



Scott Fife

Artist Notes on *Cardboard Kingdom*

My sculptures are made of cardboard. This material was chosen initially as it was common, inexpensive, and readily available; often a discarded packing material. I hunted for large cardboard with great markings, and refrigerator boxes were gems. I work with archival cardboard, used for the conservation of documents and backing prints or drawings.

Early on, I was drawn to the friendly playfulness and sense of alchemy cardboard gave me – giving an everyday disposable thing preciousness. My making is a simple process: direct, using glue and screws, holding layers together as the glue dries or runs down the surface, easily changed, adding or subtracting. None of my process is hidden.

The pieces in this show are of animals. Physically beautiful, we endear them with many meanings. But they are predators and prey in a brutal world. These are portraits of individuals as they are in nature, balancing survival.

Horse

Long ago, when living in Pasadena, I made a full-size cardboard horse, a wild pony actually. More recently I took an interest in horse racing, and did studies of thoroughbreds at the back of tracks: Santa Anita, Longacres, Emerald Downs. I've always been drawn to this mythic animal representative of the fading West, a subject of cave paintings, used repeatedly in classical Greek and Roman sculpture, all the way to George Stubbs and Hollywood Westerns. A vehicle – whether attacking a wagon train, robbing a bank, the posse or the runaway – always the horse. Later portrayed by Debra Butterfield, John Graham and Lucian Freud. Beautiful, their eyes, ears and noses so sensitive, necks so powerful.

Condor

Brought back from endangerment, he is a majestic bird – gigantic, almost mythical in the sky – but a vulture, a janitor rather than hunter. Is our amazement just its size and the beauty of the flight, silhouetted and recognized in the light?

Polar Bear / Nan nook

The King of the Frozen North and now a threatened species, living only in far parts due to climate change and polluted habitat. Their beautiful shape, often seen in Art Deco art, became known during a time of exploration of the North Pole. Later, captured for their bear skin rug, they became a sort of visual aphrodisiac in Hollywood films. But polar bears are far from a fairy tale. Spiritual with

white coats, they are powerful and deadly. The largest extant land carnivore, he likes the taste of humans with or without down coats. He has a blue tongue and does not drink coke.

Zebra

Oh zebra, are you the origin of Op Art? Known as carnival creatures, made kitschy in graphics, their striping is a protective screen. Remaining wild, a prey animal, they resist domestication.

Lioness and Ernest Hemmingway

The biggest of the big game, with the male the King of the Jungle. However, the female lion is the deadliest one, the hunter, the strategist. More active, she's the one teaching the young to hunt. While not as grand in size, her mane less exaggerated, she sees with big piercing eyes, big ears, she hears it all. Looking at Delacroix's studies of lions, the lioness head is streamlined like art deco. His study of a lion attacking a horse is a tragedy but also just feeding the family.

Young Hemingway is included in the small group – a big game hunter and 20th century icon who endures no matter. Here he is fallen or maybe napping, awakened by a recognizable roar and the carnivorous breath of the lioness. Their noses turn completely black as they age; maybe better than white hair. Her head is simplified, with only a few stray hairs and eyes shut. Like Hemingway she is napping, or just tired of being under construction. The Queen of the Jungle.

Baboon

Our close brother, this ink wash portrays a baboon striding across, but with no ground, no horizon, only a motion study. A primate, he suggests the connection to the wild and ourselves. The pink background heightens his action, at sunset or sunrise or perhaps in a flash of urban color.

Wer Wulf / We're Wolf / Lycanthrope

The myth of a shape-shifting part human, part wolf is known everywhere in the world. It is about infection and recruitment, and a mystery about a human becoming, becoming human.

Bat

The most complex of creatures, known only at dusk and night, seeming insect-like, but far more akin to Batman, with leg and arms and lips. Portrayed as vampires, as if they are after us, they are among our protectors.

Jaguar

French painter Delacroix introduced the jaguar to me. South American in origin, this animal was brought to 19th century European zoos as exotica. A totemic deity in Aztec myths, he is the largest cat in the Americas. Camouflaged by spotted markings moving through the jungle forest, here caught in a moment. Jaguar, threatened by habitat loss and poaching, stealthy, quiet, and still present.

The Dog with Picasso's Guitar

Often portrayed as a companion, or an animated figure even playing cards. But the dog is our gateway into knowing an animal's world, its prime-mortal life. This dog is one I knew, a big beautiful Redbone. When one of our other hounds, Leroy, was a puppy in the studio, he was a philistine pulling sculpture around, treating a piece of art as a toy. Here is Woodrow chewing on Picasso's guitar, treating cardboard as cardboard even when signed by a master. It's companionship vs. monetary value. Is he purposefully destructive or playful?