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Bestiary

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Recommended Citation

Rebecca Tice: Artist Statement

My work focuses on the fantastic and the peculiar. It grows out of an interest in animals, myth, and the human tendency to anthropomorphize.

By creating imaginary beasts with recognizable animal features I continue the tradition of bestiaries and the myths they articulate. The pieces inspire curiosity. Colorful, funky, even cute, they are attractive and approachable representations of what animals could be. I compose environments containing these beasts to allow viewers to explore an actual imaginary space. To make the fantasy more believable, the beasts are engaged in interactions with one another in natural roles such as predator and prey. Some exist in groups or flocks, surrounded by others of their kind. I lay the groundwork for an experience involving animals as most people know them but add unexpected twists to renew the sense of wonder one feels when seeing something for the first time.

My work draws attention to the conundrum that exists in the relationship between humans and animals. When humans objectify or humanize animals, animals lose their specificity and their distinctness from humans. In the human mind, they become something other than what they actually are. Anthropomorphism turns them into less intelligent beings mimicking human behaviors. It is limiting because it fails to recognize the distinctness of animals. It further falsifies reality by ignoring or glossing over the fact that humans are animals too. This egocentricism limits the imagination because it restricts it to versions of itself.

My beasts are unlike the animals humans know exist, and so they are able to capture a viewer's attention through wonder and hold it through lack of explanation. Because there is little that has been perceived before, viewers are more likely to speculate. I present a different way of

looking at animals to open up the possibilities of how to have a more complex experience when viewing them.

My beasts are not intended to teach a lesson, as they were in bestiaries. They are meant to ignite the imagination and create an experience that is engaging and different from the normal viewing process involving animals. The medieval illuminated texts known as "bestiaries" feature all kinds of animals, real and imagined. They give equal weight to the fantastic and the factual, just as I do in my work. They present animals in a way that weaves lore and mystery into fact, allowing the viewer to exercise the depths of what is or could be possible.

Animals have been essential to human survival and development throughout history. They appear in the first paintings made on cave walls, they were prized in royal collections, and they quickly became the stuff of legend. Even after being domesticated, animals continued to captivate. In some cultures animals are seen as human ancestors, spiritual beings, and vessels for reincarnation. Today the bonds humans form with animals begin at childhood with the introduction of stuffed toys, characters in animated films, and domestic companions.

Whatever the initial interest may be, animals are powerful because they are the closest living organisms to humans yet they retain a distinct aloofness as separate beings. My work reflects the captivating nature of animals and the depths of human imagination.