

Hybridity

Exhibited Works

Thomas Grunfeld (German), *Misfit*, 2004. Taxidermy

Kohei Nawa (Japanese), *PixCell Monkey*, 2004. Mixed media, including taxidermy and glass beads.

Nicolas Lampert (American), *Kangaroo*, 1995. Digital print on wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist. Commission of Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASSMoCA), North Adams, MA.

Nicolas Lampert (American), *Locust Tank*, 1995. Digital print on wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist. Commission of MASSMoCA, North Adams, MA.

Nicolas Lampert (American), *Praying Mantis Crane*, 1999. Digital print on wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist. Commission of MASSMoCA, North Adams, MA.

Carlee Fernandez (American), *Rabbit with Calla Lillies*, 2001. Taxidermy, felt, wood.

Grant Hayunga (American), *Raven Headed*, 2005. Mixed media on canvas.

Grant Hayunga (American), *Gabriel's Spell*, 2004. Mixed media on canvas.

Reuben Lorch-Miller (American), *Frogettes*, 2001. Mixed media.

Patricia Piccinini (Australian), *Surrogate (For the Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat)*, 2005. Silicon, hair, acrylic resin, leather, and plywood.

Meyer Vaisman (American), *Untitled*, 1986. Taxidermy turkey, mixed media.

Michael Oatman (American), *Husbandry*, 2005. Diptych collage and spray paint on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Pierre Ardouvin (French), *Litter*, 1994. Fake fur hats, dog basket.

Michael Oatman (American), *Singles Cruise*, 2005. Collage on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Rob de Mar (American), *Untitled*, 2000. Mixed media, felt, iron.

Richard Erlich (American), *Sand House 2*, 2003. Archival pigment print.

Richard Erlich (American), *Sand House-NH19 (graffiti girl)*, 2003. Archival pigment print.

Lia Menna Barreto (Brazilian), *Sapos Amassados sem Ordem (Toads Kneaded Without Order)*, 2002. Rubber.

Guy Ben-Ner (Israeli), *Two Ostriches*, 2003. Mixed media .

Guy Ben-Ner (Israeli), *Elia—Story of An Ostrich Chick*, 2003. DVD projection.

Motohiko Odani (Japanese), *Rompers*, 2003 DVD projection. Courtesy of the artist.

Patricia Piccinini (Australian), *When My Baby*, 2003. DVD video projection.

Adam Stennett (American), *Mouse Swimming Overhead*, 2004. DVD projection.

Adam Stennett (American), *everything tastes better when you are blind*, 2005. DVD projection.

Michael Oatman (American), *Egg Bank*, 2005. Collage on paper with test-tube rack frame. Courtesy of the artist.

Sam Easterson (American), *Animal, Vegetable, Video*, 2001. DVD projections. Courtesy of the artist.

Michael Oatman (American), *Familiar Songbirds II*, 2003. Collage on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Michael Oatman (American), *Familiar Songbirds III*, 2003. Collage on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Kathy High (American), *Embracing Animal*, 2004. DVD projections, glass test tubes. Courtesy of the artist. Commission of MASSMoCA, North Adams, MA.

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The Evolution of Species and Spaces in 21st-Century Art April–September 2006



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Hybridity is a defining characteristic of contemporary existence: the mysteries of identity—both aesthetic and genetic—are increasingly complex and potentially fantastical. Our global village shelters both the human and animal kingdoms, and the boundaries between them may be dissolving, as many of these artworks suggest: animals transform, merge, and mutate, with others, with humans, and with machines, offering both a provocative vision of the future and an incisive examination of human behavior and psychology—what drives, delights, and frightens us—in the new millennium.

Cute yet creepy, fun but foreboding: Toward a new mythology.

From the beast of the Apocalypse to the Chimera of Greek mythology to the creatures of H.G. Wells's *Island of Doctor Moreau* to memorable characters in recent *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* movies, hybrids have always inhabited our collective, cultural imagination, and have been rendered in every media, including sculpture, painting, writing, architecture, film, and more. Artists have traditionally employed images of hybrids in response to times of crisis, or to give expression to the uncontrollable dreams of imagination. In the 21st-century, artists are no less imaginative in their expressions of hybridity, but the mythologies suggested in the works here are grounded in fact as well as fiction, and, at times, in as much hopeful anticipation as in admonishing fear. These brave new worlds, where various animal and plant species share homes, habitats, bodies, and even genes with humans and machines are already coming into being: the ever-receding wilderness has brought once disparate populations into close contact (think of the deer feeding on your front lawn), and scientific advances are yielding all manner of genetic engineering and therapy (think of the almost daily news articles about laboratory mice bred to mimic the conditions of various human diseases). Perched on the precipice of this present moment, which seems equal parts promise and peril, these artists express a complex, postmodern ambiguity: dismay, even anger, at our disregard for our earthly home, its environment, and its animal populations, delight at the potential for science to address some of these issues, and a fascination—sometimes fearful, sometimes celebratory—with technology. And the forces of nature

itself, worshipped in ancient times, subject to humankind's efforts at control in the modern era, exert their own power: laboratory-designed creatures evolve in unpredictable ways, animals assert their perspectives back onto ours, and animals and earth claim the domiciles of the domesticated, meeting us halfway in the new, hybrid world.

The transformations at play here do not favor the human over the animal: video works by Sam Easterson and Kathy High guide us through the world from the animal's perspective, rather than our own, and Grant Hayunga's horse and bird-people retain their elegant animal heads, while their more human bodies look raw and vulnerable. The leading actors in video works by both Guy Ben-Ner and Mokohito Odani are either costumed or morphed into animals, offering compelling perspectives on both human and animal behavior. In this exhibition, the communion of species occurs on multiple levels, in every imaginable direction.

Scientific developments and the effects of climate change, pollution, and the expanding human population may well give rise to a plethora of new species in the 21st-century. Patricia Piccinini, Nicolas Lampert, Thomas Grunfeld, Carlee Fernandez, Meyer Vaisman, and others craft newly imagined creatures in their investigations into technology, genetics, environmental change, and cultural convention. While they recall a spectrum of sources, from ancient mythology to early twentieth-century Dada collage and the assisted readymades of Marcel Duchamp, to the magical creatures of recent science fiction films, these beings belong to the here and now. Transgenic animals and plants already exist; these artworks offer a provocative reflection on the intersection of current aesthetics and contemporary reality.

Visions of a world where evolutionary changes occur at high speed are nurtured in spaces without defined boundaries: in Michael Oatman's riotous spectrum of human and animal interactions set in suburban fantasyland, in Richard Erlich's abandoned houses inhabited by desert sand, in Rob De Mar's mountain highway nestled in a lamppost, and of course, in the viewer's mind, absorbing images and objects presented in a contemporary art museum within a hotel.