup> Unlike human artists, who mix two colors to yield a third, Koopa produces innumerable miniblends. Thick variations of texture are distributed across the surface, and the dragging marks, accented by a pause and shift of weight with each new footfall, yield a complex series of pulses interrupting longer sweeps of motion. These works invite the viewer to look closely and gaze at length to uncover their secrets.

Buyers' testimonies posted on Koopa's website consistently praise the surprising vividness and depth of the colors as well as the distinctive marks of tiny turtle claws sliding through the paint, details which are lost in the electronic images of the artwork. Judging from my (admittedly unscientific) sample of testimonials, a majority of Koopa's purchasers are female, and many buy a painting as a present for a family member: husband, mother, or child. Many are repeat customers who indicate they are saving up for another purchase. Broadly speaking, this might place a majority of the customers in the vast range of the middle class—having expendable income for luxury purchases, but not so much income that spending a couple of hundred dollars on a luxury item doesn't require being attentive to a budget.

Like the more general comments on animal paintings found on the ZooBeat forum, Koopa's clients echo those posters' values of uniqueness, contribution to conservation, and owning a conversation piece. But what's different is the enthusiasm they express for the aesthetics of the product as a painting. Koopa's works occupy honored places in his clients' homes, with many purchasers even specifying where they will hang their painting: in the bedroom, in the entryway, in the living room, integrated into their lives and their home decor. Many also stress a desire to share the painting with their friends and to experience their friends' amazement that it was created by a nonhuman artist.

Felicia from Iowa captures many of these sentiments about the aesthetic appeal of the work and the function of disbelief in producing desire and wonder. She writes:

All I can say is Oh My God!!! I can't believe the creative genius of Koopa. I simply must have more. It is amazing how the camera doesn't capture the full beauty of these paintings. I knew they would be nice but I honestly didn't expect the colors to

jump out at me the way they did. My husband was impressed and couldn't believe that a turtle did such amazing work. I'm glad I had my cd to prove it to him. He thought I was nuts but now he wants one (or two) for his office. Keep up the good work Kira and Koopa. Smiles, hugs and kisses to you both!<sup>33</sup>

Koopa's works appeal to both artists and those with little experience of "fine art," as the following testimonials reveal. Laura from Connecticut writes:

I have never purchased a piece of art in my life and couldn't tell the difference between a Picasso and Monet. However, I purchased a Koopa painting and have to say that it is amazing. The way the colors blend and create these peaks and then disappear into another blending of different colors is breathtaking. What I'm trying to say is that unless you are visually challenged, anyone can appreciate the beauty in these paintings.

Kelly from Georgia purchased a painting (*Untitled, #4*) for her grandmother in North Carolina. She described the result, which demonstrates that both artists and art lovers react positively too: "This past weekend [my grandmother] had a party at her house with several of her artist friends. . . . She said that they all raved about the painting—one compared it to Gauguin, another to Monet! I think you've got a hit on your hands!"

In their enthusiasm for the visual aesthetics of his painting, Koopa's fans are exceptionally vocal. They *love* the paintings—the actual visual result—not just the idea of the painting. They find it "amazing" that a turtle did it. I think it is the richness of mark making and the complexity of color and stroke on the surface that make Koopa's work "painterly" in a way that most other animal art, usually composed of a minimal number of strokes, is not. If Koopa could make these paintings on his own, Jackson Pollock would be in trouble. The turtle would *be* a creative, aesthetic being. That he is not, to our knowledge, is the prerequisite for the amazement greeting his products.

But Koopa the international celebrity artist is just one among many painting animals, most much less well known than he and less avidly collected internationally. Most animal art is produced and consumed locally. It's made in zoos and sanctuaries that use art making as an enrichment activity to relieve boredom for captive animals and then sell the results to help fund animal care. But it is one thing to place a turtle on a canvas and encourage him to walk, and quite another to convince an elephant, seal, or rhinoceros to paint. How does this happen?

### Teaching a Seal to Paint

Up to this point, except in my discussion of Koopa, I have made only passing references to the processes involved in creating paintings by wildlife, processes that vary somewhat by species. In this section, I describe the art making in detail based on my in-person observations, supplemented by descriptions found in the press and videos. Although animals can't paint without human assistance (they can't go to the store and purchase a canvas or get the paints out of a storeroom), the degree and mode of collaboration clearly vary widely, not only from species to species but also from individual animal to individual animal.

Every aspect of the art-making process presents a moment for decision making. To understand the artwork as a product of the animal-human interaction, I break down those moments into their component parts—a sort of microanalysis of production usually invisible to the public. Among my questions are the following: Who decides to paint in the first place? How does the animal "know" how to paint? What role does the animal play in producing the work? What role does the human play? When, where, and why does the painting activity take place? Is food always involved? Who selects the colors? The brushes? The paper or canvas? The painting's size and spatial orientation? Who decides when a painting is "done"? Who controls where the paint goes on the canvas? Who decides which paintings are "successful" enough to sell? On what basis? How are the paintings priced? By whom and why? Does the genre of "animal painting" have its own aesthetic? I take the case of Midge, a sea lion living at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, as an example to explore these issues.<sup>34</sup>

Training a sea lion to paint is based on the same type of operant conditioning training techniques used to train him or her for other behaviors, like clapping flippers on cue or balancing a ball on the nose. As operant conditioning is used to train a variety of species to paint, I describe the process briefly here.

Based on the work of B. F. Skinner in the early part of the twentieth century, operant conditioning pairs a stimulus (given by the trainer) with a response (an action by the animal) by tying them together with a reward. For most animals, that reward is a bit of food, but it may also be a back scratch, a belly rub, or even just hearing someone say "Good." Operant conditioning may employ a "negative stimulus" (something that hurts or distresses the animal) to help shape behavior, but this is discouraged and is used as a last resort.<sup>35</sup> (While I have never heard of

abusive techniques being used in the United States to get animals to paint, there have been some reports of maltreatment of elephants who paint in tourist camps in Thailand.)<sup>36</sup>

The ultimate goal is to train animal actions (termed "behaviors") to occur reliably on cue. But no sea lion is going to just pick up a brush one day and paint on a canvas to receive a wonderfully smelly fish reward. Training also involves "shaping" behaviors—that is, reinforcing, slowly and over time, behaviors that move the animal closer and closer to the desired one. For example, training a sea lion to paint involves teaching the animal to hold a brush in her mouth for a specified length of time without dropping it. To begin this sequence, the trainer would reinforce even the briefest inquisitive picking up of an object, gradually rewarding only the times the sea lion held on to the object for longer and longer periods.

Next, the trainer would work toward establishing reliable "give" and "take" cues so that the sea lion would take the brush when offered and give it back when commanded to do so. She would then be trained to "target" the canvas (that is, touch a specific spot on command) with the brush in her mouth, and, finally, to shake her head back and forth while holding the brush against the canvas. At some point, the brush would be loaded with paint, and the sea lion would begin to make marks on the canvas.

Once this whole cycle was under stimulus-response control, a painting could be produced through the substantial repetition of the take, target, headshake, and give-back-the-brush sequence of actions, with a different color of paint added to the brush at each sequence repetition to build up a multicolored abstract composition. While all the training for art making sounds tedious, it can provide stimulation and interspecies contact for the animals, that is, behavioral and environmental enrichment, while also building on previously trained behaviors.<sup>37</sup>

Midge, the California sea lion at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, is a willing and enthusiastic artist, and her experience provides a good case study. Her companion sea lion doesn't particularly like to paint with a brush and so is rarely asked to do so, indicating the role of the animal's choice making in participating in this activity. For him, paint is simply smeared on his flippers, and he then wiggles across paper, leaving his "prints." These talismans of physical uniqueness and species identification can also be sold as art prints to raise money, but it is only Midge who produces actual "paintings" for sale. She is an engaged and energetic (sometimes too energetic) brush painter who often paints in educational shows for the public. I was for-

tunate to attend a "private" session with her trainers, and describe that experience as follows.<sup>38</sup>

I watch as Midge swims over and slides out onto the concrete apron surrounding her pool while her trainers ready her paints and canvas. Sleek and wet, her dark-brown, short, dense fur rippling across her muscular torpedo shape, her round black eyes glistening, and her nose snorting, she quickly waddles over to one of her trainers. If this eagerness is telling, she seems anxious to paint.

Taking the brush in the side of her mouth, she really gets into the head-shaking part of the behavior, aggressively rubbing the bristles against the canvas, which a trainer strains to hold steadily perpendicular to the floor at Midge's head height. The paintings Midge produces have a great sense of energy, since this "whiskering" is translated into dynamic sweeps of color, with brushstrokes clearly scored into the paint and short jabbing strokes layering on top of wider beds of color. Flecks of flying paint add a final tracery to the surface.

The painting Midge is making for me on a piece of white stretched canvas measures eight inches by twelve inches. Its first layer of color is a vivid turquoise that she thickly applies in broad, fat brushstrokes as she goes at the canvas, pushing her brush into it with short, side-to-side head shakes while the brush protrudes from one side of her mouth. Each such attack on the canvas is greeted ("reinforced," in the stimulus-response vocabulary) with verbal encouragement—squeals of delight from the trainers. A second layer of bright purple is applied in longer sweeping strokes, with bristle lines carving across the surface in upward curves. Finally, a bright rosy pink accents the middle of the painting, with thick matte color sparingly applied. The colors mix a little but mostly read as discrete layers, giving the canvas a sense of depth and vibrancy as the tones of the stacked hues bounce against one another, resulting in a composition of surprising complexity and vigor.

This is truly "action painting" in the Jackson Pollock style of abstract expressionism. The drips, splashes, and sweeping skeins of Midge's brushstrokes record the physical actions that produced them, just as the paint on Pollock's canvases does. For instance, the sweeping motion of the brush results in strokes that begin as dense marks but taper to thin trails of pigment. The animal trainers say that people like these paintings because they have a lot of "energy" in them, but these aren't merely aesthetic judgments: more than energy is written on the canvas. It matters too *whose* energy it is. Midge's paintings render her energetic and unique presence in a tangible way.

Like most artists, Midge "signs" her work after completing it. In

this case, the "signature" is a purple nose print on the back of the canvas, the smudge resembling a little heart. On the wooden stretcher across the back, the trainer writes "Midge's nose print" in ballpoint pen, and then draws a heart, directing our reading of the smudge as loving signature. She then dates the piece (9/6/07) and writes "Midge, 22 yr. old female California Sea Lion." Whereas in a humanly produced work, a name and date usually suffice to identify the artist, at least in the European American fine-art tradition, here the individual must be identified by species, age, and sex as well.

For most of the lay public, this information carries little meaning—is a twenty-two-year-old sea lion old or young? Do females paint differently than males? How are California sea lions different from other types of sea lions? But these appended facts serve to further individuate the animal artist while simultaneously genericizing it ("a" California sea lion). The signing process represents a translation of the European fine-art tradition into animal terms, with a resultant taxonomic "signature" combining name and physical status.

As I noted earlier, animal paintings are really human-animal collaborations, and in this case Midge doesn't choose the canvas, the colors, or the brushes. While the trainer holding the canvas tries to move it so that Midge's brushstrokes don't all end up in the same spot, Midge's energy and attack are what drive the process. Her humans make no effort to derive symmetry, a representational sense, or full spatial coverage of the canvas.

