

Press release  
Zurich, 31 March 2011

## **DogCatMouse at the Kunsthaus Zürich. Exhibition and Summer Workshop**

**From 1 April to 31 July 2011 everything is going to be beastly good fun at the Kunsthaus! For a long time, animals were a fixture of human life, and played a central role in art as well. Indeed, animals are considered one of the very first subjects of visual representation. Now, one hundred paintings, sculptures, photographs and videos from the Kunsthaus collection have been assembled into an exhibition, while a summer workshop invites visitors to participate in studio sessions, guided tours and excursions organized by the Kunsthaus and held in collaboration with the Zurich Zoo, the Museum Rietberg and other institutions.**

The holdings of the Kunsthaus Zürich include several hundred images of animals. Curator Sibyl Kraft and Art Education head Hans Ruedi Weber have selected one hundred feathered, furred or scaly subjects to gaze back at visitors from the museum walls. If you haven't seen any animals yet today, it's no wonder: apart from pets, animals have almost completely disappeared from our everyday environment – and the kind that is served to us on a plate is scarcely recognizable as such. For millennia, however, things were different. A depiction of an animal is never just that, but rather the representation of the human view of that creature, and thus of the relationship between humankind and the animal kingdom. That's why our show reflects the way animals are perceived, and the variety of forms taken, and functions played, by their appearances in works of art.

### THE ARTIST AS HUNTER

The most neutral form of seeing and representing attempts to commit beautiful, intriguing or unusual animals as naturally as possible to paper or canvas, and is thus a basic document of use in the natural sciences. The precise observation of animals, however, has always also been a prerequisite for hunting. In addition to rendering visible the beauty of a given prey's fur, feathers or scales, hunting also gives artists the opportunity to depict pursuit and suffering. The horse, probably humankind's most important animal companion, has its own section of the show. Its energy and power have been deployed in work and warfare, and it has always functioned as a status symbol: and thus it also enjoys a key position in the arts. The Kunsthaus volière features works from the early 14th to the middle of the 20th century in which birds are used to exemplify a wide range of artistic expression, from the decoration on the back of an altarpiece to Surrealistic meditations on the birdcage.

### PARADISE LOST AND PARADISE REGAINED

The mythical origin of our culture is described as a Paradise in which all creatures are united. The peaceful coexistence of humankind and animals, or of animals and their environment, has always served in art as an image of the desire for this lost beginning. And yet an animal is also held responsible for Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise: the snake, which thus becomes the embodiment of evil; other beasts, too, are used in the visual arts and literature to give form to our fears and impulses. Fables, fairy tales and sagas are full of animals that have made their way into images, and thus into our exhibition.

### COMPANIONS TO HUMANKIND

One section of the show is devoted to the cohabitation of humans and animals. Since earliest times, humans have appropriated conspicuous elements of animal nature for their names and heraldic emblems. Farmers have been closest to animals, living with and from them for millennia. Today, now that farm animals have been replaced by machines or sequestered in feed batteries, all we have left are household pets, which are so familiar that their depictions often display human traits.

### WORKS BY DÜRER, BÖCKLIN, BEUYS AND MERZ

Although not all of the 'beastly good' animal pictures from the Kunsthaus collection have made it into the exhibition, visitors are free to go in search of the rest, singly or in groups, guided by a free accompanying brochure. In addition to brief explanatory texts on the various thematic sections, the brochure also contains illustrations of works in other rooms of the collection. The selection comprises a variety of different genres, with one of the oldest pieces being Albrecht Dürer's engraving entitled 'Adam und Eva' (1504). Paintings by Hans Asper – such as his 'Bildnis der Cleophea Krieg von Bellikon' – are evidence of a tremendous need for representation, while Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp's 'Zwei Jaguare' (1639) is part of the tradition of observing the behaviour of animals in their natural habitat. In his painting of Saint Anthony preaching to the fishes, Arnold Böcklin ventures into the realm of fable; for its part, Max Ernst's 'Les cages sont toujours imaginaires', a collage of various materials, gestures towards Surrealism. The warts-and-all contemporary approach of Mario Merz in 'Jenseits der Hecke' testifies to the gap that has opened between humans and animals in our day, while depictions of horses, dogs, cows, rhinoceroses, monkeys and mice will also have visitors talking. Finally, the video of a performance by Beuys, which documents the way the artist confines himself with a coyote, is good for a shudder or two – which is all well and good, since the

exhibition aims to revise our prejudices, and have us rediscover animals as humankind's companions, as well as in works of art.

### SUMMER WORKSHOP: 'DOGCATMOUSE'

A programme is available for the summer workshop 'DogCatMouse'. The offerings include a painting atelier for children aged three and older, events for schools, photo-safaris, conversations with animal therapists and taxidermists, family excursions, guided tours with artists, and courses in which participants can try their hand at drawing or sculpting. The programme is a collaboration with the Zurich Zoo, the Museum Rietberg, the Zoological Museum and the North America Native Museum. Its aim is to win the hearts of art lovers for animals, and raise awareness of artistic creations among animal lovers, creations that place animals in fantastical surroundings or give them characteristics unknown in the wild, or in captivity.

Supported by the Vontobel Foundation.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch). Opening hours: Sat, Sun, Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thurs, Fri 10 a.m.–8 p.m. Easter 22-25 April, 1 May 2011: 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Admission CHF 16.- / 11.- (concessions). Visitors 16 and younger free of charge.

Registration required for schools and groups. Public Guided Tours: Sun 3/24 April, 15/29 May, 12 June, 10/31 July, daily at 12 p.m. Fri 8/29 April, 20 May, 10 June, 1/22 July, daily at 6.30 p.m. (Registration required: tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84).

Advance sales: SBB RailAway-Kombi, discount rail travel and admission: available at local stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300,300 (CHF 1.19 per min. by ground line), [www.sbb.ch](http://www.sbb.ch). Magasins Fnac, [www.fnac.ch](http://www.fnac.ch).

Special deal! During the 'DogCatMouse' exhibition visitors (and members of the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft) will be eligible for a discount of CHF 5 on admission to the Zurich Zoo upon presentation of their Kunsthhaus ticket stub. Visitors to the Zurich Zoo can get the same discount on admission to the Kunsthhaus to see 'DogCatMouse' upon presentation of their ticket to the zoo.

Summer workshop: participation costs between CHF 8 and 80 for adults and between CHF 8 and 40 for children. Programme available at [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch). Registration required: tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84.

### NOTE TO MEDIA

To download visual material go to [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch) > Information > Press.

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