

Barbara Dover uses a refined process of selection and minimal installation to evoke in our conscience questions about our behaviour to animals. These questions also highlight poignant choices the artist has made in the development of these installation pieces. Why is certain material, easily read in negative or positive tones, employed in this manner? The dilemma of choosing real feathers and hair to speak about the plight of animals, when these can be misread, is a deliberate risk the artist takes. Dover refers to "the juxtaposition of the beautiful and the brutal - treating potentially unpleasant issues while maintaining a strong aesthetic".¹ Beautiful in colour and texture, the cow and horse tails are about the animal as a commodity. They are about hostile activity, yet incorporate a strong sense of serenity and particular placement. Dover discusses the tension obvious in work that uses tragic imagery and states; "This is the tension I'm interested in - it highlights the dilemmas, tensions and contradictions of the issue I'm addressing".²

The temptation for some artists working in a genre easily referred to as 'animal matters' is to confront and revolt the viewer. However, as evocative or memorable as these events or installations may turn out to be, Dover sees these brutal portrayals as external to her methodology of practice. The choice of material is a deliberate focus. It is removed from the stage of association with living animals but remains there to provoke and hint at these issues in subtle ways. These issues involve the familiar use of animals by humans in a myriad of exploitative and mutually beneficial arrangements: these practices have been noticed or ignored by humans for millennia. Dover, the artist, has chosen another way of bringing the plight of animals to an audience.

While a crucial tenet of Dover's work evolves from her investigations into human behaviour towards animals, her

focus goes beyond that made by the impassioned activist and has led to the honed use of material and perspective of a committed artist. For example, the piece now titled *Breathless* was rebuilt. This involved rescaling and completely removing text 'inhale' and 'exhale' from the Perspex housing of feathers. Dover had referred to the "automatic action of breathing (inhaling and exhaling) as something we humans share with other animals that gives us both life; it denotes a living being."³ However, Dover further explains "I decided not to use the words on the constructions - there was so much going on in [them] and materials ... in the larger version, I didn't want to add any more. But I titled the piece *Breathless* which more or less sums up all the words I originally used."⁴ The deliberation is typical of her reductionist process using pristine Perspex enclosures to provide an emphasis for the animal matter within.

In Dover's cylindrical pieces text sandblasted on Perspex surfaces, creates a resonance in and from the work, speaking significantly from the artist for the animal. The choice of words signifies the threatened animal. In *Barrier*, enclosed cow tails, words include; 'Rendered, Transported and Engineered'. In *Memento Mori* using horse tails in Perspex tubes the words become; 'Constrained, Fabricated, Converted, Packaged, Reconstituted, Rationalised, Disassembled, Restructured, Mechanised and Denatured'.

Dover's work is timely in relation to current research and writings on animals and can be located in the context of other artists investigating this area. Her extensive knowledge and experience has been used to treat ethical and moral relations with animals and their representation as a serious subject. The importance of animals is central to her creative pursuits and through a focus on such matters her imperative is to expose the human relationship to the animal.

Anne Lord, Lecturer, College of Music Visual Arts and Theatre, James Cook University

Animal Matters BARBARA DOVER Exhibition at Cairns Regional Gallery 12 April - 18 May 2003



An exhibition of work as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Creative Arts from the College of Music, Visual Arts and Theatre, James Cook University



Through the Community Exhibitions Program Cairns Regional Gallery profiles the work of artists and organisations throughout Far North Queensland

N.Q. PLASTICS

NQ Plastics



Holan Foundry and Studio



Epic Media

Design: Twocan Multimedia



Animal Matters BARBARA DOVER



Selected Biographical Details

Barbara Dover lived and worked in Melbourne before moving to Cairns in 1994. She has worked as an art teacher, arts administrator, project officer and artist, and has been involved in work for animals both in Australia and overseas.

Qualifications

2003 Masters of Creative Arts (candidate)
James Cook University, Townsville

1997 Graduate Diploma Arts and Entertainment
Management, Deakin University, Melbourne

1994 RSA/Cambridge CTEFLA,
La Trobe University, Melbourne

1979 Diploma of Art and Design (Drawing),
Prahran College of Advanced Education
(now Victorian College for the Arts), Melbourne

1968 TSTC Art and Crafts,
Melbourne Teachers College, Melbourne

Selected Exhibitions

2003 Animal Matters, Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns

2002 Postcard Show, Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns

2001 Connect, Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns

2000 Take Four, Vincent Gallery, James Cook
University, Townsville

1999 Betwixt & Between, TAFE Gallery, Cairns

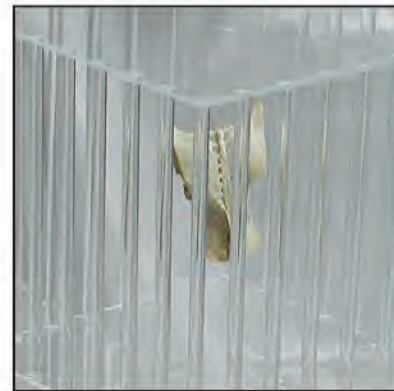
1998 4870, Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns

1981 Spring Festival of Drawing, Mornington Peninsula
Arts Centre, Victoria

1981 Drawings & Sculptures (with Noelene Lucas),
Gryphon Gallery, Melbourne



Breathless, 2002



Site Unseen, 2003



Memento Mori, 2002

Once we place nonhuman animals outside the sphere of our moral consideration and treat them as things we use to satisfy our desires, the outcome is predictable.