The colors are chosen by the trainers, but with an interesting intervention from the zoo's marketing department. A member of the public relations staff had suggested using colors that "go together, sort of like a color wheel," and so the nontoxic tempera paints are numbered and color coordinated to let the trainers know what "goes with" what. My painting uses turquoise, purple, and fuchsia, all combinations of blues and reds. Sea lions are color blind, so we can assume that the color choices provide no particular meaning or pleasures for them, but they certainly do for the viewing public. Note, though, that the notion of which colors "go together" and which do not is a historically and culturally specific valuation of aesthetic relationships. We can assume that the bright colors of my painting are deemed "attractive" in part because they echo current color aesthetics in US visual culture. Midge's paintings are thus structured to read as attractive "paintings," both through format (canvas, paint, brushes) and through color and design aesthetics.

The moment of completion is a negotiation between trainer and an-

imal. While the trainer has complete control over the color choices, the animal has a say in when the painting is finished, mostly by indicating her disinterest in continuing to paint. When the trainer sees Midge's energy or attention beginning to flag, she will ask, "Are you done?" If the answer is a honking "yes," the painting session is over, and Midge trundles over for a big reward of fish.

At the end of the session I observed, I got my own reward when the trainers asked me if I would like a hug from Midge. While she balanced on her tail on the edge of the pool, she wrapped her two flippers around my body, and I then wrapped my arms around her. She punctuated the embrace with a fishy-breathed "kiss"—complete with a blast of warm air from puckered lips—on my cheek. Sucker that I am, I thought that the long duration of the hug indicated Midge's intense fascination with me, but I later learned that the timing was based on her trainer's subtle cue, which I could not see. Still, receiving a dripping hug from Midge fulfilled my desires for cross-species communication, even though the implied affection I associate with "hugging" was (merely) a demonstration of operant conditioning.

### The Eye of the Beholder

Somewhat chagrined at my own fantasies of cross-species embrace, I nonetheless think my own desires are symptomatic of what the public goes for when purchasing "artworks" produced by animals. The commodity—a product of the animal's embodied actions—becomes the stand-in for that desired physical touch and psychic meeting. To be in such close physical proximity with a nondomestic animal would require (we assume) some sort of "meeting of the minds"—a permission granted by the animal to enter its world in some minimal way, at least. Captivity, of course, is the unstated and masked prerequisite for such meetings of the mind where the art product is concerned. The symbolic transfer of a painting from animal "artist" to human owner indexes the desired free-will communion between species with the bridging of commodity exchange. We may not be able to embrace Midge, but we can own the talismanic trace of her physical self by purchasing one of her energetic brush paintings. The painting becomes the magical bridge between two physical and emotional entities, human and nonhuman, that otherwise could never meet.

In the foregoing discussion of turtle art celebrity and zoo art production, we discovered the ebullient engagement of the purchasing

public that generates this transnational market for "art" by animals. The democratization of philanthropy, that is, the ability of people of relatively modest means to contribute to conservation or to the betterment of animal welfare for captive animals and their cousins in "the wild" through the purchase of such "art," is a strong driving force for this art market. You may need millions to buy a van Gogh, but you only need one hundred or two hundred dollars or pounds to purchase an animal-made masterpiece. And with that purchase, you get not only the material product itself, the "artwork," but also the psychic reward of contributing to animal welfare and the possibility of educating and impressing your friends ("Yes! A turtle made that!").

Finally, and perhaps most important, the purchase activates the sense of contact with a "wild" or unusual animal, even if that animal lives in captivity, through the commodity-mediated connection with that animal's mind and body. The painting, after all, is the result of the (somehow) willing participation of the nonhuman animal in the process of daubing paint on a canvas. The sale—the commodity exchange in a capitalist system—formats this object as "art" and recuperates that animal embodiment into a commodity exchange of object for physical and psychological trace. The commodity for sale captures and records the material rendering of a specific animal's action in space and time and thus serves as both deed and talisman of authentic presence. Its purchase completes the circuit, uniting human and nonhuman animal in an idealized world of mutuality.

The fantasy that such connections could occur outside capitalism's embrace is enhanced by the role that "art" plays in them. "Art," as the material result of creativity, oscillates between the market and the intangible realm. Although embedded in the market, "art" purports to be above utility and beyond commodification, that is, priceless. As such, it promises the primed currency of human and animal connection, offering the imaginary ideal of transspecies connection outside commodified exchange. At the same time, however, it firmly anchors its products, and their sale, in the capitalization of wild animal captivity, no matter how benignly intended, that is the legacy of two centuries of scientism and colonial booty.

But the real stakes in animal-produced art emerge when the species involved shift from turtles and sea lions to apes. The audience for "art" made by animals of all sorts may exceed our expectations in both monetary and geographic dimensions, as I have argued here, positioning sales of this art not only as local events but also as part of a transnational art market. I have uncovered varied human motivations

in helping to produce, purchase, and display artwork by seals, turtles, horses, dogs, cats, and even rhinoceroses, among other animals. But this emergent art market has a pinnacle too, at which we encounter works produced by animals in whom we humans recognize an "intelligence" akin to our own. They include elephants and, most especially, nonhuman primates. In considering these animals, the real crux of the matter shifts from conservation support to academic research and the resulting potential for moral and ethical obligation.

In the following chapter on "art" produced by nonhuman primates and its transnational market, I explore the issues of representational art and how that categorization is used to raise the bar in our evaluation of nonhuman animals' intellectual capacities and our resultant moral obligations to them. Only elephants and some primates have produced "artworks" that are representational, that is, works explicitly referring to the world, articulated through a symbolic system of communication that humans understand to be meaningful.

I move, then, from the broader contexts of the transnational market for art by animals like Koopa and Midge to representational works by primates. What happens when the use of quotation marks, the "wink," attached to the category of animal "art" disappears? As we will see, the stakes here—and the potential influence on the lives of animals involved—are much different when the artist is a turtle or a sea lion than when the artist is a human-language-enabled ape like Michael the gorilla.



## "Art" by Animals, Part 2: When the Artist Is an Ape—Popular and Scientific Discourse and Paintings by Primates

In May of 2005, three paintings by a very special artist were sold by Bonham's Auction House in London for approximately thirty thousand dollars.<sup>1</sup> This transaction is not so unusual perhaps, except that the artist was an ape, and the sum was the highest ever paid for works of art created by a nonhuman animal.

How could this happen, and what does it mean? This chapter, a companion to the preceding one, builds on that chapter's detailed analysis of the growing global trade in art by nonhuman animals, including paintings produced by rats, dogs, and sea lions, among others. In this chapter, primates are my focus, and as before, I take up key questions animating this market, extending them now in light of primates, who up the ante. Does this art market function as a contestation of humanism? How does the culturally specific category of "art" change when the species producing it changes? What is at stake in naming animal creations "art," and for whom? For scientists? For the lay public? Why do some of these works, especially those by primates, command relatively high prices? What aspect of "the human" and of "mind" does art stand for in related

debates about animal capacities? How do such artworks relate to notions of "the primitive"? And ultimately, what does this challenge to the humans-only category of art making mean for a posthumanist vision of beings in the world? If the artist is an ape, or the ape is an artist, does that designation have potential political implications for the status of apes—indeed, for their representation, literally and figuratively—as political subjects?

To consider these larger questions, we must also ask the following, which underpin the art-making phenomenon: What role do notions of intentionality, aesthetic pleasure, design capability, and cultural knowledge of representational conventions play in our understanding of art making by animals? Ultimately, how do we situate these actions and products, and the beliefs they activate and depend on, within the wider, historically specific context of the European-derived notion of "art" as a distinctive realm of expressive individuality? This realm, while supposedly promoting transcendent truths that exceed the values of a market economy, has, for the last several hundred years, been deeply embedded in that economy.

In the preceding chapter, I sketched the transnational contours of this art market, its link to philanthropic support for zoos and sanctuaries, and the implied continuum that positions the value of artworks along a scale of increasing capacity for "intent" demonstrated by the species producing the works. As I noted, the toe prints unwittingly left by the pigment-dipped feet of the "ratistes" as they stroll across a canvas are valued less than the abstract expressionist-style brush-wielding pictures produced by Midge, the energetic sea lion at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden. And the painterly color mixing of Koopa the turtle gains value precisely because of the contrast between his assumed lack of ability to generate aesthetic intent and the exceptional aesthetic subtlety of his oeuvre.

Such products, I argued, serve as talismans connecting a desiring public to the imagined touch of the (wild/captive) animal's body—to the foot, trunk, flipper, lip, or feathers that literally traced marks on paper. Impossible in real life, such a touch is rendered in a bodily trace, captured and framed for an aesthetic experience and hung on the wall as a painting, integrated into the space of daily life.

Here, while shifting the species focus, I retain my emphasis on understanding the creation, reception, and circulation of these art products within the context of a specifically European-derived notion of art making and its contemporary linkage of individual creativity, subjectivity, and visual skill. The conditions of possibility for recognizing

these products as art were multiple. Especially important was the post-World War II rise of abstract art, particularly abstract expressionism, which prepared the cultural ground for the public acceptance of animal-produced paintings (99% of which are abstract) as art, and which has been a key prerequisite for the expansion of the animal art market overall.

In addition, the earlier European modernist encounter with, and passion for, so-called primitive art produced by individuals in African and Oceanic societies, for example, helped expand the visual range of European artists like Pablo Picasso and enlarged, for Europeans and those they influenced, the concept of what "art" could look like and who could create it. Primitivizing and orientalist ideologies of the time underwrote the ascription of a lower evolutionary status to non-Europeans vis-à-vis Europeans and fostered a notion that their art was a contemporary representative of earlier evolutionary stages.<sup>2</sup> It's a short leap within this Darwinian ideological landscape to casting primate art as that of the uber-"primitive." And finally, the post-World War II rise of a category of "outsider art"—especially since the 1970s—which recognized works produced by untrained individuals as exhibiting complex, often unique, and even obsessive design qualities, offered another broadening of the concept of "art."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, the category of visual art in the European and European-influenced world has been expanding in terms of both who is to be granted the status of "artist" and what their work can look like and still fall within the socially designated realm of "art." The notion of and market for "art" by animals is both part of and simultaneously dependent on this historical expansion.

But even if "abstract art" by animals has gained value within this expanding matrix and market of products, producers, and categorization, the holy grail in animal art making remains purposeful, expressive, aesthetic creation by nonhuman animals who have chosen to engage in this activity. For some humans, even more sought after and more elusive is evidence of the desire for transspecies communication through the creation of representational paintings.

I analyze this aspect of the art market, and its overlap with scientific desires to uncover the human origins of aesthetic expressivity, to argue that in the case of those few apes who live in "bicultural" ape-human communities, such an expressivity may exist. If it does, its greatest value is not in the art market, or in its ability to shine a light down the long history of human evolution, as is often claimed. Rather, its power

lies in the pressure it can bring on us to recalibrate our relations with such nonhuman beings. This is the danger, the allure, and the promise of art when the artist is an ape.

As we will see, although the market for art by animals is relatively new, the human search for artistry in nonhuman animal lives, and especially among primates, is not. That history sets the stage for our current understandings.

