

Lindsay Garcia | Artist Statement | *she's a beast* | April 2016

Sleepy-eyed, you try to recollect the dream you just had. Fragments of fantasies remain disconnected. Birds chirp in the distance. You climbed a fence; the horses beckoned. You played like a child on stage, petting an imaginary horse, and dancing aimlessly. Or was it a bestial show? You teased the horses to turn on you in an act of bestial suicide. But you didn't quite wake up yet. You were on neighborhood watch. Someone had been breaking into the horse fields at night and the horses just did not look right come morning. You were lost in space...and...time. You were in history, at a historic reenactment site, built in the 1930s, representing the late 1700s, wearing clothes from the recent past, but somehow in high resolution. The sound of a machine brings you back to modernity. It is just before dark but also midday and also sunrise. The street is vacant or full of ghosts. The horse is so pretty bathed in the strokes of the sun. You feel sexy but you aren't sure why. Someone is following you with a camera in long, slow motions. They are you sometimes, but at other points, they are a horse or a voyeur. The camera goes in and out of focus. When not pictured, you seem just off the edge of the frame. You got caught fence hopping and were put on display for the whole town to point and laugh. A cow moos at you for coming too close to her calf. The threat of bestiality always looms.



Figure 1: Lindsay Garcia, *she's a beast*, 2016 (video still)

I began this project to understand the figure of the zoophile, or “zoo” for short. As someone who deeply loves animals, to the point where I have made art, engaged in activism, and wrote about animals for many years, I want to comprehend zoophilic love. A zoophile is a person who identifies zoosexuality as a “distinctive sexual identity”<sup>1</sup>—one who desires a nonhuman animal as a primary sex object. Bestiality, or the act of having sex with a nonhuman animal, is not always zoophilia. *she’s a beast* is a video about human-animal sexual relationships and explores the complexities within discourse, history, art, and literature around bestiality and zoophilia.

Some scholars have called zoophilia/bestiality: “interspecies sexual assault.”<sup>2</sup> Others have called it “offensive to *some* people.”<sup>3</sup> To some, it is a “condition,”<sup>4</sup> a “taboo,”<sup>5</sup> a “paraphilia.”<sup>6</sup> For Foucault, nineteenth-century psychiatrists’ classified the zoophile as a “minor pervert.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, proponents have stated “sex across the species barrier should no longer be seen as an offense to our status and dignity as human beings.”<sup>8</sup> Zoos gather at what are called “zoocons” and in online forums designed for them to remain anonymous and connect to each other.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Cassidy, “Zoosex and Other Relationships with Animals,” in Donnan, Hastings and Fiona Magowan, eds. *Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009): 91.

<sup>2</sup> Piers Beirne, “Rethinking Bestiality: towards a concept of interspecies sexual assault,” in Podberscek, Anthony L., Elizabeth S. Paul, and James A. Serpell, eds. *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the relationships between people and pets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 313.

<sup>3</sup> Hani Miletski, *Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia* (self-published, 2002): iii (emphasis added)

<sup>4</sup> Miletski, *Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Midas Dekkers, *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality*, translated by Paul Vincent (New York: Verso, 2000): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cassidy, *Zoosex*, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978): 43.

<sup>8</sup> Singer, Peter, “Heavy Petting,” *Nerve*, 2001, <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001----.htm> (accessed April 28, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Cassidy, *Zoosex*, 91-92.

A variety of camps of thought prevail on this subject: those who condone it when it is consensual (although this line is tricky when dealing with nonhumans), those who do not take a moralistic stance at all, those vehemently against it, believing that it is always already violent and inhumane, along with other points of view. I went into this project desiring to sympathize with those who are misunderstood by heteronormative sexual culture, the zoophiles themselves. Examples of sex between different species of nonhuman animals in the wild and in captivity are well documented.<sup>10</sup> Why shouldn't humans enjoy interspecies sexual contact? Could it be okay if we let go of what we think we know about consent and trust that these humans know their nonhuman animals? I know, for example, when my dog Winslow wants to have his belly rubbed and when he doesn't. This line between sexual touch and petting has always seemed strange to me. Some pet companions let their animal friends kiss them on the mouth—and this is societally accepted—but one touch of the genitals, and jail time is the solution. Bestiality is only legal in eleven of the United States. In Virginia, it's a felony. The first bestiality law in Virginia was enacted in 1610, meaning that in those first three years of nation-building, bestiality took place in Jamestown settlement just five miles down the road from where Colonial Williamsburg—the setting of my video—now stands.

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<sup>10</sup> James Owen, "Interspecies Sex: Evolution's Hidden Secret?" *National Geographic News*, March 14, 2007, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/03/070314-hybrids.html> (accessed April 28, 2016).

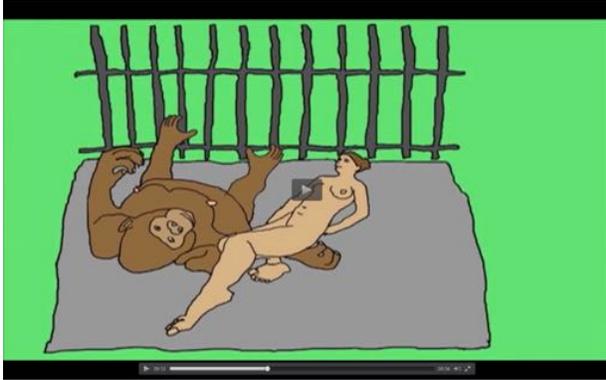


Figure 2: Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, *Lesser Apes*, 2011 (video still)

After reading one story from a 1970s collection of pulp erotica, I became disturbed by the image of a man who tricked a baby cow into performing fellatio on him. I couldn't get that graphic picture out of my head and the emotions it drew up in me (shame, anger, disgust, etc.), and it completely shifted how I

think about zoophilia/bestiality. I finally grasped why this has not been a frequent subject of academic or artistic inquiry although some books, articles, and artworks do exist. It is challenging subject matter. One artwork, *Lesser Apes*, a video by Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, follows along a zoologist and a primate that she takes care of as they dive into a lesbian interspecies relationship. Duke and Battersby's work, however, for the sake of ease of representation is animated. And while I do not wish to discount the multitudes of video-based pornography, I also did not wish to create a work that necessarily references such imagery, nor did I want to have sex with any animals for a work of artistic research.