The exhibition, Animal Matters, examines issues pertaining to human relationships with animals, primarily focussing on the ethical nature of these relations, particularly the exploitation and commodification of animals. My work explores the contradictions inherent in relationships with animals which allow us, on the one hand, to identify and bond with some species and, on the other hand, to detach and disconnect from others. This exhibition derives from my long-standing parallel interest and involvement in both the arts and the cause of animals which, until recently, have been kept separate.

Domesticated animals, such as cows and horses, have had a long continuing association with humans. Since our early ancestors first depicted them on cave walls, these animals have represented, for us, a complex mix of symbolic, metaphoric, religious and cultural meanings. Farm animals, in our culture, are consigned a commercial value, which compounds the exploitative relationship we have with them and, therefore, colours our perception and treatment of them. Cows, horses and chickens, for instance, are the source of a multitude of products we use daily: food, clothing, bedding, face creams and hormone replacement therapies among numerous other items. Yet we seem less moved by this reality than might be the case if cats and/or dogs were the origin of these commodities.

Hence the works in this exhibition explore the question: Why do we make, in our consideration and treatment of animals, ethical and moral differentiations between the species? The work ventures into issues relating to animals that bring into play those areas of moral and emotional meanings, which the philosopher Midgley (1994) claims are "... vast and, by their very nature, threatening, so they are hard to explore." Their visual exploration has thus the potential to interrogate cultural and visual stereotyping and its concomitant symbolic and metaphoric connotations.

The focus of Animal Matters is 'the animal'. This embraces not only the form and appearance of the animal itself, but also their actual material or substance, such as feathers, hair or bone, produced as industry by-product or waste. In essence, the

associative aspects of real animal matter are fertile and hence maximise questions about the exploitative nature of animals' lives. The reality of the material is more powerfully evocative of the sense of the animal, of which the material was once a part, than deliberately representational strategies.

The materials aspect of my work is fundamental to its concept and precept. Materials, therefore, are a significant aspect to the meaning underpinning my work. They generate their own idiosyncratic meaning in ways that, as Baker (2000) points out, "... materials count, materials create knowledge, or at least encourage open and imaginative thought." The choice of material is also significantly influenced by aesthetics. The use of repetition, for example, is an aesthetic choice and construct. It provides a powerful metaphor for relentless rows of cages containing and constraining countless animals.

The images and materials of this exhibition address pluralistic concerns in the lives of individual animals and our use (and abuse) of them. The work acknowledges the consideration of animals as sentient beings in their own right. It probes beyond the idea, prevalent in nineteenth and early twentieth century art, of animals as metaphors for, symbols or images of human life or behaviour and challenges re-consideration of their role and place in the world.

The visual is underpinned by the verbal in the work. The role of language as a medium of detachment is thus interrogated by noting that the labelling of particular species of animal as pest, vermin or beast sanctions hostile attitudes and brutal treatment of these animals. Similarly, designating some animals as stock, units of production, produce or grain-consuming units neutralises, objectifies or conceals the verity of the individual animal as a living, breathing being with his or her own needs and behaviour.

Humans share this planet with animals; they do not have irrevocable rights to it. Hence the term matter in this exhibition's title references multiple meanings of that word. 'Matter' does not just pertain to the substance derived from animals (feathers, hair, fur and skin) but to issues and concerns that centre on our ethical relations with and exploitation of animals. Animal matters matter.

Barbara Dover

... we cannot ethically disregard the interests of other beings merely because they are not members of our species.

Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life*

All photographs are details of the whole artwork.

1. feather houses
Breathless, 2002, (detail) acrylic, stainless steel,
feathers, dimensions variable,
9 parts, each 126 cm height.

2. horse hair vertical tubes
Memento Mori, 2002, (detail) extruded acrylic,
horse tail hair, 100 x 200 cm.

3. cow tail horizontal tubes
Barrier, 2002, (detail) extruded acrylic,
cow tail hair, 200 x 100 cm.

4. Perspex rod cages
Site Unseen, 2003, (detail) acrylic, extruded acrylic,
egg shell, bone, feathers, horse tail hair, cow tail hair,
animal hide, 28 pieces, each piece 20 x 20 x 20 cm.

5. grey horse hair knots in horizontal tube
Sans, 2003, (detail) extruded acrylic,
horse tail hair, 50 x 60 cm.

6. Cow and horse portraits
Anon, 2002, (detail) acrylic, ink jet on transparencies,
spray paint, joss paper, 10 works, each 60 x 60 cm.



Sans, 2003



Site Unseen, 2003



Anon, 2003