### Evolutionary Stakes and Political Subjectivity: The Question of Aesthetic "Intent"

For some contemporary scientists of human evolution, an important question is whether an "aesthetic sense" is a transspecies phenomenon, detectable in birds and apes, for example, but most highly developed among humans. Those in this camp care about art by animals because they see animals as human prehistory.<sup>4</sup> There is a search for origins. For example, as Frans de Waal notes,<sup>5</sup> many biologists regard the New Guinea bowerbird's hutlike nests as evidence of protoaesthetic expression.

Male bowerbirds build elaborate nests, decorating the entries with colorful objects like berries and flowers that they arrange and rearrange, analyzing the patterns from a distance and then flying in again to move a petal until the composition is just right, with an eye to attracting a female mate. For de Waal, this activity may not be art making, but it raises the question of whether human aesthetic urges, or—more accurately, I would argue—actions and desires expressed in the realm that has historically come to be called the artistic, may "go deeper than culture" and may relate to basic features of our perceptual systems, like our eyes and ears.<sup>6</sup> As additional evidence, he notes that many birds must learn the songs they sing, that they aren't born with this knowledge, and that many bird populations have different "dialects" reflecting regional variations, just as landscape paintings of the Rhone and the Rhine vary in style even during the same historical periods. Some birds are even apparently more creative singers than others, pioneers in the development of new songs.<sup>7</sup>

While these notions of an aesthetic genealogy appear to connect some evolutionary dots, the real stakes lie in debates about art by primates, the taxonomic group that includes humans and our closest relatives. There are two realms in which debates about "art making" by animals operate: that of science—including especially the work of com-

parative psychologists and primatologists working on ape cognition and language capabilities—and that of the layperson.

For comparative psychologists and primatologists, ape paintings have served as data for investigations of eye-hand coordination and tool use and for cognitive studies of symbol making.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Sarah T. Boysen and colleagues, on the basis of a coding of 618 drawings by three chimpanzees, conclude that chimps will engage in drawing activities without training or reinforcement, and that "this behavior may reflect their intrinsic interest in exploratory and manipulative play."<sup>9</sup>

In more recent investigations, biological anthropologist Anne Zeller provides additional evidence of deliberate choice making in the production of abstract paintings by captive primates. Between 1993 and 2004, Zeller gathered more than three hundred pictures made by apes and more than fifty by human children and compared them. After an extensive analysis of color preferences, the use of space on the paper, and so on, she concludes that far from being unintentional "scribbles," the mark making by both apes and human children is highly intentional. Zeller argues that

humans can adapt to a wider range of choices than other primates, mainly in numbers of colours and numbers of patterns utilized, but tend to be quite conservative and rule bound when placing their expression centered on the paper and generally within the boundaries. Females seem more constrained by these rules than do males. Chimpanzees, like the other apes, tend towards a preferred number of colours to manipulate but are quite exuberant in expression, breaching the page edges more frequently than remaining inside. However, they exerted control over the location of their colours (rule of thirds) and used complex patterns, such as the cross. This differs from gorillas who tended to use colour masses (smears) more than other species, although they were capable of deft movements with their large fingers.<sup>10</sup>

Zeller concludes that these results point us toward a better understanding of how primates respond to visual stimuli, and that we can understand their pictures in terms of a metacommunicative function.

These findings build on other experiments, like those conducted in the 1950s by Desmond Morris showing that rather than making marks randomly on a page, apes make considered choices about where to make marks in relation to what is already there, apparently seeking a sense of balance. Anecdotal evidence also indicates that apes appear to have a sense of when a painting is "finished." Congo the chimpan-

zee became agitated if Morris tried to remove a painting before Congo wanted him to. Nor could he be implored to paint more on an image once he stopped.<sup>11</sup> So it appears that nonhuman primates make marks on a surface that reflect choice involving careful consideration of location, relation, color, mass, and even style, and that they can decide what a "completed" item should look like.

Primate specialist de Waal goes further: "Apes can deliberately make what looks like art to humans," he says. While apes don't seem to strive to create enduring works of visual art that will "please, inspire, provoke shock, or produce whatever effect a human painter strives to achieve," they do seem to enjoy the visual and kinesthetic act of making the drawing or painting.<sup>12</sup>

Additional recent work by Boysen, de Waal, Morris, and Masayuki Tanaka (who is using touch screens in Japan to trace scribbling patterns by young chimps)<sup>13</sup> back up these findings, suggesting the possibility of what might be called a "protoaesthetic," components of manual and visual choice making that are necessary to but not sufficient for the development of what humans consider "art making." This interpretation would be important for those concerned with evolutionary issues and human development.<sup>14</sup>

This search for or desire for a protoaesthetic impulse also underlies, I believe, both the public's passion for paintings by apes and the widespread use of painting as an enrichment activity by primate keepers in zoos and sanctuaries. The broad contours of assumptions about art making sketched above are operative in both the scientific and the popular discourse realms, although the scientific realm may parse these concepts more complexly and with greater precision. But in both realms, there is a huge "wow" factor—the sense of a frontier being crossed, a limit being broken. If an ape can make art, then . . . what? What is the passion to know what follows that ellipsis?

Although early isolated case studies of primates showed that some of them like to draw or paint, chimp art really broke through to the popular consciousness in the 1950s. This postwar period coincided with a widening acceptance of abstract art as "legitimate" artistry. That shift in art history prepared the ground for laypeople to see ape art—primarily based on gestural marks, not representational strategies—as "art." This period saw ethologist Desmond Morris, trained at Oxford and a surrealist painter himself, featuring a young chimpanzee named Congo on his popular London television show *Zoo Time*. It was Congo's abstract paintings that were recently put up for auction at Bonham's in London alongside works by Warhol and Renoir. Although the Warhol

and the Renoir failed to sell, Congo's paintings did, and for far more than the anticipated equivalent of \$1,000–\$1,500 each.

As CBS News reported, American Howard Hong, a self-described contemporary painting enthusiast, paid \$26,352 for three brightly colored abstract tempera paintings by Congo.<sup>15</sup> This marketability took the Bonham's curator of modern and contemporary art, Howard Rutkowski, by surprise. "We had no idea what these things were worth," he said. "We just put them [on sale] for our own amusement."<sup>16</sup> The unexpected sale was reported in both mainstream and arts-specific media, including National Public Radio, CBS News, the London-based *Guardian*, and *Science* magazine online, demonstrating the artworks' status as entertainment news, science, art, and oddity.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, as is the case for so many artists, Congo's prices climbed because the artist is dead, having succumbed in 1964 to tuberculosis at the age of ten.<sup>18</sup> At his most prolific in his youth, he produced about four hundred drawings and paintings between the ages of two and four.<sup>19</sup> For Desmond Morris, works like these, and not those of early humans, "represent the birth of art."<sup>20</sup>

Reports of the sale lent additional newsworthiness to a retrospective of Congo's work titled *Ape Artists of the 1950s* at the Mayor Gallery in London in July of 2005. The art critic of the *Sunday Times* in London, Waldemar Januszczak, found that the exhibit challenged his beliefs that only humans can truly paint with intentional rather than accidental aesthetics. He admits, "I like Congo's paintings. A couple of them I love." Calling the retrospective "fascinating and slightly worrying," he describes Congo as a "talented" painter who made active color and compositional choices, threw a tantrum if a human tried to take a picture away from him before he was finished, and refused to add to any painting he regarded as completed, despite entreaties to do so. Each of these actions serves as evidence of intentional aesthetic production. Qualities of unclouded color, symmetrical balance, and, at times, a "mood [that is] pure Kandinsky" make Congo's best works demonstrations of profound achievement, in Januszczak's words.<sup>21</sup>

But even in this article, we see the smirk, the longtime view of the artist as monkey, as fop, and as self-important boor traced by scholar Thierry Lenain.<sup>22</sup> The title of Januszczak's article, "Monkey Master," and the resounding absence of the question mark are impossible to miss. Even the cavalier repetition of *m*'s in *monkey master* depends on a disregard for the particularity of the painter—for Congo is a chimpanzee, not a monkey. But the word *monkey*, aside from its alliterative use, also conjures up images of an organ grinder's monkey, a trickster, and

a miniature and comic humanoid. The fear that we might be monkeys after all erupts through the tongue-in-cheek titling.

But there is another side to this coin: Morris is concerned with tracing the origins of human abilities to their nonhuman primate past (thus assuming, of course, that apes don't have cultural history but rather live in the present as mere exemplars of our long-distant evolutionary cousins). But these discussions rarely recognize what sociologists and theorists of art know—that representational systems aren't simply the results of inherent human eye-hand coordination and perceptual abilities but are historically distinctive symbolic systems, and are learned both actively and passively by members of specific human communities. Just think of the difference between the visually flat medieval paintings of saints and the lush three-dimensional images of Michelangelo, to draw just one example from well-known western European traditions. When some laypersons and even some scientists refer to ape drawings as a mode of protoaesthetics, or representational art, they ignore the fact that "art" is a category of social activity that is historically specific, differing according to time, place, and community.

To better understand art practices and their linkages to what human primates do, we must frame art making as a cultural activity, and this doesn't necessarily mean that apes don't paint but that maybe some do. This is especially resonant when we consider the cases of individual apes like Washoe, Koko, Michael, Kanzi, and Panbanisha, all stars in long-term communication research who have been trained to "speak" with humans through sign language or the use of lexigrams.

After all, Koko and her now-deceased companion, Michael, for example, were raised as members of a bispecies community full of symbolic visual images (they looked through store catalogues and books and watched videos). And they learned to perceive and to name at least some objects, and perhaps even concepts, which is a culturally specific representational act in itself. Perhaps this naming lies at the origin of their art making if, in fact, we are to accept that characterization. At the very least, they complicate the question of meaning and suggest the need to consider seriously what might be happening when the artist is an ape.

But there are other reasons why a documentable artistic ability among nonhuman primates, and even among other animals, might be discomfiting. If animals do produce works of art, might they not be more like us—expressive, self-aware, reflective—than we would like to admit? And if so, might their already contested status—as property, as commodity, as "animal," and hence without rights and with few legal protections—be harder and harder to maintain?

### How Do You Teach an Ape to Paint?

For the next part of this discussion, I momentarily leave aside painting by Washoe, Kanzi, and Koko and these apes' symbolic interactions with humans, but I will return to them later. Washoe, for example, was involved in studies on representation and schemata. My understanding is that she hadn't been "taught" to paint in any formal way.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, most of the paintings I describe below are produced through operant conditioning and target training by apes who don't have access to sign or symbolic language.

In the primate painting sessions I observed at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, painting was usually taught through operant conditioning, just as any other activity might be: for instance, training a primate to present his or her chest close to the bars of the cage so a stethoscope could be used during medical procedures. I had the opportunity to watch primate keeper Jennifer Davis on two different days as she painted with Toba, a forty-year-old female orangutan; Gracie, an eight-year-old female gorilla; and Tatu, Gracie's father and a silverback. Toba is unusual in being self-taught, while Gracie and Tatu are more typical, having learned to paint through specific instructional techniques.

