(a) fly
flug(a)
Artists Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson have been collaborating since 2001. Their most recent work sets out to examine human relationships to landscape and the environment by way of observing the human/animal interface.

(a) fly focuses on domestic animals and animals within an urban environment and forces a reappraisal of human co-habitation with other species. The artists spent time in Reykjavik at the end of 2005 and at the beginning of 2006 working with various individuals and institutions in relation to the project. The archive of images in the book is one result of a working relationship between the artists and a number of pet owners who agreed to take part.

(a) fly is richly illustrated and includes articles arising from the project by specialists in the fields of human geography, art history and cultural theory.


flug(a) beinir aðhygginu að gækudýrum í borgarumhverfi og kallar eftir endurkastum á samvísnum mannsins við aðar lifverir. Listamenninnir dveldu í Reykjavík í lok ársins 2005 og í upphafi 2006 og unnu með ýmsum einstaklingum og stofnum að verkefninu. Ljósmyndirnar í bókin eru einn hitli þeirra verka sem urdu til í samstarfi listamennanna og fjölda gæludýraeigna í Reykjavík.

flug(a) er þýjð fjölda mynda og inniheldur greinar tengdir verkefninu eftir sérfræðinga á svafi landa- og mannvísafraði, menningarfræði og listfræði.
Making Space for Animal Dwelling

The creature gazes into openness with all its eyes. But our eyes are as if they were reversed, and surround it, every-way, like barriers against its free passage. We know what is outside us from the animal’s face alone.

Rainer Maria Rilke, Eight Duno Flagey

Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari warn against figuring animals as Oedipalized members of the family: individualized animals, family pets, sentimental. Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, my cat, my dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into narcissistic contemplations, and they are the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands, the better to discover a daddy, a mommy, a little brother behind them. We have socialized other species, brought them into our world, our umwelt, and into our (psychological) drama. We have, in brief, domesticated them. Snobismodder/Wilson’s project a fly in my soup tugs at the tethers of domestication by which we bind select animals to ourselves. Their work makes strange and unfamiliar the domestic scene where pets and humans live together. By re-presenting us with animal and human dwelling, the project invites viewers to think of the world of the animal and to imagine the life of the animal in itself. How do these animals among us live, dwell, and think? What is their space — uniquely theirs — outside the confines of human narcissistic appropriation of the animal’s world? Unlike wild animals or farm animals, pets live distinctly both within our world and in a space that is their own. A fly in my soup is poised at the horizon between these two worlds.

Að skapa rými fyrir heimkynni dýra

Mæð öllum augum ílitu dýrarka opin heim. En ökkar sjón er ílt og beint til baka og silt þar allt i kring sem véldiðum kringum útgangsp. Hvað fyrir utan er, það þekkum við af dýrnes áður einku.

Rainer Maria Rilke, Óssni ímögfræði, því Kvasi Amsen

The way we think about animals establishes a particular way of seeing them in the world, in our world. The history of art expresses this way of seeing by depicting animals as objects of study from our point of view. The animal is placed 'over there' while the artist draws the animal. Between the two is a safe distance for objective and correct representation. Yet, while we look at the animal and study it and represent the beast as it appears to our way of seeing, the animal looks back. This look of the animal changes everything. The cultural critic John Berger explains in 'Why Look at Animals':

The animal scrutinizes him [man] across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension. This is why the man can surprise the animal. Yet the animal — even if domesticated — can also surprise the man. The man too is looking across in similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension. And the is so wherever he looks. He is always looking across ignorance and fear. And so, when he is being seen by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. And yet the animal is distant, and can never be confounded with man. Thus, a pointer is accorded to the animal, comparable with human power but never coinciding with it. The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man.

While we look at them, they look at us. So, we wonder, what is behind this look of the animal? What are its secrets that remain inaccessible to us? Domestic animals, pets as we're fond of calling (to) them, house for themselves seething multitudes of points of view that work below the surface of our own seeing. An encounter with the animal looking at us is a moment in which we come to recognize an animal world, a moment when we are the object 'over there'. In this look from another species, we realize there are more points of view than our own and that there are other optical and spatial phenomenologies than our all too familiar human ones. Indeed, animals and humans occupy the same earth and spaces but have different worlds, different unworlds, a fly in my soap makes the issue of worlds

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even more pronounced since these animals share a very intimate place on earth with humans, the home. These animals, these pets, reside in our home, our room. But seen from other (animal) eyes, are we not in theirs?

