

**Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts / Lausanne**

---

**Comme des bêtes (Like beasts)  
Bear, cat, pig & co.**

From 28 March to 22 June 2008

Official opening: Thursday 27 March 2008 at 18.30

**As its starting point the exhibition takes nine emblematic animals – the bear, the stag, the pig, the cow, the donkey, the cat, the hen, the butterfly and the fly –, animals that are “close” to us (whether we want them to be or not), offering a range of images that are now commonplace, now surprising or even spectacular, all of them clues to understanding human beings’ complex relations to animals.**

“Comme des bêtes” shows us that the depiction of animals operates across the ages and civilisations as revelatory of our states of mind, our desires, our worries, our imagination, our (natural or pathological) needs for contact with animals or for keeping them at a distance. For we are speaking of ourselves when we speak about animals, we show them through our eyes when we depict them: “[the narrative] features [animals], it is true, but as representatives of the human race”.

Whether tame or wild, useful or purely harmful, sublime or grotesque, triumphant or tragic, as depicted by artists the bear, the pig, the cat and the others are fascinating mediators in our relations with nature. For animals often act as intermediaries or even intercessors : “[...] animals above all allow an expansion of contact with the natural world of which so many individuals in an urban setting are seriously deprived. In return for being cared for and fed, they have been conditioned to respond to human beings’ expectations, a real ‘compromise’ between them and things. Amidst isolated and maladjusted human beings often incapable of loving, the animal lover achieves a blessed equilibrium.” Images of animals – whether positive or negative – always end up by turning against us, insistently asking us: what is a human being? A classic philosophical question. What is an animal? A biological question. However, “The animal is not just an organism of biological interest; it also refers back to a figure of otherness in relation to which man defines his specific identity.” What does “animality” or “bestiality” mean? An ethical question. What links human beings and animals? A question touching on ethology, ecology, biogenetics and phylogenesis. And above all what differentiates human beings from animals? A question to which we expect reassuring answers (the philosophers offer some): according to Descartes it is reason; according to others consciousness, language or the soul; according to Rousseau, freedom of choice. In Part I of his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) he writes: “Some philosophers have even suggested that there is more difference between this man and that man than between this man and this beast; so it is not so much understanding that makes man specifically distinct among animals as his quality as a free agent. Nature issues commands to all animals, and the beast obeys. Man feels the same impression, but he recognizes that he is free to acquiesce or resist; and it is primarily in consciousness of that freedom that the spirituality of his soul is manifested: for physics in a way explains the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas; but in the power to wish or rather to choose and in feeling that power, only purely spiritual acts are found, and nothing of them is explained by the laws of mechanics.” As Giorgio Agamben sees it, what defines man is his consciousness of what differentiates him from animals: “man is the animal who has to recognize that he is human in order to be so” or who “recognizes that he is not”. Jean-Christophe Bailly adopts a completely different point of view, based on a shared destiny of living creatures, on the animal constant within which man is only an epiphenomenon. He engages in a philosophical exercise consisting of thinking of animals as something that exists outside man, his thought, language, and world.

---

## Comme des bêtes (Like beasts). Bear, cat, pig & co.

From 28 March to 22 June 2008

These questions have of course been formulated by western philosophy, but they are eternal questions which have been asked since human beings have thought and therefore defined themselves as humans, and universal preoccupations that are of interest to all peoples on all continents, for reasons that are sometimes very different. They arise again immediately we use animal parts to make up for the inadequacies of the human body (from the use of catgut, a resorbable suture material, to xenotransplantation), immediately man may become an easy target for illnesses or viruses of animal origin ("mad cow" disease, bird flu) or the technical possibilities of mixing animal and human genetic material are glimpsed (experiments in that direction have apparently already started). And finally everything culminates in this big question: what is man's place in the (mineral, vegetable, animal) natural world, or quite simply in the universe? – a question that is becoming increasingly topical as our world is being destabilized and our certainties are crumbling.

This exhibition does not set out to answer all these fundamental questions. "Comme des bêtes" offers visitors of all kinds groups of works that are all elements of such thinking. We have taken an opposite stance from themed exhibitions – of which there have been many related to animals in recent years – where the works are then called upon to illustrate the theme. Pierre Gascar says: "Animals for us are the image of a reassuring continuity. They link us to the world in time. Without us realising it, they take us back to childhood, our individual and collective childhood, and that of the human species. They link us to the world physically." At the same time the exhibition wants to show that this physical relationship can also be effected through works of art, even if they introduce an initial distance because of the medium used, and further distance associated with the subjectivity of the artist. The relationship to the animal is effectively filtered by the artist; therefore it potentially takes on an *exemplary* character. (Excerpt from the catalogue)