Toba sports a reddish-gold comb-over look and long tangles of fur. She has been painting for a couple of years. Although Jennifer was not the one to introduce her to painting, it appears that upon being presented with the materials, Toba took to it right away without formal instruction. The first day I spend with her, she isn't in the mood to paint, even though Jennifer and I are painting on the other side of her bars, hoping to entice her to join us. But on the second day, she's is ready to go. She loads the brush with paint herself, choosing from among several colors, and then paints on the paper we have put inside her cage. She does two things while painting that she's never done before. First, she shakes the brush when it's loaded with paint to get dribs and drabs spraying onto the page instead of just strokes, and second, she holds the paper upright in one hand while making strokes with the paintbrush in the other. This new behavior indicates she's actively problem solving and choosing how to conduct this activity on this particular day. As a reward at the end of the ten-minute session, I get to feed her some yummy Yoplait yogurt, a treat for both of us.

Toba, as I have noted, is unusual—most primates have to be taught to paint. This is done through operant conditioning, as described in

the preceding chapter. To recap briefly: in operant conditioning, a stimulus, like a verbal command, is paired with a reward when the proper response is performed by the animal. Painting involves multiple steps—holding a brush, touching the brush to paper or canvas, and returning the brush to the keeper. Commands like "take" and "give" can prepare the animal to take a brush loaded with paint and then to give the brush back to the keeper. The animal is trained to touch the brush to the paper when the keeper holds the canvas up to the bars of the cage and asks him or her to "target" the brush onto the spot—in this case, to make contact with the paper.

Jennifer has reached the targeting stage with Gracie, who has been training for a couple of months. Gracie received both verbal praise and a few tasty grapes as reinforcement for touching the paintbrush to the canvas. During her father's very first painting lesson, the goal was to get him to return a loaded paintbrush to the keeper through the bars of his cage, whereupon the keeper introduced paper between them, so that the brush left a mark on it. The question of creativity is not being explored here, although keepers I've talked to often try to give the animal options so that part of the enrichment activity is the opportunity to exert control over one's environment by choice making: Which brush? Which color? Nevertheless, keepers intervene in all sorts of ways to heighten the odds that a painting will be salable—aesthetically pleasing—ensuring that the colors won't be muddy and the paint will cover more than one spot on the paper. They turn the paper, remove it at a certain point, offer a limited pallet of colors that "go together," and so on.

But my concern with this process is as an enrichment exercise. One of the primary aspects of the enrichment is its one-on-one activity, which gives the ape attention from the keeper, most often undivided attention. Erica Thiele, chimp enrichment coordinator at the M. D. Anderson Research Center in Bastrop, Texas, calls this shared activity "an intimate behavior." Thiele makes painting available to her captive charge Joey the chimpanzee as an enrichment activity. Joey, she says, appears to love painting, as evidenced by his "uh uh uh" vocalizations in response to praise at the end of a session. And while the painting exercise itself is a positive experience for him, in her estimation, he also likes the tasty reward of a Coke after each session.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, apes have been known to paint other things, including their cages, so the act of mark making may be enriching, engaging, or entertaining in itself.

But while the apes may produce items that can be sold as "paintings" and may engage to some degree with the issues of "expressivity"

and aesthetic choice making, the emphasis here is on art making as "enrichment" for the animals. The creation of moneymaking items is merely a byproduct that can help support the primate program. (Joey's canvases sell for varying amounts, depending on size: \$250 for a five-by-seven-inch minimasterpiece and twice that for an eight-by-eleven-inch canvas.)

#### But—when the Artist Is an Elephant? Representational Drawings

Congo, Gracie, Jimmy, Toba, and many other primates produce works of varying aesthetic complexity and attraction for potential buyers. Some, like Congo, become celebrities and are the subjects of scientific studies. For others, painting offers "enrichment," a diversion, a way of engaging with their keepers one on one and doing something different in the potentially undifferentiated daily routine of captivity, thus supporting their psychological health. However, no matter how diverse their motivations, their degree of training or lack thereof, or their amount of active aesthetic choice making in color and design, none of these primates has produced artworks that appear to be representational. In contrast to "abstract art," which is focused on creating relationships between line, color, and a surface as an end in itself, "representational art" is (to put it very simply) art that depicts, through culturally specific symbolic systems recognizable to humans, something in, or knowable about, the world—like a picture of a banana. Only a very few primates and some elephants have produced such work, and I turn to them now, starting with a pachydermic detour to Thailand.

About five years ago, tourist videos of elephants painting in Thailand began to surface on YouTube. Astoundingly, the resulting paintings were unmistakable depictions of elephants, their shapes gracefully outlined in bold black lines and accented in red. Not only were the elephants painting but they also were painting self-portraits, or so it appeared.

These elephant artworks were produced under the auspices of Komar and Melamid's Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Center, which fosters painting at three elephant campuses in Thailand, most notably the Thai Elephant Conservation Center in Lampang. The latter is a government-supported elephant conservation and retirement center in the northern tip of the country near Chiang Mai. The sanctuary supplements its government funding by offering daily educational shows, attended by Thai and foreign tourists.

Ever since logging was banned in Thailand in 1989, elephants, once movers of giant teak logs, have been out of work and lacking in care, reduced, in many cases, to begging in cities with their mahouts (caretakers) or performing circuslike tricks for cash. Moved by the elephants' plight, artists Komar and Melamid introduced painting to them and their keepers.<sup>25</sup> These Soviet émigrés to the United States have been known since the mid-1980s for their catholic tastes in art making as well as their avant-garde interventions in conceptual art. They made a painting session a regular part of the tourist shows at the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Center. The artworks are sold both on-site and internationally, thanks to Komar and Melamid's artworld connections.<sup>26</sup>

However, unlike so many of the other "painting" schemes used in zoos and sanctuaries as fund-raisers, which result in a colorful smearing of paint in a sort of abstract-expressionist mode (discussed in the previous chapter), the Komar and Melamid elephants produce something different. In addition to that type of colorful, squiggle-lined "expressionist" picture on a white background, they also create ostensibly self-representative images. Crafted in an Asian brush-painting style, these images consist of simple, flowing black lines, unadorned by extensive three-dimensional shading or perspectival renditions of landscape for context.

YouTube videos show the elephants approaching the paper with careful deliberateness as they hold the ink-loaded brushes in their trunks. These videos continue to be popular today, with new ones continually posted, expanding the public for elephant art; "Elephant Painting an Elephant," for instance, attracted 154,300 views in four months.<sup>27</sup> The videos help disseminate the images of elephants actually painting, and generate discussion in posted viewer comments. Generally, commentators are split into two camps: those who find elephant artists amazing but recognize that the elephants have been trained (sometimes noting that human artists are trained too), and those who proclaim that surely the elephants were abused in the training process to get them to paint. While there is no evidence to connect the Thai Elephant Conservation Center with such maltreatment, Thailand has many elephant tourist camps, especially in the Chiang Mai region, and many activists have criticized the traditional method used for "breaking" an elephant. This technique, *phajaan*, is used throughout Asia and involves starving, beating, burning, and severely confining young elephants after separating them from their mothers. By the time the elephants learn how to paint as a performance skill, they may already have been "trained"

by the traditional abusive *phajaan* technique, which is kept invisible from the camps' visitors, most of whom are tourists from the United States, western Europe, and Australia.<sup>28</sup>

The YouTube videos themselves show no incidents of abuse, only intensely concentrating elephants, each in front of an easel and grasping a brush in his or her trunk. Deftly, an elephant touches the tip of the brush to the rectangular sheet of paper, draws a specific line, and then deliberately lifts the brush, only to touch its tip to a different part of the paper. Each line, done in sequence, inscribes a different component of the outline of an elephant: the curve of the back, the lilted lift of a tail, the shell shape of a giant ear, the upraised arc of a trunk, until the strokes merge, one connected to the other, and the whole body suddenly appears on the page, perhaps with the added accent of a red poppy held in the trunk.

It's easy to mistake the intense effort of the brush placement and marking on the page for artistic intuition. But as the painting unfolds, we see the trained components fall into place. Even if we know the painting is a "trick," rotely learned by the elephant, the technical accomplishment is astounding—no smudges, each line perfectly connecting with the next, and the resultant image imparting a sense of movement, with front legs sweeping forward in front of hind limbs. The voiceover on the YouTube video cited above captures the viewer's emotions as the painting unfolds:

The elephant (perhaps named Suda, but the audio of the local announcer is unclear), stands in front of the slanted easel and very, very, very carefully reaches his (or her?) trunk toward the unblemished white expanse of the page. Touching the surface, the brush tip traces a strong black line over the paper, curving in a gentle arc. Eventually, we will find that this represents the elephant's huge backbone. "Look at this! Look at the calm face! It's an elephant, ya'll, painting an elephant!" enthuses the commentator on the video. The 1970s tune "Sounds of Silence," by the folk duo Simon and Garfunkel, begins to play during the elephant show performance, underlining the soft, sustained movements. A swelling chorus of appreciative murmurs rises from the crowd onsite watching the demonstration.

The video voice continues to enthusiastically relate the commentator's reactions as the action unfolds. "That is a real elephant, not a person dressed up in an elephant costume! How does this happen? Maybe the elephant is training? Some grown folks can't even draw that right there." (The drawing has now progressed to the point that the body and striding legs of its elephant figure are clearly visible.) Repeatedly,

the elephant gives used brushes to and takes fresh brushes from his mahout, returning to the canvas after each exchange for another intensely careful stroke. The contrast between the animal's huge size and the small controlled movements of its trunk is stunning.

In between brushstrokes, in a release of tension, the elephant swishes its tail and bobs its head. "He's dancing!" says the voiceover on the video. "This is amazing! This elephant is a true artist!" (The elephant then draws two oblong lines behind the main body outline, inking back legs in motion.) "The elephant ain't even messin' up at all!" And indeed, it's true. The back-leg lines don't run into the front-leg lines, preserving the sense of bodily volume emerging on the page. "All right! Wasn't that amazing!? It's [drawing a picture of] a happy elephant! Unbelievable!"

Operant conditioning—the training of small behaviors through positive rewards and the linking of those behaviors into a series of multiple actions in a designated sequence—has excelled here. The announcer at the tourist show tells the crowd that it takes three to four months for an elephant to learn how to paint like this. Each rendition of an elephant by a specific elephant is just like the one before it . . . a copy of a copy of an original that was designed by the (human) brush-painting artist, now a teacher of elephant painting, hired by Komar and Melamid to head up this project.

The situation is reminiscent of Chinese factory workers today who paint flower after flower on wineglasses destined to be sold cheaply as "hand-painted" luxuries at US dollar stores. The individual in each case creates the same thing slightly differently, over and over again, according to a formula of strokes and colors. Each glass will have a slightly larger or smaller flower petal than the others, just as each elephant ear is a slightly different outline. Technically, the product will be unique and hand- (or trunk-) made, thus retaining what Walter Benjamin called the "aura" of the original in a time of rampant reproductive copies.<sup>29</sup> The overall production schema, capitalizing on the uniqueness associated with the idea of "handmade" as opposed to machine manufactured, is nevertheless set up to work precisely *against* the individuality associated with the term *artistry*—that notion of individually expressive subjectivity that has been such a defining characteristic of the European-derived art-making process in the past few centuries.

