

Talk given at dorothy's gallery, 27 rue Keller in Paris on January 25, 2011 in conjunction with a show of animal etchings and a talk by Donato Bergandi from the MUSEUM, Paris

This etching project has been in works for twenty years. There are positions that animals take, either in groups or individually, expressions in their eyes that have a way of attaching one to them in a kind of visceral way. If I can portray them at all the way I perceive them, I think they can bring others closer to them as well. In this way an artist can serve as a strong although discreet intermediary between the man-made world and the natural world.

It seems the first paintings were those of animals by the cave men, animals are also some of the subjects children love to draw, the variety of their proportions give them a huge variety of models to draw from. The differences between humans are more subtle. In Nagoya, at the biodiversity summit this October, there was a children art competition for painting animals. The people noted that the loss of the animal kingdom is really preoccupying them.

I'm very inspired by Montaigne, a French 16th century essayist, who suggested certain further links between art and animals. He said that animals actually inspired in us art itself, through spiders and their webs, birds in the building of their nest and their song, and dance in many animals, such as the springbok in Africa. He also denounced cruelty toward animals and trees, which for him was as bad as cruelty between people, and is the source of war.

One subject that interests me particularly are the links between art and ecology. I recently wrote an essay on this, an extract of which was published in the winter issue of l'Ecologiste. How an artist can contribute to healing the environmental crisis. What is the responsibility of the artist?

In my artwork, it's especially important for a certain element of care. When you copy a plant or animal, you have to observe it, and the time during which you draw it, you are communing with it.

This just happens to be the same type of care we need in ecological work as well. The only thing is we have to move toward a more self-effacing artistic expression, not always think about promoting our name, because ecology is group work.

Both the animal world and the artistic process are havens where one can find purity of feeling. Animals are revitalizing for many when the human condition too heavy, too tormented, too complex.

One goal for an artist today is to elevate the status of the plants and animals, from the common robin to the exotic bald parrot, discovered just last month in the Amazon, the large to the microscopic.

I'm trying to move toward a more rhythmic flow of life and work, founded on the very ecosystems we are hoping to save and promote.

The manual aspect to art is vital for this internal communication. A naked idea is not enough, as contemporary art has attempted to prove. Virtuosity does not suffice either, as Constable noted at a time when artists were all trying to outdo each other in the exact imitation of nature. You can admire someone for technique, but to love a work of art it is more than that. And this care I'm talking about just so happens to be the exact element we need for ecological work as well. As artists this is very difficult because we are encouraged especially to build up a name for ourselves, we are not encouraged to yield to others, sometimes even to listen to others. We have a long way to go from a contemporary art world, deeply subservient to the market, toward a more self-effacing artistic expression. However, there are many artists who are saturated with the way the art world has set its standards, and are thinking in these terms now, as the only direction to turn to.

I'm hoping this will lead to artistic quality, for this is the element that brings people together. I don't mean subduing ourselves. For we have a wild part in ourselves that needs to be left alone to express itself,--just like the wilderness itself -- which can be directed away from violence toward artistic creation or love.

This etching project has been going on for twenty years. There are positions that animals take, either in groups or individually, expressions in their eyes that have a way of attaching me to them in a kind of visceral way. If I can portray them at all the way I perceived them, I think they can serve as a way to bring others closer to them as well. When you draw, you have to observe, and the time you take to bring on a likeness, you live with the animal or the plant, you become one with it. Here an artist can serve as an intermediary between the man-made world and the natural world, in a kind of intuitive way.

It seems the very first paintings were those of animals by cave men. Animals are also some of the subjects children love to draw, the variety of their proportions give them a huge variety of models to draw from. The differences between humans are more subtle. In Nagoya, during the summit on biodiversity, they had children paint the animals. They noted there how the loss of biodiversity is really preoccupying them.

I'm very inspired by Montaigne, a 16th century French essayist, who suggested certain further links between art and animals. He said that animals actually inspired in us art itself, through spiders and their webs, birds in the building of their nest and their song, and dance in many animals, such as the springbok in Africa. He also denounced cruelty toward animals and trees, which for him was as bad as cruelty between people, and is the source of war.

One subject of interest for me is the link between art and ecology. How an artist can bring healing to the environmental crisis. There are many different ways, and I have chosen one that involves figurative work. In my teaching and my own work, I look especially for a certain care. This is the exact element we need for ecological work as well. As artists this may be very difficult, because we are encouraged to build up a name for ourselves, we are not encouraged to work in groups. From a contemporary art world, toward a self-effacing artistic expression, we have a long way to go, but there are many artists who are thinking along these terms now, as the only direction to turn to.

Our goal is to elevate the status of the plants and animals, the wildflowers, the common bird to the newly discovered species, such as the bald parrot, from the Amazon. This is a type of purging activity, it pushes through destructive notions toward a more rhythmic existence, based on the very ecosystems we are hoping to save and promote.