### The works and the artists

"Comme des bêtes" brings together works – paintings, sculptures, photographs, videos, installations – from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present, coming from those held by the musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne and many public and private collections. The artists represented include: Gilles Aillaud, Johannes Alder, Luc Andrié, Albert Anker, René Auberjonois, Bai Yiluo, Stephan Balkenhol, Balthus, Auguste Baud-Bovy, Pascal Bernier, Julien Berthier, Ernest Biéler, François Bocion, Pierre Bonnard, Marius Borgeaud, Eugène Boudin, Elias van den Broeck, Frank Buchser, Balthasar Burkhard, Eugène Burnand, Marguerite Burnat-Provins, Robert Calpini, Cao Jinping, Valentin Carron, Leo Copers, Philibert-Léon Couturier, Liz Craft, Wim Delvoeye, Gérard Deschamps, François Desportes, Robert Devriendt, Mark Dion, Duan Jianwei, Duan Jianyu, Duan Zhengqu, Balthasar Anton Dunker, Franz Elmiger, Slawomir Elsner, Ralph Fleck, Ceal Floyer, Pierre-Philippe Freymond, Gloria Friedmann, Andrea Gabutti, Marguerite Gérard, Jean-Marie Gheerardijn, Francisco Goya, Arti Grabowski, J. J. Grandville, Barthélémy Guillaud, Alexander Hahn, Eberhard Havekost, Ferdinand Hodler, huber.huber, Rodolphe Huguet, Luzia Hürzeler, Richard Jackson, Louis-Godefroy Jadin, Ji Dachun, Alexandre Joly, François Jouvenet, Ilya Kabakov, Bharti Kher, Thomas Kitzinger, Pierre Klossowski, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Hans Krüsi, Batholomäus Lämmli, André Lasserre, Liu Wei, Liu Xiaodong, Albert Lugardon, Luo Brothers, Paul McCarthy, Naofumi Maruyama, Ana Mendieta, Gottfried Mind, Katharina Moessinger, Jean-Bloé Niestlé, Eugène Normandin, Yoko Ono, Ulrike Palmbach, Paola Pivi, Eric Poitevin, Elodie Pong, Marjetica Potrč, Odilon Redon, Peter Regli, Georges Rey, Rembrandt van Rijn, Claudia Renna, Didier Rittener, Samuel Rousseau, Edouard Marcel Sandoz, Eugenio Santoro, Christoph Schmidberger, Carolee Schneemann, Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern, Francisco Sierra, Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, Erick Swenson, Rodolphe Töpffer, Constantin Troyon, Félix Vallotton, Not Vital, Mark Wallinger, Andy Warhol, Stephen Wilks, Xu Bing, Xu Zhen, Yang Zhenzhong, Zhao Bandi

---

## Comme des bêtes (Like beasts). Bear, cat, pig & co.

From 28 March to 22 June 2008

### The catalogue

The catalogue is structured in the same way as the exhibition: a zoological justification of the nine animals chosen in the essay by Michel Sartori, a presentation of our bestiary in nine chapters, and only at the end by way of a coda (to be taken as a musical term, but also literally as the animal's tail), one of the possible approaches to thinking about the concrete themes tackled in the exhibition, an exercise conducted by Anne Sauvagnargues, a contribution we again regard as exemplary.

*Comme des bêtes*, 224-page catalogue in French, generously illustrated, published by Editions 5 Continents, Milan with contributions from Marie Alamir, Bernard Fibicher, Magali Moulinier, Groupe de la Riponne, Michel Sartori and Anne Sauvagnargues. Price: CHF 40.- (€ 25.-) / After the exhibition : CHF 50.- (€ 30.-)

Order from the Musée des Beaux-Arts Lausanne, p. & p. extra

Tel. +41 21 316 34 45 / fax +41 21 316 34 46 / [info.beaux-arts@vd.ch](mailto:info.beaux-arts@vd.ch)

### Visuals

Visual materials are available upon request at the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, [florence.pittet@vd.ch](mailto:florence.pittet@vd.ch)

### Contacts

Bernard Fibicher, Director

Florence Pittet, press relations, [florence.pittet@vd.ch](mailto:florence.pittet@vd.ch)

<p>Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts / Lausanne Palais de Rumine, place de la Riponne 6 - C.P CH - 1014 Lausanne Tel. +41 21 316 34 45 / fax +41 21 316 34 46 <a href="mailto:info.beaux-arts@vd.ch">info.beaux-arts@vd.ch</a> <a href="http://www.mcba.ch">www.mcba.ch</a></p> <p>The exhibition is open from March 28 to June 22, 2008 Tue–Wed, 11am–6pm / Thur, 11am–8pm / Fri–Sun, 11am–5pm Monday closed, including “Pentecôte” Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> May “Ascension”, open 11am–5pm</p>	<p><b>Admission charges:</b> Adults: SF 10.- Pensioners, students, apprentices: SF 8.- Children up to 16: free of charge 1<sup>st</sup> Sartuday of each month: free of charge</p> <p><b>Catalogue:</b> SF 40.- (€ 25.-) / after the exhibition: SF 50.- (€ 30.-) Order from the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts / Lausanne, postage extra: Tel. +41 316 34 45; fax +41 21 316 34 46 <a href="mailto:info.beaux-arts@vd.ch">info.beaux-arts@vd.ch</a></p>
---	---