The truth here is that the elephant is not just "naturally" rendering a linear drawing of an elephant because he or she wished to create a self-portrait. This is the fantasy: that the elephant, known to both scientists and the lay public for its intelligence and its ability to recognize

itself as a unique being—a subject—could communicate that subjectivity to us by using a symbolic system that we both (elephant and human) could grasp as meaningful and referential.<sup>30</sup> Komar and Melamid know this very well, and video watchers comment on it too; but the accomplishment, its “elephant drawing an elephant” attraction, and the performative rendition of elite skill and focused intent by the elephants all oscillate in the equation of action, product, process, and perception, both for the elephant artists and for their audience. We *wish* the elephant could paint us a picture of herself, even though we know she was probably trained to do what she does. With their signature lack of obeisance to the idea of artistic genius, Komar and Melamid would surely embrace not only this human desire but also the trumping of it by the trained elephant! As Melamid has said, “People can laugh at us. They can dismiss it all as a stupid joke, a travesty, a hoax. But let’s not forget that art is not a tragedy, not a drama—it’s a circus. And what is a circus without animals and clowns?”<sup>31</sup>

#### When the Artist Is a (“Bicultural”) Ape

In the end, the possibility of representational art making by elephants remains just that—a possibility yet to be ascertained. But there is a frontier of human-animal communication where the ideas of “art,” “expressivity,” and “representation” come together in what is for some a tantalizing way, and for others a wholly convincing way. A different level of representational intent seems to emerge among those few apes who are “bicultural,” in that they have been raised in human-generated visual and material worlds replete with conventions of human aesthetic design. Let me turn now to the small but crucial category of (human-) “language-enabled” apes.

Koko the gorilla, Panbanisha and Kanzi the bonobos, and Chantek the orangutan have all regularly participated in art making. Koko has her own website displaying prints of her paintings for sale (<http://www.koko.org>), and many of her pieces are self-titled, like the poetic *Pink Pink Stink Nice Drink*—an acrylic of sweeping blues, greens, and pinks all rushing upward from the bottom-right to the upper-left part of the canvas. Hovering on the brink of representation, this piece, according to the website of the sponsoring organization, the Gorilla Foundation of Woodside, California, is “inspired by a nearby flowering meadow with a stream running through it.” Its title is explained thusly: “Koko’s word for flower is ‘stink’ even though she admits that she loves their

smell.” “Drink” is her sign for water.<sup>32</sup> So the title references a very pink flowering area by a stream—a representation that translates a sense of the sight, smell, and taste of the three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional canvas.

Koko and her now-deceased companion Michael have also produced images of other beings, often from memory. These portraits of animals, like that of Michael’s dog Apple, or Koko’s picture of her pet fledgling blue jay, while rarely unambiguously representational, do give a new meaning to the category of portraiture. For example, Michael’s painting *Apple Chase* consists of whites and grays sweeping across the paper. Although he had a large selection of colors to choose from, Michael used the black and whites that match the colors of Apple’s coat. The title of his painting seems to combine a memory of a being with that of an event, recalling his favorite running game of “chase” with Apple.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, upon request, both gorillas have produced paintings expressing their interpretations of specific emotions—the meanings of which they have come to understand through sign language—including “love,” “hate,” and “anger.” This level of interspecies communication was unavailable to the 1950s ape artists represented in the recent retrospective including Congo’s work. None possessed the linguistic knowledge to communicate in a way humans could understand, and so they couldn’t be asked to paint certain things or ideas or emotions. Granted, in the case of Koko and Michael, the paintings and their titles, and the interpretations of the titles and of their referential meanings, are all products of bispecies collaboration. Gorilla knowledge is filtered through the medium of human concept-based communication in the English language, as transposed into American Sign Language.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the gorillas speak and understand a form of English, but the humans don’t speak Gorilla.

The challenges in and potential for exploring paintings by apes are both enormous. The most extensive investigation so far of apes’ pictorial possibilities comes in Tomas Persson’s study of how apes interact with pictures.<sup>35</sup> Building on earlier studies but designing his own, Persson brings sophisticated semiotic analysis to bear on primates’ engagements with visual images, in an approach that carefully parses the number of abilities and skills needed to see a picture *as* a picture. For example, a photograph, with its historical conventions of realism, is both a thing (a piece of paper with ink on it) and a depiction (an image). We must then relate that surface image to something else, somewhere else in the world that it refers to.<sup>36</sup> And we must not confuse the “realism” of the image with the thing it is an image of.<sup>37</sup> From this per-



spective, Persson analyzes apes' perceptions of photographs and of line drawings of objects in his attempts to understand how they respond to such complex representational images. Some apes, he proposes, perhaps especially those introduced to human language, seem able to respond to such representations as representations.

Reading his work, we can bring the necessary, but often lacking, social and historical dimensions of pictorial understanding to discussions of art by animals. "Bicultural" apes like Kanzi and Koko, who have lived for decades in human-centric worlds full of human words and images, can be, in Persson's term, "inspiring co-workers" in this regard.<sup>38</sup> Humans, after all, learn interpretive strategies for pictorial representations through social interactions and verbal "scaffolding" in their communities, and by a certain age can understand that some drawings "stand for" something else. Culturally specific visual conventions, having to do with strategies for depicting time and space (for instance, three-dimensionality, depth, a moment captured in time, and so on), are, as cross-cultural studies of humans have shown, quite complex, and they too are learned. Various mediums—paper, touch screens, color markers, paint—also impart their own complexities to the representational process. Beyond these considerations, we must remember that not all images are "art." "Art" is a historically contingent and culturally variable category of visual production and reception underwritten by institutional and social formations.

The whole concept of artwork and art making is thus always already constructed through human categories of meaning. But even allowing for that, these primate-produced paintings come strikingly close to the status of "artwork" as a visual representation produced for the pleasure of looking at it or of making it, but not for a utilitarian reason. These works seem to combine a sense of mark making with imagination, resulting in a product that is then perceived as "art" by someone else, thus completing the hermeneutic circle uniting perception with interpretation.

Persson, unlike cognitive scientists who investigate primate pictures in search of origins of human abilities, poses different, less anthropocentric, questions: "Can pictures help us understand them [primates] better? Can we ask them questions through pictures that we cannot do through language? Or rather, through their language, can they tell us things about pictures that reflect their inner worlds in new ways?"<sup>39</sup>

If some apes *are*, or could be, artists, what does that imply about humans' obligations to them? Already, there have been moves afoot in the European Union to grant special status to great apes—a sort of

in-between animal and human status garnering legal protections.<sup>40</sup> Recent court cases in the United States are also pushing this boundary, trying to assert that apes should be "legal persons."<sup>41</sup> And even dogs and cats will soon have legally mandated "freedoms" in some European countries—freedom from hunger, from the elements, from isolation. If more studies and more popular reports describe animals, and especially apes, as artists, it becomes politically harder and harder to deny their sentient and intelligent status.

In a liberal humanist social orientation, where individual rights, the rule of law, and a belief in the importance of individual subjectivity are crucial underpinnings of social formations, the line between human and nonhuman primate becomes ever more indistinct. Even in a poststructuralist, posthumanist vision, with decentered subjectivity, and an emphasis on a socially constructed "I" as a position to be occupied, not an essence to be expressed, the social construction of the category "animal" as that which is not human is increasingly exposed as an epistemology with a specific history, not as a "fact" naming an already extant reality. In either case, animal artists subvert the presumed privilege of the human. And this, perhaps, is the utopian ideal (or fantasy?) that people purchase when they buy a painting by Koko to put on their wall.



18. Mama the wire-haired fox terrier made this painting at a Champaign County (Illinois) Humane Society fund-raising event in 2011. Note the imprint of her paw pads, marking the physical trace of the individual animal, as distinctive as a human fingerprint. Water-based paints on paper,  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ ". Collection of the author.



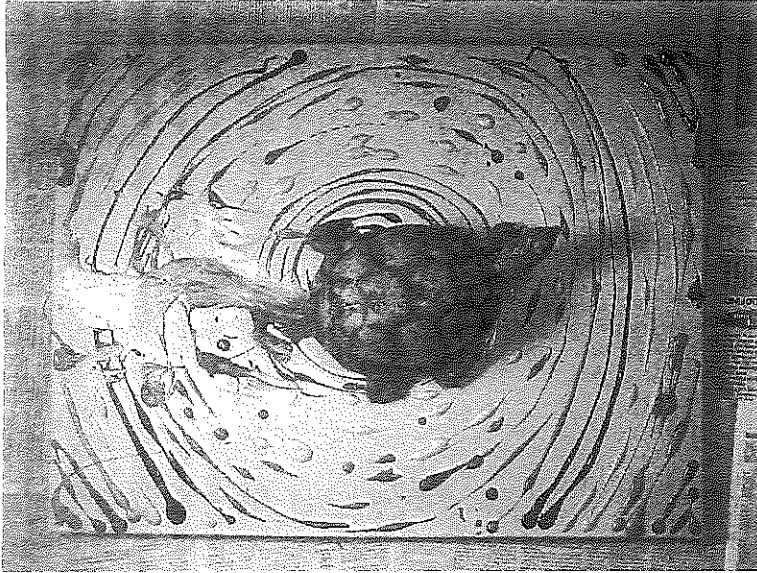
19. This painting in blues and greens was made by a snake being treated by the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital Wildlife Clinic, Champaign, and was used to raise money for the operation of the nonprofit facility. Note the sinewy traces of the snake's body and movement inscribed on the canvas board. Water-based, nontoxic paints on canvas board,  $9 \times 12$ ". Collection of the author.



20. Midge the sea lion paints with one of her zookeepers poolside on September 6, 2007, at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden. Holding a modified brush in her mouth, she shakes her head vigorously back and forth, making swift bright-blue and purple strokes on an eight-by-twelve-inch canvas board. Photo by the author.



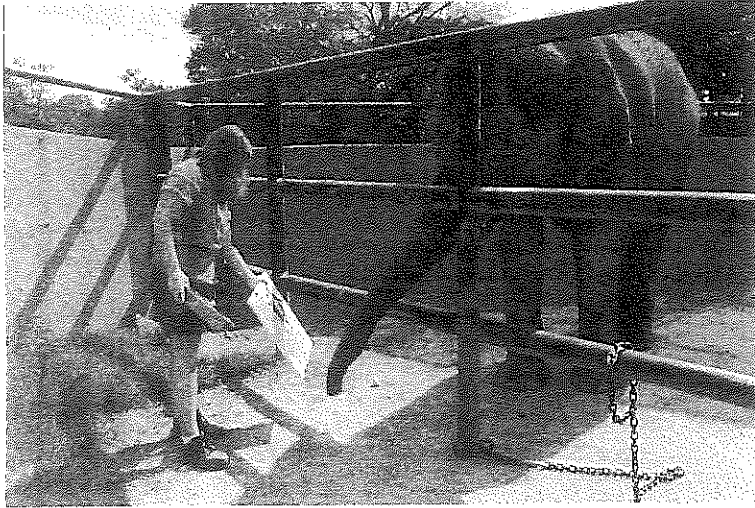
21. Painting by Midge the sea lion, Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, produced September 6, 2007. Water-based paints on canvas board, 8 × 12". Collection of the author.