In a fly in my soup Snøbjørnsdottir and Wilson photograph domestic spaces in Reykjavik but from a unique perspective. The photographs are of the space in people’s homes where ‘their’ animals dwell. It may be a dog bed, a cat corner, a fish bowl, etc. The photographs do not include the animals—only their setting. As with their previous work nonet flat out and bluesome (an examination into taxidermed shriks of polar bears), the absence of the actual animal haunts this work. We wonder what sort of beast it is that would live here. Does it have claw or paws or fins, a beak or muzzle, a shell or fur, feathers or scales? Such musings invite us into the world of the animal. We begin to consider how the olives, paws, and tails manoeuvre in this venue and what the animals think about the environment around them. We ponder the animal’s “interface” with the earth and in doing so grant animals a face and a dignity of being. So, in these images viewers must negotiate the often Oedipalized human expectations of a pet with the question of what the animal perceives. There is an uncomfortable fit between the animal’s residual space in the human’s habitat and the photograph which makes the animal’s place central. Brynild explains that when they are invited into a home, they do not photograph the well-kept family rooms or the front façade of the house; rather, they photograph seemingly incongruent corners, washrooms, stairs and ledges—the place of the animal. If the animal is considered to be at the margins of the family picture, then the images provided in a fly in my soup reverse the centre and periphery. Now in a fly in my soup these beasts which we let live with us begin to take over; they are the centres of their worlds for which our domiciles are the periphery. Wilson and Snøbjørnsdottir force the question: “From whose world (unweit) are we seeing this place? No longer are we keeping the animal at a safe and objective distance for artistic representation and natural history observation. Rather, knowledge comes from the displacement of perspective and

un rødf deler mørk blått råmyt å jordinn med mørkinn, i.e. heimlín. Í þessi dýri þessi getur, í þessu öðru, Í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru. En vàð aframed augum við (sæmund), en við þá fái í þessu þeims!

I verkinu fugl(la) taka Brynild og Mark þóðmyndin inn í heimlín í Reykjavík, en frá eintölu sójurnönum. Myndin er af stöðum í heimlíniov loka þar sem dýrinn þeirra dýrinn þeirra. Í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru, í þessu öðru. En við þá fái í þessu þeims!

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from the uncomfortable haunting provided by the surface of another world that lingers as a remainder in our own.

Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson work in the margin between an animal world and the human world. They do not provide a perspective from the animal’s point of view nor solely from the human’s. In this they differ from artists such as Per Mann whose black and white video Breathes (2000) depicts cattle in a field seemingly videoed from a grazing cow’s point of view. With the photographs from a fly in my snap, we are suspended and left to wonder, to question what it means to dwell and who is dwelling with whom? To appreciate the in- and out in their work, it is worth considering how this art opens up the world of the animal but refuses to represent, to speak for, other species.

The animal’s perspective of the world has been strikingly described by the early 20th century scientist Jakob von Uexküll, a founding figure in ethology and biometrics. His work has informed how science, philosophy, and art address animal life. In ‘Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men’, Uexküll moves beyond mechanistic biology to develop a line of inquiry into the animal’s sense of its surroundings, something close to an animal phenomenology (Ingold, 176). Uexküll opens his famous essay as follows:

Paraphrased, the monograph should be called a stroll into unfamous worlds; worlds strange to us but known to other creatures, manifold and varied as the animals themselves. The best time to sit out on such an adventure is on a sunny day... Here we may glimpse the worlds of the lowly dwellers of the meadow. To do so, we must first blow, in fancy, a sort of bubble around each creature to represent its own world, filled with the perceptions which it alone knows. When we ourselves then step into one of these bubbles, the familiar meadow is transformed. Many of its colorful features disappear, others no longer belong together but appear in new relationships. A new world comes into being.

Uexküll presents an infinite variety of perceptual worlds that are manifold and varied as the animals themselves. Each animal species holds its own point of view and its own distortions of the actual earth.

Byrdík and Mark vína á mörkum heima dýrs og mann. Hæf gefa hverki sjónarhorn dýrins ně eindingu mannins. Á þessu leyti eru þau fræstuður listiðamennýr áburð við Per Mann, ein svæðisvæða videóverk hans Breathes (2000) sýnir nauðgrip á aki sem eru að því er verðið myndafall á sjónarhorni kýr sem er á best. Með myndum í verku (Ingold, 2002), eru við sett í ósvegu og þurfa að velta hlutum fyrir okkur, hafð þýður það að eiga heima og hver á heima hlið hjarta? Til þess að meta því grá svæði í verki þessins er vel þess vörð að stigua hvæg þessi list opinur heimis dýrins en nettar það að tala fyrir aðrar dýrategundir eða setja þær fram.

