



Human Animal Binary

The discourse on climate change is not new; it has been the subject of scientific and political debate for decades. In recent history, the debate about humans' problematic interventions in nature has gained urgency and publicity, and has achieved considerable success. Nevertheless, it has not yet been able to cause a turnaround. The Anthropocene era has long since dawned; harmful human influences can be detected across the globe. But the climate crisis not only threatens dramatic ecological upheavals, it is also accompanied by the intensification of social conflicts.

What can be the symbolic and discursive contribution of art in view of the extent of this threat? Social processes are always criticized, commented on, or at least represented by art. In a sense, it is an outpouring of its own historical context; neither aspect can be fully read without the other.

The anamorphic sculpture with four richly detailed images of bee, lynx, kingfisher, and river trout is initially a low-threshold intervention with a strong experiential dimension. An optical trick creates a synchronicity of image and object: the animal representations are interlocked according to a certain system over 144 glass strips in a cube-shaped space. As a result, the two-dimensional representations disintegrate into a cloud-like complex of image fragments as they circumnavigate the sculpture and reassemble themselves - like a constant emergence and decay of living creatures.

Thomas Medicus has already used the functional principle of the installation in various contexts. Coupled with the idiosyncratic animal representations, this illusionary technique fulfills an affirmative task in Human Animal Binary. It conveys the incomprehensibility of life, even when this threatens to disintegrate in the next moment. The brutality of environmental destruction becomes clear in contrast to the overwhelming diversity and independent vitality of nature.

This artistic treatment is accompanied by a text on the biodiversity crisis per picture and page. Starting from the respective depiction, an arc is drawn to larger ecological contexts; the linking of locally particular phenomena and globally universal processes is expressed therein.

Human Animal Binary is in many respects a sculpture that links dichotomies and in this way creates that "in-between" that locates a work of art in a discursive space.

The title Human Animal Binary, as well as the use of the industrial materials concrete, glass, and metal, allude to a dilemma in which much of humanity finds itself: Human habitat largely contradicts coexistence with non-human animals. In order not to exceed the capacity limits of the planet and thus prevent the destruction of our habitat, a fundamental show of force on a global scale is needed.

The human living, production and activity space expanded to large areas of the planet is based on the plundering of "nature". It affects - not least - ourselves, who as highly developed living beings are part of nature and completely dependent on the success of biological and ecological processes.

The climate crisis and the pandemic make it clear once again that our understanding of "nature" as something different, something subordinate to us, has begun to crumble and that the renewal of the foundations of civilization has long since become necessary.

Yet artistic intervention is unable to resolve this dilemma; the representations of nature remain trapped under the glass cover.

The construction of Human Animal Binary caused about one ton of CO₂, which takes a mature spruce fifty years to bind. A maximum of two tons of the greenhouse gas may be emitted per capita and year for the human species to become climate-neutral. This limit is currently exceeded many times over in industrialized countries.

Would it have been better not to produce Human Animal Binary at all because of this incorporated contradiction?

The countless image fragments of the object were made with the help of the stained-glass technique that has existed since the Middle Ages: Colors are burned into the surface of the glass and can last for many centuries, despite the fragility of their support material.

One day the installation will stand in a different social context: as a memorial that has come true or as a relic of a time that has been overcome.

www.thomasmedicus.at/human-animal-binary