

List of Works

1. Julie Andreyev/Animal Lover  
Aria, 2009, video, 11'10

Aria supported by a co production residency at Banff New Media Institute, The Banff Centre, Banff, Canada; Intersections Digital Studios, Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

2. Julie Andreyev/Animal Lover  
shit dogs say, 2012  
Youtube video, 01'58

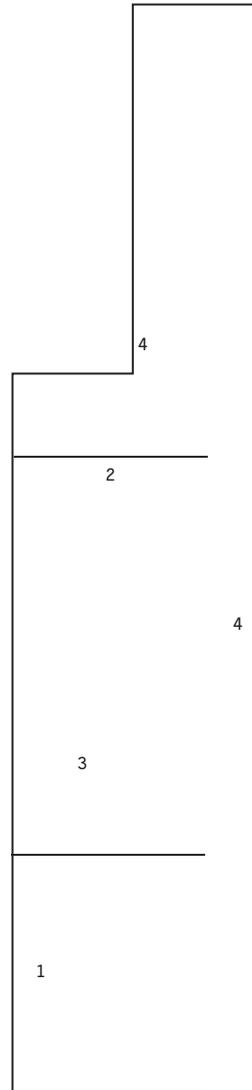
dog walking dog, 2012  
Youtube video, 01'37

dog dreams, 2012  
Youtube video, 03'01

Animal Lover Youtube videos supported by The Canada Council for the Arts.

3. Mary Anne Barkhouse  
Red Rover, 2012  
mixed media

4. Bill Burns  
Dogs, Boats and Airplanes, 2003-2010  
chromogenic prints on fuji archival paper, salt and pepper shaker, personal letter



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Curated by Tarah Hogue

# Facing the Animal

## Mary Anne Barkhouse, Julie Andreyev, Bill Burns

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The ancient Greek term *kyon* means dog, a term applied to the Greek philosopher Diogenes who pissed in the streets of Athens to ridicule the pretensions of philosophy as espoused by Plato and Socrates, appealing to a base animality that refuses to separate the sensual from the intellectual. Defined in opposition to the top-down ideology of cynicism that allows for precisely this kind of disembodied reasoning, kynicism laughs in the face of such knowledge and chooses instead to embody the beliefs it conveys: a philosophy of action.<sup>1</sup> In other words, there is a lot to be learned from dogs. The artists included in this exhibition: Julie Andreyev, Mary Anne Barkhouse and Bill Burns, each approaches his or her subject with a significant combination of humour and respect.<sup>2</sup>

*Shit Dogs Say* (2012), *Dog Walking Dog* (2012) and *Dog Dreams* (2012) is a collection of videos by Vancouver-based artist Julie Andreyev who works collaboratively with her two dogs, Tom and Sugi. In these intimate clips of daily activities, Andreyev offers short but engaging glimpses at the relation between artist and animal, the videos acting as a portrait of the dogs' unique personalities. In the cinematic *Aria* (2009), Tom and Sugi are the central subjects within an iconic Canadian wilderness. An aria is typically thought of as an operatic arrangement for a solo singer accompanied by an orchestra. In this video projection the orchestra is composed from the sounds of insects, water and other noises made by nature that slowly crescendos from long, quiet shots of the scenery punctuated by Tom and Sugi running through the frame until Tom performs his own "operatic" solo. This is especially significant when considered alongside Charles Darwin's theory of music's origins in sexual selection as opposed to language in that music and the arts in general may be an outcome of our animal heritage rather than our supposed transcendence of it. In its relation to the sensual, art is thus aligned with the natural, suggesting that all species partake in an essential becoming-artistic.<sup>3</sup>