Sjónarhorn dýrins á heimin var ljót á áhrifaklaf hátt af vísindamanninum Jakob von Uexküll snemma á 20. öld. En hann var eitt af fyrstnæðum á svæðið tilhelting og tilhafnivettis (biometric).”

Verk hans hefur sýnt fram í hverjum vísind, heimisþekjum og list takast á við lítt djú. „Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men” gengur Uexküll lengra við vörur munnar lítiðræðinna í því að þráða leð til að skapa þvíverð lýsurins um umhverfi sitt, eittvöru sem nálægt það að vera fyrstuæfðurrað fjára (Ingold, 176). Uexküll hefur fragra þegar það í þessi þing:


Uexküll leðir fram margleiga skýrheimsins sem eru „margbreytilegar og dýkra eins og dýrins sjálfr”. Sérhver dýrstaegund hefur sitt eigið sjónarhorn og sín þjóðum á þjóðum. Þessi sjónarhorn spela hvæg lumière núra dýrins hefur þrátt í gegnum aldavver til að aðbaglast þjóðum og
These perspectives reflect how the body of the animal has evolved over ages to adapt to the earth and meet the animal’s needs. We are left with the understanding that there is no single universal world and no unified space or time. Instead, time moves differently for each species and each animal senses and shapes space quite differently. For our ‘pets’, how long is the time between our going to work and coming home? How do we come and return shaped for a cat and shaped by it? In the Eight! Dunm Beg, poet Ranier Marie Rilke describes this space that overlaps and heuristics our own as a 'nowhere without the no'. We do not have access to this space, this nowhere, and yet it lingers in our presence ‘without the no’. The diligent reader of Uglel’si’s work and the attentive viewer of a fly in my soup perceive the loss of univest space and time and come to see that our own human world is yet another bubble with distortions and omissions. Here in our most intimate place, in our home, we find that our bubble and our world overlaps with another’s.

There is an important reversal at work in the overlap of domestic and wildness. Even as we have tried to domesticate animals, a fly in my soup looks into their dwellings and recasts the very animality within the human. These ‘pets’ have animated us as – in a perceptual shift – ‘our home’ become cultured animal dwellings where we human animals bed with the fur and flesh of other beasts. Human dwelling is the joining of cultural refinement and basic animal needs. Fine furnishings reflect social decorum and good taste. Yet, as its most functional level, the human bed, the cellphone, the kitchen all centre around our animal nature. Introducing animals within the space of human dwelling complicates our own sense of place and our own sense of identity, of what it means to be a human animal. Displacement of perspective and disorientation provided by these images goes to the heart of what it means to dwell. In English, the origin of the word ‘to dwell’ is the Old English word dwelon meaning ‘to go around’. Perhaps Snbjornsddottir and Wilson show us more clearly what it means to dwell by showing these seemingly clear pictures. These observations of the everydayness of an animal’s place among us, Dwelling becomes ‘a stroll into unfamiliar worlds’, including our own.
the (un)articulated hand manifest some way of thinking outside of culture and perhaps closer to the liminal space shared between the human and animal worlds? As artists work with untrained pupils, it may be possible to more closely think and re-present the non-human space of the animal.

A bit later in his essay on the stroll through animal worlds, U ekoul explains: “Through the bubble we see the world of the burrowing worm of the butterfly, or of the field mouse; the world as it appears to the animals themselves, not as it appears to us. This we may call the phenomenal world or the self-world of the animal. To some, these worlds are invisible. In as much as the animals’ worlds are unknown to us they remain a ‘nowhere’, but as explored and recovered by a fly in my soup, the images reveal a ‘nowhere without the not’; we cannot know this ‘nowhere’ through direct investigation and interpretation of the animal or its dwelling (its ‘going astray’). Indeed, only by suspending the groundlessness of home and recalling the stray (animal) in our own dwelling can we obliquely glimpse another’s abode. Rikke explains that ‘we know what is outside us from the animal’s face alone’. Tracking the animal’s world we can begin to understand an ‘outside us’ that is in our very midst.

Listamenn vinnu med djúptuðum nemendum. Æt kannski hægð að komast nes því að húspa um þremurbjótum þrym dynsins og fræmsgyðs þess.

Nokkrar sútar í grein sinni um ferðina um riki dynsins seem U ekoul...


Ron Broglie
Ringó & Tómasína