22. Koopa the turtle begins a painting within a circle of paint. In this photo, we see the importance of human artist-owner Kira Ayn Varszegi in placing the colors that Koopa will mix into the final image. Photo by Kira Ayn Varszegi, used with permission.



23. Koopa the turtle completes a painting. He and his caretaker-artist, Kira Ayn Varszegi, together create the conditions for him to complete this painting, blending a myriad of colors together. Photo by Kira Ayn Varszegi, used with permission.



24. Chandra the elephant, painting on September 6, 2007, at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden with one of the staff. She is making a painting by blowing and smearing water based paints in golds and greens on a 16 by 20 inches stretched canvas. The painting is signed by her unique "nose print" . . . a smooch from the tip of her trunk in the corner of the painting. Photo by the author.



25. This painting, *Stink Gorilla More* by Michael the gorilla, then in residence at the Gorilla Foundation, Woodside, California, used nontoxic paints to depict a plenitude of multicolored flowers in pastel colors. According to the Gorilla Foundation, the word *stink* in the title of this painting, supplied by Michael, refers to the gorilla's word for "flower," referencing its intense smell. Michael, now deceased, produced many paintings, like his companion Koko, and both titled their paintings in their own words, which were then interpreted by their caretakers. Photo courtesy of Dr. Ronald Cohn/the Gorilla Foundation/Koko.org.

36. B. R. "Buck" Peterson, *Original Road Kill Cookbook* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1987).
37. There are exceptions, of course, in which animal lives are granted standing in the debates about human mobility needs and are brought into community-based public discourse. Alexandra Koelle's discussion ("Rights of Way," 109–267) of recently constructed ecopassages, tunnels, and bridges for animals to safely cross roads on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana well exemplifies how animal lives can be factored into human design if such lives are valued.
38. Claire Palmer, "Killing Animals in Animal Shelters," in *Killing Animals*, ed. Animal Studies Group (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 170–87.
39. Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals*, 4.
40. Ibid.
41. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 126, cited in Steve Baker, "Animal Death in Contemporary Art," in *Killing Animals*, ed. the Animal Studies Group (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 83.
42. Unlike the rationale behind the creation of the animal passages that Koelle ("Rights of Way") discusses—that animal deaths on roadways result from competing claims to use of shared space—this presumption, which renders roadkill unrecognizable as a social problem, chalks them up to "bad luck": wrong place, wrong time; cause for "regret" but not for change.
43. I am grateful to PhD candidate Stephen Vrla, who is completing an animal studies concentration in sociology at Michigan State University, for sharing some of his preliminary, unpublished research on roadkill with me. Following up on his own experiences and my previously published call for research on the phenomena, Vrla has used multiple regression analyses on survey data, supplemented by Personal Meaning Mapping, to help pinpoint the relationships among attitudes toward animals in general, sensitivity toward animals, and reactions to the encounter of roadkilled wild or domestic animals in daily life, and to correlate those issues with demographic factors such as age, region, religion, gender, and political orientation.  
 Vrla's preliminary findings, reported in his unpublished 2013 paper "Something to See Here': Looking at Road-Killing and Road-Killed Animals," indicate that repeated exposure to roadkilled animals can have a desensitizing effect on an individual's concern for those animals, but can also generate increased concern for roadkilling as a larger problem. Also, perhaps not surprisingly, he found that people were more bothered by the sight of dead dogs and cats on the highway than by the bodies of wild animals, as they perhaps intuited that someone at home was missing those pets. Hence, the impact of seeing roadkill varied with the species killed.  
 I look forward to Vrla's published reporting of this first stage of his research and to his longer-term development of this research initiative.

Ultimately, his research and that of others may reveal strategies to lessen roadkill that will complement the geographic initiatives behind the construction of animal passages and the reorientation toward space as a multispecies habitat that includes humans. Until we know what people actually think and feel about their personal encounters with roadkill and about their conceptions of it as a social phenomenon, we aren't likely to be able to make significant inroads in decreasing it.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

1. See discussion on ZooBeat, 2008. Now renamed ZooChat: Zoo and Animal Conservation Community, the online forum is searchable at <http://www.zoochat.com>, accessed November 4, 2015.
2. Among the many critical writings since the 1970s that strive to situate the European-derived categories of "art," "art making," and the "art world," along with the latter's producers and consumers, in a culturally specific historical narrative, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1990 [1972]) and Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) remain lucid and influential.
3. Megan Levy, "Tony Blair, the Rat, Launches Artistic Career," *Daily Telegraph* (London), March 1, 2008, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1580403/Tony-Blair-the-rat-launches-artistic-career.html>.
4. See the "Events/Exhibits" page on the Scamperat website, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.scamperats.com>. For an elite take by a British artist, see the work of Lucy Kimbell and her performance-lecture "One Night with Rats in the Service of Art," discussed in Steve Baker, *Animal/Artist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 41–63.
5. See the "Welcome to ScamperART!" page on the Scamperat website, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.scamperats.com>.
6. Thierry Lenain, *Monkey Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 21.
7. Ron Broglio, "Contact Zones and Living Flesh: Touch after Olly and Suzi," in *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 82. In this chapter, Broglio asks "how the surface as a theoretical space occupied by the animal has a productivity and meaning different from the privileged self-reflection of the human subject; in other words, how does the animal and its noninteriority produce thought differently?" (81).
8. Baker, *Artist/Animal*, 24. Baker's work is similarly an indispensable analytical guide to a landscape of experimental artists investigating the interface of humans and animals: Sue Coe, Sophie Utting, Eduardo Kac, and Angela Singer, among others. Some of these artists use living or dead animal bodies in their art making, which includes live performance, photography, and film.

9. Nor is the process usually documented in film or photographs that then become artworks in themselves. The exchange of money, in the majority of cases I discuss, goes mostly to support the animals themselves (e.g., supplementing nonprofit budgets at animal sanctuaries). And finally, for the majority of both the consumers and the scientists I discuss, the goal in engaging with these artworks is not to deconstruct the notion of a surface as the ground for shared action or to self-reflexively take apart the conventions of art making to see it as a historically constituted zone of visual conventions and social relations. Although it exceeds the parameters of this chapter, further comparison of audiences, consumers, and the market for these two related categories of art by and with animals would be illuminating.
10. Michael Killian, "Trunk Show: Asia's Out-of-Work Elephants Find a New Career in Art—and Now Their Work Is on the Block at Christie's," *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 2000, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-03-13/features/0005180027>.
11. Elizabeth Bukowski, "Why Do Elephants Paint?," March 12, 2000, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.salon.com/2000/03/23/elephantart>.
12. Graciela Flores, "When I See an Elephant . . . Paint?," *Scientist*, June 1, 2007, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/25148>. The children's book *Ruby the Painting Pachyderm of the Phoenix Zoo*, by Dick George (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), goes into surprising detail about Ruby's painting experiences, describing her beginnings, color choices, and rendering of the colors she saw around her.
13. Teresa Annas, "Animals Earn Their Keep in Hampton Roads and Abroad with Art," *Virginian-Pilot* (Hampton Roads, VA), August 11, 2007, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://hamptonroads.com/node/309221>. I thank Mary Bennett for bringing this article to my attention.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. ZooBeat.com, accessed February 18, 2008, <http://www.zoobeat.com/2/paintings-animals>. ZooBeat has since been relaunched as Zoochat.com.
17. All comments from the ZooBeat forum presented here preserve the writers' original spelling and punctuation.
18. Now searchable under <http://www.zoochat.com>, ZooBeat was launched by an administrator in Australia in 2003. The first of its kind to focus on an English-speaking community of posters, it is still going strong. Other sites bring together users in other communities, and attitudes obviously may differ across the globe. "ZooChat started life using the name ZooBeat and was hosted on a server in Australia. The first post was made on October 19, 2003 and gradually grew over the following 5 years. Early members were primarily from Australia and New Zealand, but over time more and more international members joined, with the majority of the

- traffic now coming from the UK, US and other parts of Europe. . . . As part of a rebranding exercise and a move to a more international focus, the site was renamed to ZooChat on October 19, 2008 (exactly 5 years after the site was launched). The site was relocated to a U.S.-based server at the same time" ("About ZooChat," accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.zoochat.com>). Today, most members are in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the United States, several European countries, and Singapore.
19. Lenain (*Monkey Painting*, 27) emphasizes the historical congruity of a public interest in painting by apes, especially the celebrity ape Congo, with a growth in the 1950s in the science of primatology and a broadening passion among European artists and collectors for what they termed "primitive art," which had influenced artists like Picasso earlier in the century. My emphasis here is on the expansion of an acceptance of human abstract expressionist painting into the wider public realm after World War II. Without this public acceptance, a market for art by animals would never have developed to the extent it has today, because such markings couldn't have been aesthetically framed as "art."
  20. My kit is called "A Paint Kit for Dogs," by Pup-Casso (manufactured by Art-Casso, LLC, Saratoga Springs, NY). It "makes a great gift," is "recommended for dogs ages 1–154 (in dog years of course)" and is "the World's first No Mess, non-Toxic paint kit for dogs!" as the white boxer in the red beret proclaims on the front of the box. Not surprisingly, a portion of the proceeds goes to animal protection causes. Helpful hints in the instructions urge the owner to avoid dropping too much paint in just one or two spots, which can cause smearing. Even here, a specific aesthetic is advised. The results can also be transformed into mugs and T-shirts, extending the public for the creations of your pet, who just might be the next "Mutt-isse."
  21. Heather Burch and Burton Silver, *Why Cats Paint* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1994), 75.
  22. The dimension of philanthropy that undergirds this market does not extend to the rare sanctuary for farmed animals whose lives are, for most people, destined for the dinner plate and hence not in need of "saving." A pig—when raised as a pet and noted for intelligence—can be an exception, as it has changed categories, going from "food" to "pet."
  23. This charisma correlates with the fund-raising strategies of animal welfare groups who use ahh-inspiring photos of baby seals or of mother polar bears and their young. Research by Dr. Bob Smith of the Durrell Institute at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom has shown that most nongovernmental organizations raise money for species that they can "sell." Especially popular are large animals with forward-facing eyes. These species get the most conservation dollars from these campaigns, whether or not they are the closest to extinction. See "Study Highlights

New Mammal Species for Promoting Conservation Fundraising," *Phys.org*, May 17, 2012, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://phys.org/news/2012-05-highlights-mammal-species-fundraising.html>. By contrast, groups fighting animal cruelty picture abused, starved animals in their materials, representing a situation that demands correction and calls forth empathy, not through charisma but through pity.