This work came about through a variety of research methods. Firstly, I read multiple academic sources (primary and secondary, especially psychological studies) on bestiality and zoophilia. Instead of reading the texts as if to craft an argument (as one would do if writing a paper), I read the texts as a means to develop an aesthetic experience that touches upon some ideas articulated by prevalent sources and also enters the human psyche in a different manner than a text does. Next, I created a draft, a dress rehearsal so to speak, through live performance—a form of research-by-doing. From here, I devised a script and hired a

videographer to shoot the piece, Henry Sho Kellum (a very talented junior at W&M). Even though I directed each shot, the aesthetic created by Kellum and his mirrorless digital camera, this fantasy world, dictated the final form of the piece. The clips he shot became an archive of sorts for which to draw from and craft a final video experience. Thus, the video was the product of research, practice, and close looking.



Figure 3: Lindsay Garcia, *Beast Forum*, 2016 (performance documentation still)

My dress rehearsal for this video came in the form of a performance that took place in late March in the basement of Millington Hall during the one-night-only exhibition *Mom, Look, Birds: a night of art n ecology*.

The sexual objects of this performance were dead birds, specifically those in the College's ornithology lab collection. I entered the space, wearing a robe and a red wig, and sat on a blow up bed surrounded by stack of books about birds along with the bodies of black, brown, and white dead birds with tons of black and white print outs of Audubon birds taped to the wall behind me. The room was dark, lit only by a bedroom-style lamp. The space was both a dreamscape and the site of obsession. The question of my pathology, perversion, abnormality, and paraphilia challenged the audience. I picked up my laptop and typed and spoke "Dear Beast Forum: I can't stop thinking about having sex with dead birds," repetitively and in fragments. I stroked the dead birds around me and placed them all over my legs. At a point in the performance, I turned on the song about birds that Nelly Furtado sings, took off the robe to reveal a black leotard, and began dancing as if I embodied a bird around the stage area.

Empowered by dancing, I slunk off the stage and began pulling down some of the bird print outs from the wall, ran up to the viewing area, stated “You get a bird” (a la Oprah’s “you get a car” line), and handed out photocopies to audience members in constant repetition. I returned to the stage, frolicked as a bird once again, knelt down, held two brightly-colored parrots, one at a time, and sang lyrics from Love Myself by Justin Bieber. “My mama don’t like you and she likes everyone. And I don’t like to admit that I was wrong.” I exited the stage. Working in live performance allowed me to try out the form and subject matter of *she’s a beast*, as a focus group of sorts. Although, in the video, my sexual aim shifted from birds to farm animals, the audio became native sound, and the reference to online communities fell away, there was still a common affect created by both works: luxuriousness and yet disgust; half-awake sleepiness; playful and yet serious; and the constant threat of obscenity.



Figure 4: Lindsay Garcia, *she's a beast*, 2016 (video still)

The video became a dream sequence, where bestiality was always underlying the surface. Human-animal sexuality extends far beyond performing actual sex acts with other animals. Other than the pet example above, there are others, such as a young girl’s oft experience of having an orgasm while riding a horse,<sup>11</sup> or her obsession with the majesty of

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<sup>11</sup> I know this is a thing, but for some reason I cannot find any academic sources to support it, and a google search only reveals vast amounts of pornography.

horses.<sup>12</sup> So I decided to play within a fantasy world.

Although I shot other footage that included talking to the camera in more of a reality TV/documentary style, I opted for footage which exacerbated a

disconnect between time and space, human and nonhuman, camera and character. Ultimately, I

created a video that helped me tackle some of the challenges I encountered in researching the figure of the zoophile. While I still do not aim to prejudice against the zoophile, I have concern for the animals who may not be able to thwart human sexual advances. On the other side of things, there are also examples of humans who are raped by other animals.<sup>13</sup> Clearly more research needs to take place in fields other than performance and video art which determines whether these relationships can be okay or not. Moreover, one of the greatest, most humanistic of these reasons is such that there is a scientific theory that the present-day human species came to be through past acts of interspecies sex between humans and chimpanzees.<sup>14</sup> The whole reason for humanity may actually be romantic, zoophilic relationships across species lines seven million years ago...



Figure 5: Lindsay Garcia, *she's a beast*, 2016 (video still)

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<sup>12</sup> I had trouble finding academic sources for this as well, but there are countless blog posts by self-proclaimed “horse obsessed” women, such as this one: <http://theodysseyonline.com/marist/when-youre-actually-crazy-horse-girl/298400>.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Wilcox, “Reverse Bestiality: When Animals Commit Sexual Assault,” *Science Blogs: Observations of a Nerd*, <http://scienceblogs.com/observations/2011/01/28/reverse-bestiality-when-animal/> (accessed April 28, 2016)

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Wade, “Two Splits Between Human and Chimp Lines Suggested,” *The New York Times*, May 18, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/18/science/18evolve.html?ex=1149307200&en=c50c55c811de69b6&ei=5070&r=0> (accessed April 28, 2016).