Mary Anne Barkhouse uses animal imagery in her practice in a number of ways that challenge popular perceptions of them as well as the division between scientific and what she considers to be more traditional forms of knowledge garnered from her upbringing as the daughter of a family of influential Kwakwaka'wakw artists (including Ellen Neel and Mungo Martin) as well as a family of Nova Scotian farmers. In the newly created *Red Rover* (2012), a line of carved wooden pull toys of poodles and wolves face off against each other atop foam play mats with a cartographic rendering of British Columbia's coastline, all in glossy pink and black. Running across the map of British Columbia is the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline that will run from near Edmonton, Alberta to Kitimat, British Columbia. A project vehemently opposed by environmental activists among many others, the pipeline, along with the poodles, is indicative of the encroachment of human development into previously wild habitat. This is not an attack on the poodle per se, but a recognition of issues surrounding species conservation ("species" being connotative of both value and death in ways reminiscent of colonial accounts of the "vanishing Indian"<sup>4</sup>) as well as the endless competition for resources that affects both

1 Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, "In Search of Lost Cheekiness: An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's Critique of Cynical Reason," in *Tabula Rasa* 20 (2003).

2 Respect: "To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet." Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 19.

3 Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

4 Haraway, 18.

humans and animals. The slickly painted poodles also call to mind General Idea's use of the poodle throughout their oeuvre as a representation of both artifice and clichéd gay male sexuality, a fitting parallel for Barkhouse's own dry commentary on the current relations between nature and culture.<sup>5</sup>

Bill Burns also connects dogs and industry in his *Dogs, Boats and Airplanes* (2003-2010) series, which includes a number of photographs taken during the artist's travels along with a collection of salt and pepper shakers all in the shape of dogs, boats and airplanes. The absurdity of this work allows for its opening onto a much wider set of issues<sup>6</sup> in which dogs act as interlocutors or double agents that are equally at home in both cultural and natural spheres. Dogs thus become a site of intellectual engagement with a highly rationalized and bureaucratic conception of nature in which pedigree, global capital, movement and travel are all at stake. In all of the works in the exhibition, the use of the canine in both urban and wilderness settings complicates notions of the human passage from nature to culture by pointing to animals' existence in our daily lives. Beyond this, however, Burns' work celebrates the vitality of animals amongst us in both the broadest and most mundane of ways, recording the artist's interactions with them in a variety of circumstances.

*Facing the Animal* circulates around a number of issues raised by the relation between humans and animals as it has been conceived of historically and philosophically, how contemporary artists are approaching this topic, and why art is particularly well suited to address animality. There is an ethical imperative suggested in the exhibition's title, a rethinking of Emmanuel Levinas' notion of the face as having an expressive or vulnerable quality that calls the ego into question and demands a response.<sup>7</sup> While in Levinas' account this mode of being-for-the-Other more or less explicitly refers to a human Other,<sup>8</sup> it nonetheless proceeds from a moment of encounter that has fundamentally interruptive potential. We encounter animals everywhere in our daily lives, especially in the domesticated dogs and cats that share our streets and homes. The pet industry in North America is a multi-billion dollar endeavour entwined in the economic flows of late capitalism, which extends beyond capital itself to include relations of sex, age, race, class, technology and more. In the constitution of companion species, response may therefore be the least of what is required.<sup>9</sup> Recognizing this, the metaphysical separation of human and animal becomes untenable.<sup>10</sup> What is needed, rather, is a better account of the mutual entanglement in the constitution of all beings. Perhaps this is a lot to ask of a dog who is, after all, the star of the show.

5 Isabela Varela, "Pageantry, Poodles and Performance: Camp Strategies in the Early Work of General Idea," MA Thesis University of British Columbia, 2001.

6 "Levinas tells us that the opening to ethics is beyond reason." Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 72.

7 Calarco, 64.

8 Calarco argues that Levinas' notion of the face may be extended to the animal, though he sees it as secondary to the human face in a call to ethical response (72).

9 Haraway, 6.

10 In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Giorgio Agamben suggests that the separation of man from animal through man's capacity for language is at the base of a politics of exception in which life itself is abandoned and suspended under the force of the law.