24. Koopa was originally taken from the wild more than twenty-five years ago. Box turtles aren't endangered but are included on a CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) watch list. They can live to be several decades old. Koopa is raised in a tank-free environment and receives veterinary care. No adverse effects from the painting have been documented by the veterinarian. Despite this, Kira, his collaborator-guardian (Kira Ayn Varszegi, who, like Koopa, also goes by a one-name appellation), warns other turtle owners not to let their pets paint. "Koopa has been acclimated to being rinsed off in the shower, and he is fully trusting of me. Precautions are taken to make sure he doesn't prolapse in the paint." A statement on eBay offers this caveat: "Koopa . . . paints under the close supervision of a turtle expert. We do not condone anyone attempt [*sic*] to use their turtles to paint. What is safe for Koopa is not necessarily safe for other turtles or tortoises. We consider all copycat attempts to be unsafe as well as disrespectful to us as established individual artists" (eBay listing for item 360006925995, accessed February 25, 2008, [cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI](http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI)). I'm not sure who the "we" is who considers turtle painting unsafe, but clearly the individual artists here are Kira and Koopa. This defense of artistic property rights is another way that Kira situates Koopa's products as fine art.
25. eBay listing for item number 360006925995. "Turtle with Talent," Ripley's Believe It or Not! September 5, 2013, accessed May 30, 2014, but no longer available, <http://www.ripleys.com/weird/inside-ripleys-world>.
26. See Koopa's MySpace page, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.myspace.com/koopatheturtle>.
27. Koopa has made more than eight hundred paintings, each taking only a few minutes to complete. Now retired, he paints only twice a week, completing about three paintings in each session. A portion of the proceeds from sales goes to support Kira, but a portion has also been donated to turtle rescue work, with more than \$12,000 going to that cause as of 2008.
28. Kira Ayn Varszegi, e-mail communication with the author, March 5, 2008.
29. In the case of other celebrity animal artists who aren't primates (like Tillie the Dog and Komar and Melamid's painting Thai elephants), the profession of the guardian as an artist him- or herself was crucial in envisioning the animal's potential to paint and in creating the conditions for the result to be recognizable to humans as "artistic." Tony Blair the rat's chewed items became "art" when so declared by his artist-owner, who photographed them for the Saatchi gallery's website. Her actions in turn

depended on the transformed category of art since the early decades of the twentieth century, when Marcel Duchamp's signed urinal and other works successfully challenged the category of what, in the European realm, might be considered "art."

30. Kira Ayn Varszegi, e-mail communication with the author, March 5, 2008.
31. <http://www.turtlekiss.com>, accessed February 25, 2008. Now defunct.
32. A sample of more than two hundred pieces, available under the "Galleries" section of Koopa's website, gives a sense of the complexity, differences, and similarities among the works. A "Koopa" is immediately recognizable, based on his technique and Kira's choices for color combinations and color designs as well as her judgment about when the painting is "done." Overall, bright hues dominate, especially blues and reds. Although Koopa's painting technique has remained the same over the years, the color palette has changed somewhat as new colors became available and old ones disappeared.
33. <http://www.turtlekiss.com/testimonials.htm>, accessed February 25, 2008. Now defunct.
34. I am very grateful to the staff at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden, who assisted my research so generously. On my visit in 2007, they welcomed me "backstage" into the aquarium, elephant, and primate regions of their institution, introduced me to many special animals, and demonstrated painting techniques as they are done with sea lions, elephants, and apes.
35. For example, to train a monkey to move from one cage to another, the trainer may entice him to move toward the door by using the positive reinforcement of a grape as a reward for that action—or she may, if all else fails, squirt water at the monkey (a negative reinforcement) until he moves out of his cage and into the new one. The monkey is then rewarded with a grape for complying; the next time he sees the open door, it's hoped that he'll move from the first cage to the second to receive that reward without the use of the squirting hose.

While operant conditioning thus does not rule out causing distress to the animal as a mode of teaching, this option is regarded as the last resort. I'm not saying here that coercive techniques aren't still used in certain captive settings, like some circuses, or that operant conditioning never involves coercion.

Karen Pryor, animal behavioral specialist and former trainer of marine mammals at Sea World, has written what some regard as a classic book on the subject of animal training and positive behavioral modification: *Don't Shoot the Dog: The New Art of Teaching and Training* (New York: Bantam Books, rev. ed., 1999). It features an introduction by B. F. Skinner and explains the operant conditioning method.

36. I take up this issue further in the next chapter, when I discuss elephants. In the United States, most progressive, accredited zoos now practice



“protected-contact” management techniques with their elephants, which protect both the animals and their keepers. Keepers and elephants may touch each other through strong metal bars but never directly side by side. While I am not endorsing keeping elephants in captivity and recognize that for many captive elephants, conditions are intolerable, significant advances in addressing their physical and psychological welfare are under way in at least some US zoos. For some of those elephants, painting may be one enrichment activity among others.

When I visited the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden in 2007, in addition to seeing Midge the sea lion create a painting, I also had the opportunity to accompany keepers to the elephant enclosure. There, through stout metal fencing, the keepers interacted with Chandra, an elephant who had been trained to present her trunk for procedures like taking medicine. Painting was presented to Chandra as an enrichment or play activity in her interaction with the keepers, and it used some of the same medical training techniques, like “blowing out.” The keeper held a sixteen-by-twenty-inch canvas up to Chandra along with some preselected pots of nontoxic paint in golds and metallic greens. Chandra touched her trunk to the canvas, making swooshes with the paint, and sometimes blew the paint out in splotches and drops. She “signed” the painting by making an imprint in gold paint of the distinctive tip of her trunk. The canvas surface bears traces of the encounter’s context, as bits of hay are stuck on the surface too. No representational drawing was involved, and Chandra was never touched during the ten-minute interaction. A treat at the end of the art-making session was an additional reward beyond the fun. In the Thai situation, the elephants are working elephants, performing the painting routines in exactly prescribed sequences of motions several times a day.

For information on the controversy surrounding some Thai elephant painting and allegations of abuse, see, for example, Kate Good, “Elephant Artists? Here’s Why Making an Elephant Paint Is Cruel, Not Cute,” October 7, 2014, accessed November 4, 2015, One Green Planet, <http://onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/why-making-an-elephant-paint-is-cruel-not-cute>. Images on this website show how elephant keepers (mahouts) can subtly use bullhooks and nails secreted in their hands as they tug on elephants’ ears to give directions, even in front of tourist audiences during art-making shows. In addition, traditional training methods can be abusive in themselves. I thank Barbara J. King for bringing this source to my attention.

37. Behavioral and environmental “enrichment” is increasingly considered important, not only in zoos and sanctuaries but also in laboratory settings, where animals may live in captivity for long periods of time. Nonharmful ways to increase mental and physical stimulation for captive animals include hiding food in “puzzle feeders” that require the success-

ful manipulation of objects to retrieve it; designing a more interesting visual and audio environment, such as including the movement and the sound of a waterfall; and providing “artistic” opportunities. For example, part of the “enrichment program” for animals at the National Zoo in Washington, DC, involves apes playing with apps on iPads and pandas painting.

Even otters get a chance to participate. See, for example, Joel Landau, “Otters at Smithsonian Zoo Play Music on Keyboard,” *New York Daily News*, May 28, 2014, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/otters-smithsonian-zoo-play-keyboard-article-1.1808851#ixzz33Iq3SM00>. Whether or not we think the otters enjoy an arrangement of sounds that humans would call “music,” providing them with a way of producing novel effects through the manipulation of their environment appears to enhance their well-being. Many of the captive painting programs have yielded the same results. Some participants (human and nonhuman) may primarily enjoy the human-animal interaction necessitated by painting, and others—for example, some primates—may actually enjoy the act of painting itself, as I describe in the next chapter.

38. With the generous help of the staff in 2007, I was able to watch several species of animals paint, including Midge. She painted for me during a quiet time between public shows in the zoo’s outdoor amphitheater.

## CHAPTER NINE

1. Lloyd Vries, “Dead Chimp’s Art Sells Big: Three Works by the Late Chimpanzee ‘Congo’ Sell for \$25,620,” CBS News, June 20, 2005, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/06/20/entertainment/main703057.shtml>.
2. Key works on the development of these ideologies include Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
3. See Lyle Rexer, *How to Look at Outsider Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), for one discussion of this category.
4. The philosopher of art Denis Dutton summarizes a narrative of evolutionary origins for artistic “instinct” in his book *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009). Deeply knowledgeable about artistic trends and practices, he searches for their evolutionary origins by turning back to prehistory. “Preoccupied as we are with the flashy media and buzzing gizmos of daily experience, we forget how close we remain to the prehistoric women and men who first found beauty in the world. Their blood runs in our veins. Our art instinct is theirs” (243). Evolutionary biologists look even further back, to prehomid times.

5. Frans de Waal, *The Ape and the Sushi Master: Cultural Reflections of a Primatologist* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
6. *Ibid.*, 151-52.
7. *Ibid.*, 155.
8. K. Beach, R. S. Fouts, and D. H. Fouts, "Representational Art in Chimpanzees," *Friends of Washoe Newsletter* 3-4 (1984): 1-4; Sarah T. Boysen, Gary G. Berenson, and James Prentice, "Simian Scribbles: A Reappraisal of Drawing in the Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*)," *Journal of Comparative Psychology* 101 (1987), accessed November 16, 2015, doi: 10.1037/0735-7036.101.1.82; Frans de Waal, "Apes with an Oeuvre," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 19, 1999, B6; Masayuki Tanaka, Masaki Tomonaga, and Tetsuro Matsuzawa, "Finger Drawing by Infant Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*)," *Animal Cognition* 6 (2003), accessed November 16, 2015, doi: 10.1007/s10071-003-0198-3; John Mathews, *Starting from Scratch: The Origins and Development of Expression, Representation and Symbolism in Human and Non-Human Primates* (London: Psychology Press, 2011).
9. Boysen, Berenson, and Prentice, "Simian Scribbles," 82.
10. Anne Zeller, "What's in a Picture? A Comparison of Drawings by Apes and Children," *Semiotica* 166 (January 2007): 181-214; quotation is from pp. 210-11. Zeller concludes that apes may produce ideational and possibly representational images, even if those modes of representation are more understandable by apes than humans.
11. While these incidents could certainly be attributed to factors such as boredom or distraction from the task at hand, the multiplicity of such anecdotes in reports of ape painting indicates they deserve further investigation, as they point to a human-associated trait of deciding when an artwork is "finished."
12. De Waal, "Apes with an Oeuvre," B6. Of course, not all communities value enduring material artistic representations. The implicit reference here is to a European-derived value system for painting, sculpture, and so on. In addition, although undocumented, I know of one instance (relayed informally to me by a primate scientist) in which a primate painted on a material surface and then hung that surface on the wall of his cage for a day. Anecdotally, captive apes have also been known to paint on the walls and floors of their enclosures when pigments were supplied for painting on paper. If this mark making serves communicative purposes beyond the kinesthetic pleasures of producing it, we do not know.
13. Boysen, Berenson, and Prentice, "Simian Scribbles." See also Eveline Seghers, "Cross-Species Comparison in the Evolutionary Study of Art: A Cognitive Approach to the Ape Art Debate," *Review of General Psychology* 18 (2014): 263-72; de Waal, "Apes with an Oeuvre"; Desmond Morris, "Ape Artists of the 1950s," *artnet.com* 2005, accessed November 5, 2015, [www.mayorgallery.com/exhibitions/117/works/](http://www.mayorgallery.com/exhibitions/117/works/); and Tanaka, Tomonaga, and Matsuzawa, "Finger Drawing by Infant Chimpanzees."

