

Wild Thing!

*Wild thing...you make my heart sing...
You make everything
Groovy
I said wild thing...
...I think I love you*
Chip Taylor, The Troggs, 1965

Since the dawn of human history animal imagery has been an aspect of humankind's cultural repertoire. Whether created as expressions of 'sympathetic magic' to ensure successful hunting; for spiritual and symbolic purposes; as romantic expressions of man's relationship to nature; or simply in appreciation and awe of the wild, visual representations of wild animals have featured in the records of all cultures on every continent throughout time.

For most of human history animal imagery, for whatever reason it was produced, was a viable subject matter for visual artists. During the twentieth century, however, such imagery has had little status in the 'serious' art world as many critics and artists believe there is something overly sentimental or superficial in the portrayal of animals in art. Despite the relegation of animal imagery to the sidelines of artistic endeavours, however, many artists have continued to explore the wild kingdom.

Like all genres of artistic examination, these explorations reflect the various artistic styles practiced by artists throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. From realistic representations to abstract impressions, the artists in the exhibition *Wild Thing!* have pursued the 'wild things' of Alberta and beyond, capturing them in a variety of manners, with a diversity of materials, and for a multitude of reasons.

The exhibition *Wild Thing!* investigates this pursuit. Featuring artworks drawn from the collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, this exhibition celebrates the beauty of 'wild things' and the importance animals hold within the world and the consciousness of humankind.

*The exhibition **Wild Thing!** was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA Travelling Exhibition program is supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

COVER:
Laura O'Connor, *Snap Shot*, 2009
Digital print on birch board
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Travelling Exhibition 2011-2013 Seasons

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition for the 2011-2013 seasons. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves up to 50 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide for the show. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

Our Thanks

The Artists

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

Contact

Shane Golby, Manager/Curator
AFA Travelling Exhibition Program Region 2
Art Gallery of Alberta/CSF
10550-107 Street
Edmonton, AB T5H 2Y6
T: 780.428.3830
F: 780.421.0479
shane.golby@youraga.ca



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Wild Thing!

*Until one has loved an animal a part of
one's soul remains unawakened.*

Anatole France, French poet and novelist





Adeline Halvorson
High Country, 1990
 Oil on canvas
 Collection of the
 Alberta Foundation for the Arts



Lloyd Caibaiosai
Hunting Medicine-Buffalo, 1973
 Acrylic on canvas board
 Collection of the
 Alberta Foundation for the Arts



Illingworth Kerr
Untitled-Mountain Goats, n.d.
 Pastel on paper
 Collection of the
 Alberta Foundation for the Arts

The exhibition **Wild Thing!** investigates the aim of visual artists to capture, in a variety of media and manners, the wild things of Alberta and beyond. Like all genre of artistic examination, artistic explorations of this subject matter reflect the various artistic styles practiced by artists throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

One art style expressed in the exhibition **Wild Thing!** is that of **Photorealism**. This is clearly seen in the painting *High Country* by Adeline Halvorson and is also seen in the pencil drawing *Columbia Icefields Monarchs* by Greg Watson. Photorealism derives from both 19th century Realism and 20th century Pop Art and developed as a counter to Abstract Expressionism and modernism. Realism is a movement in European art that developed beginning in the early sixteenth century. As European explorers and travelers began investigating distant lands they became fascinated with the natural world of animals and plants they encountered and began recording them for readers and viewers in their home nations. By the 19th century Realism had become a dominant movement in art but, with the invention of photography, artists turned to more expressionistic and abstract modes of expression which became the focus of the art world. By the 1960s, however, many artists turned back to the 'real' world for inspiration, trying to reclaim and exalt the value of an image. In this aim artists used the camera as a tool to gather information and use it to create hyper-realistic paintings.

