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Beasts: Wild Animals in RAM's Collection

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The lives of animals and humans are interwoven in many ways. The natural world, in all its variety, has long been a favorite topic for artists who can marvel at its complexity, diversity, and beauty. They may also use it as a way to explore larger issues about the environment, humanity, society, or culture. The artists whose works are featured in this exhibition are drawn to depicting animals that are, perhaps, a little more removed from the daily lives of most—those that might be considered “beasts.”

While it can be used to describe certain types of people or brutish activity, the word beast is generally associated with four-footed animals that are wild, dangerous, or large. Those animals could be familiar, such as horses and cows; known, but not domesticated, such as elephants, rhinos, and bears; or unfamiliar or fantastical, such as dragons and imaginary creatures. Artists render them realistically, sweetly, abstractly, or symbolically, depending on the focus of their interests.

The ceramic sculptures, fiber works, paintings, photographs, prints, and other media that are included in **Beasts** are all drawn from RAM's collection. Whether beasts are the primary focus of the work or characters involved in a broader story, their presence reflects the consistent human desire to make sense of the larger world.

Featured Artists

Given the subject matter of her work, it may come as no surprise that British illustrator and printmaker **Sue Coe** grew up near a slaughterhouse in Staffordshire, England. Born in 1951, Coe studied at the Royal College of Art in the United Kingdom. Her work is reminiscent of earlier pieces by German Expressionists **Käthe Kollwitz** and **Ernst Kirchner**—both in aesthetic, and in visual critique of larger cultural issues. Coe is a long-time animal rights activist, but her work also examines social problems like poverty, imprisonment, and war. A resident of the United States since 1972, her politically charged drawing **Web of Deceit**, graced the cover of **ArtNews** in 1987. Coe's work has also appeared in such publications as **The New York Times**, **The New Yorker**, **Time Magazine** and **The Nation**. Of her work, Coe says, “I make vegans.” She is also the author of several books including **Cruel: Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation**, and 2017's **The Animals' Vegan Manifesto**.

With a belief that “domestic objects are social propaganda” and a desire to “enable animals to break the chains of cuteness and noble savagery,” artist **Linda Cordell** creates porcelain figurines who appear in unusual, and often, compromising positions. Her aesthetic recalls traditional fine china decorative objects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries while simultaneously addressing the instincts of animals. For Cordell, these animals are not ornamental but a reflection of worldly desires. She received her BFA from the New York State

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College of Ceramics at Alfred University, and then earned her MFA from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Cordell was also an Artist-in-Residence at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in 2003, the same year she was awarded an art fellowship by the Pew Charitable Trust.

Working almost exclusively in porcelain, artist **Sergei Isupov** states that his work “portrays characters placed in situations from my imagination but based in my life experiences.” His animal “characters” are often anthropomorphized and exaggerated. Isupov received both his BFA and MFA from the Art Institute of Tallinn, Estonia, before immigrating to the United States in 1994. Since 2003, he has been living in Massachusetts on the same property as gallery dealer and friend, **Leslie Ferrin**, in a renovated mill that houses living spaces, studios, a gallery, and a gathering site for artists. His work was the subject of a solo exhibition at RAM in 2014 entitled **Collection Focus: Sergei Isupov**. Racine Art Museum currently has over 25 works by Isupov, including some works on paper.

Artist **Tod Pardon** grew up in an artistic family. His mother **Eunice** was a fiber artist and his father, **Earl Pardon**, was a well-known jewelry artist and metalsmith. Tod received his BFA in painting and drawing from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University and his MFA in painting from Syracuse University, the same institution from which his father Earl received his MFA in painting in 1959. Yet, it was not until 1986 that Earl and Tod began to work together collaboratively, eventually establishing Pardon Design in 1990. After Earl’s death in 1991, Tod began to seriously devote himself to metalsmithing using skills he learned from his father Earl, as well as techniques he developed himself. The Pardons are linked not just by their chosen medium and affinity for color, but also by their studio space. After the death of his mother in 1997, Tod and his family moved into his childhood home, and he now produces his work in the on-site studio that he helped his father build in 1974.

Ceramicist **Lindsay Pichaske** has her BFA in sculpture from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her MFA from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She currently teaches ceramics at the College of Southern Maryland while also maintaining a studio practice. Between receiving her MFA and her teaching career, Pichaske was a Taunt Fellow at the Archie Bray Foundation for Ceramic Arts. In 2013, she won the NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts) Emerging Artist Award. A year later, Pichaske, was the recipient of the Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award. Of her work Pichaske says, she is “inspired by the raw commonalities of animal and human life... the desire to create a believable sense of life pulls me forward as a maker.” To this end, she combines unusual materials with low-fired ceramics to create lifelike “skins,” including human hair, flocking, molted feathers, charcoal, foam, sequins, monofilament, wax, artificial flower petals, string, and rope.

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Joseph Picillo is known for his startlingly realistic charcoal and graphite drawings, particularly those of horses. Executed on a large scale, though not quite life size, his images of horses and athletes crackle with movement. Born in Buffalo, New York, Picillo holds both his BA and MFA in art education from State University of New York, Buffalo. He has been the recipient of four SUNY (State University of New York) research fellowships, and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Picillo is currently professor of Art Education at SUNY Buffalo.

Like other ceramicists in this show, **Jason Walker** uses animals to examine larger narratives. The Idaho native describes his work as illustrated porcelain sculpture that addresses the intersection of nature and technology, or more specifically, how technology changes our approach and understanding of nature. As the son of a nuclear technician, Walker—who has his BFA in illustration from Utah State University and his MFA in ceramics from Penn State University—sees technology as “a major tenet (in) shaping ideology.” Walker has been the recipient of a student fellowship from NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts), a Taunt Fellowship from the Archie Bray Foundation, an International Residency Fellowship from NCECA, and an Artist Trust Fellowship from Washington State.

Beth Van Hoesen, like artist **Jason Walker**, was born in Idaho. After graduating from Stanford University with her BA, she went to France and studied at the École de Beaux-Arts de Fontainebleau, the Académie Julian, and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. She then attended the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). There, Van Hoesen met her husband, printmaker **Mark Adams**. The two settled in San Francisco. By 1956, Van Hoesen was working solely in printmaking. She is known for her realistic and highly expressive portraits of fauna, though she created landscape prints and images of flora as well. Van Hoesen received the Award of Honor in Graphics from the San Francisco Arts Commission, and a Distinguished Artist’s Award from the California Society of Printmakers. She was a member of the Bay Printmakers Society and the California Society of Etchers. Van Hoesen passed away in 2010. With the help of the E. Mark Adams and Beth Van Hoesen Adams Trust, as well as **Anne Kohs and Associates**, Van Hoesen is RAM’s most collected artist, with current holdings of over 300 pieces, including preparatory drawings, plates, and finished prints.