14. Not all cognitive scientists are interested mainly in what apes can tell us about ourselves. Some psychologists, ethologists, and primatologists are engaged in understanding primate "theory of mind," or the attribution of thought by one individual to another, or in learning more about communicative systems based on sound, gesture, posture, and marking, as these have an impact on primates' communication among themselves and with humans. The full extent of this work exceeds the bounds of this chapter. For a sample of such works by leading scholars, see the following: Barbara J. King, *The Dynamic Dance: Nonvocal Communication in African Great Apes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Roger Lewin, *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994); Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, Stuart G. Shanker, and Talbot J. Taylor, *Apes, Language, and the Human Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Francine Patterson and Eugene Linden, *The Education of Koko* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981); and Roger Fouts with Stephen Tukul Mills, *Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees* (New York: William Morrow, 1997). Even John Mathews, a child psychology specialist, concludes his largely comparative study with extremely detailed observations of primate explorations of drawing materials, arguing ultimately that all expressive behavior is developed through full-body expressivity and playful exploration, and that these activities are similar for human and nonhuman primates. For Mathews, nonhuman primates' abilities aren't simply a potential source of evolutionary information about humans but have become the impetus for a better understanding by humans of these nonhumans.
 

These debates take place in the wider context of comparative cognition studies. Donald R. Griffin's *Animal Minds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) not only summarizes many studies of cognition and communication across species, ranging from snakes to birds to primates, but also argues that the results must influence human beliefs (philosophy), ethics, and resulting actions. Critics often argue that influential studies, like those by Savage-Rumbaugh on the communicative and learned-language abilities of bonobos, are not replicable and are too dependent on the human and ape context in which they are conducted. Proponents, with whom I agree, say that such transspecies social context is integral to the communication being assessed.
15. Vries, "Dead Chimp's Art Sells Big."
16. *Ibid.*
17. Sam Jones, "Chimp's Art Fetches £14,000," *Guardian* (Manchester), June 21, 2005, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jun/21/arts.artsnews>; "No Chump Change for Chimp Art," National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, June 21, 2005, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4712948>.
18. Vries, "Dead Chimp's Art Sells Big."

19. Ibid.
20. Morris made this comment in connection with the Mayor Gallery ape art retrospective discussed subsequently in the text. See Andrew Dodds, "Ape Artists of the 1950s," *Frieze* 99 (2006), accessed November 5, 2015, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/ape\\_artists\\_of\\_the\\_1950s/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/ape_artists_of_the_1950s/).
21. Waldemar Januszczak, "Monkey Master," *Artists Ezine* 1 (2006), accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.artistsezine.com/WhyChimp.htm>. Januszczak's comments were published in the *London Sunday Times* ("Art: Congo the Chimpanzee," September 25, 2005, <http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/article149103.ece>) and in the *Australian* ("This Is a Masterpiece . . . and This Is the Artist—monkey Master," October 8, 2005, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/>).
22. Thierry Lenain, *Monkey Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).
23. Beach, Fouts, and Fouts, "Representational Art in Chimpanzees," part 2, *Friends of Washoe Newsletter* 4, no. 1 (Fall [no year given]): 1. Washoe initiated drawing sessions when presented with an array of possible activities. She apparently developed representational schema, but these were not always the same as human ones for images like "dog" (pp. 1–3). I thank Roger Fouts for supplying this newsletter. Undated but, based on content, probably ca. 1985.
24. Erica Thiele, interview by the author in Bastrop, Texas, February 7, 2008.
25. In addition, mahouts have trained elephants to play percussion instruments on cue, resulting in CDs by the Thai Elephant Orchestra that are sold along with the elephant paintings to support the conservation site. Like the trained linear renditions that allow an elephant to paint a picture of an elephant, these trained actions result not in responsive improvisation with sound-making instruments but rather in the cued rendition of strikes in time with a human-composed script. Of course, we could say that this simply duplicates how a (human) orchestra normally plays—producing predetermined, prerehearsed sounds on cue—but we assume that with humans, an individual expressivity leaks out even within the most highly regimented musical scripts, and we reward that with accolades and positive critical reviews.

Some human musicians seek a more collaborative engagement, and so bring their music to the elephants without training a response in advance. Electronic cellist Jamie Sieber recounts her experience in that regard at the Thai Elephant Conservation Center in a 2011 YouTube video. Invited to play music for a film being made there about the elephants, she instead plays with the elephant orchestra, but not in their pretrained way. She sits surrounded by them and plays *for* them, until they coalesce in a semi-circle, physically enclosing her and responding to her sonic rhythms with high-pitched cries and untrained dancing motions of their heads, trunks swinging to the beat. See "Elephants Accompany Cellist Jamie Sieber/ Part 2/Living Yoga," YouTube, accessed November 5, 2015, <https://www>

- [youtube.com/watch?v=duSgIcEqUzQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duSgIcEqUzQ&feature=youtu.be). I thank Mary Bennett for directing me to this video. We have yet to explore elephants' potential interest in sonic design and its use to communicate with humans, nor have we ascertained whether they have an interest in communicating with us through a visual medium of gestural mark making, or "art."
26. Now a regular part of the conservation site's activities and fund-raising sales, these artworks are promoted in the United States and elsewhere through auctions that Komar and Melamid, trading on their own somewhat outré reputations, help to get staged. One such auction, in March 2000 through Christie's in New York City, raised \$75,000 in one evening, with all paintings by the elephants selling out, at prices ranging from \$350 to \$2,200. See Komar and Melamid, *When Elephants Paint: The Quest of Two Russian Artists to Save the Elephants of Thailand* (New York: Perennial Books, 2000), 75. For more on the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project, visit their website at <http://www.asianelephantart.com>, accessed November 5, 2015.
  27. "Elephant Painting an Elephant," video posted January 23, 2014, on YouTube by "TeamWakeUp," accessed November 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQv5mE42Yos>. The linked Facebook page identifies a young African American man as the commentator.
  28. See Nick Kontogeorgopoulos, "Wildlife Tourism in Semi-Captive Settings: A Case Study of Elephant Camps in Northern Thailand," *Current Issues in Tourism* 12 (2009): 429–49. See also my discussion of elephant painting in US zoos in the previous chapter, note 35.
  29. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–52.
  30. As Benjamin L. Hart and Lynette A. Hart note, elephants excel at long-term spatial memory. See Benjamin L. Hart and Lynette A. Hart, "Unique Attributes of the Elephant Mind: Perspectives on the Human Mind," in *Experiencing Animal Minds: An Anthology of Animal-Human Encounters*, ed. Julie A. Smith and Robert W. Mitchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 186–200. This ability may help them to execute complicated, discrete, and spatially meaningful motions that result in the paintings I am discussing. As for the attribution of subjectivity, Hart and Hart note the importance of social empathy in elephant social bonds, including mourning of group members who die. The "mirror test," in which elephants are seen to recognize themselves in a mirror, is regarded as a prime measure of individuated subjectivity. The popular press has reported these findings, making them available in public discourse and influencing the popular perception that elephants are "intelligent" according to human standards. See, for example, John Roach, "Elephants Recognize Selves in Mirror, Study Says," *National Geographic News*, October 30, 2006, accessed

- November 5, 2015, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/10/061030-asian-elephants.html>. Humans and “higher” primates like chimpanzees also pass the mirror test.
31. Komar and Melamid, *When Elephants Paint*, 99.
  32. See Gorilla Foundation, “Gorilla Art,” accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.koko.org/gorilla-art-0>.
  33. Copies of Michael’s paintings may also be purchased at the Gorilla Foundation’s website, <http://www.koko.org>. Some critics feel that the representational claims made for this painting are exaggerated. Indeed, the studies with Koko have garnered significant academic skepticism from some primate experts, and some have even expressed concerns about the way that Koko is cared for. The larger world of ape language studies, and of “bicultural” apes—like the bonobo Kanzi, who paints, and the orangutan Chantek, who makes necklaces as well as drawings—forms the background for this discussion of Koko, on whom I focus because of what appears to be her explicit naming of some of her paintings, suggesting a link between verbal and visual representational techniques. While scientists may debate the clarity of this linkage, the lay public embraces it enthusiastically through the purchase of Koko’s paintings.
  34. It should be noted that American Sign Language is a full, complex language, and that Koko uses a form of ASL, not ASL per se.
  35. Tomas Persson, *Pictorial Primates: A Search for Iconic Abilities in Great Apes*, Lund University Cognitive Studies 136 (Lund, Sweden: Lund University, 2008). I thank Dr. Benjamin Beck for giving me a copy from his personal library.
  36. *Ibid.*, 280.
  37. Persson (*ibid.*, chapter 2) discusses various experiments with young children that try to chart their developing competencies in iconic pictorial representation, and he notes that while these capacities seem to develop at a very young age, around two years, according to some studies, they are developed in a constant context of naming, pointing, and behavioral modeling by adults and of language directing attention and interpretation (just think of the reading of bedtime stories). During the learning process, children sometimes react to images as if they were the real thing, confusing representation and material reality. “Realism” is a historically shifting aesthetic. Compare early photography from the nineteenth century with the three-dimensional movies in IMAX format today.
  38. *Ibid.*, 284.
  39. *Ibid.*, 276.
  40. Lee Glendinning, “Spanish Parliament Approves ‘Human Rights’ for Apes,” *Guardian* (Manchester), June 26, 2008, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jun/26/humanrights.animalwelfare>.

41. Steven Wise is among those leading this legal battle. See Charles Siebert, “Should a Chimp Be Able to Sue Its Owner?,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 23, 2014, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/magazine/the-rights-of-man-and-beast.html>.

## CHAPTER TEN

1. Katherine Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (New York: Harcourt, 2007).
2. See George W. Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Encoded in laws, literature, belief systems, scientific practice, popular culture, and the actions of everyday life, the legacies of these historical “grand narratives,” to use Jean-François Lyotard’s term (see his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984]), remain with us still, even as we attempt to disrupt them and even as they are interrupted too by emergent beliefs and new practices, and by epistemologies drawn from non-European-derived legacies.
3. Pet keeping as a social practice should also be seen in relation to larger projects of domestication of certain animals and not others, a relationship in which the animals historically codetermine part of that relationship. See Molly Mullin and Rebecca Cassidy, eds., *Where the Wild Things Are Now: Domestication Reconsidered* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007).
4. Now, knowing more about the breeding industry, I would not purchase a bird from a pet store. A dozen-plus years ago, however, I was ignorant of how my purchase supported this industry.
5. In late December 2014, after I had originally crafted this chapter, Blueboy died of a cancerous leg tumor. He had received outstanding care from his avian veterinarian, Dr. Ken Welle, and had lived with us for more than a dozen years. We had no idea how old he was when we adopted him, but he was surely at the high end of a parakeet’s life span. I like to think of him as the oldest parakeet on record, even if this isn’t true. Up to a day and a half before his death, Blueboy continued to clamber energetically on his playground and toss balls for interactive games, a true gift to our household. In his final hours, he made an active choice to be held in our hands rather than to rest in his compound.
6. Blueboy has unusual coloring, with a sky-blue breast and turquoise back accentuated by black-and-white feathers. He has a cere, or area above the nostrils, whose coloring in some species can indicate the sex as male or female. Using the normal markers, I’d assumed for a decade that Blueboy was a boy. A few years ago, however, Dr. Welle, an avian specialist, revealed that Blueboy is not a “boy” at all but really is “Bluegirl”: his pastel-blue coloring had confused his sexual designation. By the time I found out, it was too late for me to change his name and to reorient my