Photorealistic attention to detail is perfectly expressed in the painting *High Country*. Halvorson, famous for her equine paintings, begins with photos of her subjects but then, back in the studio, makes careful decisions regarding the composition of her work, often rearranging animals or zeroing in on one aspect of the photograph. While animals are a passion of the artist, she is also very sensitive to light and texture. Using thick and thin, watered down acrylics, she carefully builds a painting up in layers, a process which can take months and which gives the appearance of a variety of textures in the work. Halvorson's goal is to 'create a painting that not only captures the essence of (her) subject', but is also a smorgasbord of textural surfaces for the viewer's eye.

The 'Hunting-Medicine' series of works in the exhibition **Wild Thing!**, created by artist Lloyd Caibaiosai, are abstract in nature being concerned with simplified shapes and a flattened use of colour. Their style, however, is derived from the Woodland style of painting developed by First Nations artist Norval Morrisseau.

Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007) was the creator and spiritual leader of the Woodland Indian art movement, in both Canada and the northeast United States. In Morrisseau's work there is little attention to figurative modelling, and no delving into the problems of perspective or pictorial depth. Instead, he presents stylized versions of what he knew: the bears, loons, fish and other animals and the people in the town around him. The rudiments of Woodland, also called the **pictographic style** or **x-ray style**, paintings are expressive formline; a system of transparency and interconnecting lines that determine relationships in terms of spiritual power. For Morrisseau the use of bright, contrasting colours were also a key resource in his repertory of symbols. His manner of separating form into areas of distinct colour is reminiscent of stained glass.

Caibaiosai's paintings present many of the stylistic conventions developed by Morrisseau. As is also seen in Morrisseau's paintings, Caibaiosai's simplified animal figures are outlined by thick black formlines which divide the figure into bright areas of colour. Caibaiosai also shares Morrisseau's predilection to portray First Nations myths and ceremonies through art. As expressed by Caibaiosai, the 'Hunting Medicine' series of works refer to the traditional First Nations practice of 'hunting medicine', which was an alternative to the people in times of famine, hunger and bad times. As expressed by the artist:

...When there were no animals for food, nothing to eat, the hunters were successful in their attempts to feed their families, their bands. They had to approach a spiritual or medicine man for assistance. In return for payment, he gave his medicine to one of the hunters or used fair medicine to assist the hunt. This medicine has the power of calling the animals 'that were drawn with an arrow through the heart'. This medicine was a gift to the spirit of the (particular) animal, who in return gave his body as a gift to the people'.

A third style of artistic expression evidenced in the exhibition **Wild Thing!** is that of **Abstraction**. Abstract art is a term applied to 20th century modernist styles which developed in reaction against the traditional European view of art as the imitation of nature. Like all artistic practices, abstraction is not a unified practice. One aspect of abstraction involves the reduction of natural appearances to simplified forms. This may lead to the depiction of the essential or generic forms of things or involve the creation of art which works away from the individual and particular with a view to creating an independent construct of shapes and colours having aesthetic appeal in their own right.

The reduction of natural appearances to simplified forms is clearly seen in the drawing *Untitled-Mountain Goats* by Illingworth Kerr. In this drawing the artist portrays a beautiful day in the Rocky Mountains through the use of fractured and flat geometric forms and 'bright' colours. Mountains and tumbling rocks are created through simple triangular shapes differentiated from each other by black outlines. The mountain goats (sheep?) are also rendered in a very simplified manner with only the general form and species characteristics, such as the curving horns, providing clues to the actual animals being portrayed.

In his work Kerr also rebels against traditional art practices concerning the creation of space. Traditionally the illusion of depth was created through changes in size between objects and colour variations, with elements in the foreground being larger and more intense in colour than elements in the back. Instead of these methods, Kerr utilizes colour ideas developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, placing areas of contrasting colours beside or against each other to make objects or areas move backwards or forwards in space. The large area of blue mountains, for example, is placed against the smaller area of pale yellow sky and, because of this contrast between warm and cool colours, the mountains appear 'in front' of the sky. The orange colour of the largest mountain sheep, placed against the blue mountain peaks, meanwhile, serves to bring the animal closer to the viewer than the mountains. This 'staggering' of contrasting colours continues throughout the work, creating the illusion of vast distances on what is actually a two-dimensional surface.