

animal gift





COVER Joanne Nethercote *Shaking Cat* 2022,
acrylic on canvas 30.5 x 30 cm (detail)
ABOVE Brigid Hanrahan *Pretty Bird looking at some Pretty
Flowers in a Pretty Garden* 2019, glaze on ceramic 15 x 23 x 1 cm



Animal Gift is an exhibition about the exchanges of sight, play, love, materials, spirit, and body between animals. Who are the animals in your life, and how do you receive the gift of their presence? A gift not only because of the way we are called to appreciate them, but also because like a gift the presence of animals in our lives is unforeseeable and aleatory, a secret of chance...



Matthew Gove *Untitled* 2015, gouache on paper 28 x 38.5 cm



LEFT Julian Martin *Untitled* 2013,
pastel on paper 38 x 28 cm

BELOW Chris Mason *Woma Python on Red Sand*
2022, mixed media 5 x 40.5 x 30 cm





Every person has a unique relationship to animals, and this is reflected in the work that comprises *Animal Gift*.

Joanne Nethercote's *Shaking Cat* (2022) series reminds me of both the divine litany of cat memes on the internet and of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2* (1912). What is a world of social media to chronophotography? How else to show the rapid and sometimes pleasurable disintegration of time when you witness the days and life of a pet?

Claire B Bushby's works weave portraits of interspecies care around their beloved cat, Nerissa, through handkerchiefs inherited from their grandparent. Chris Mason's detailed, life-like animal sculptures reveal the vitality of animal life while demonstrating the profound care involved in the twin acts of seeing and creating.

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah explores the presence of mythic animality within the home through the Chinese zodiac Dragon. Matthew Gove depicts animals alongside human objects. They are objects of play and recreation, a jet skiing otter, a weightlifting squirrel. Sophie Dumaresque self-reflexively performs interspecies care through a WWE-themed birdbath, whose bittersweet beauty lies in being both staged and real at the same time, while providing genuine hospitality to other species and flowers as a tribute for those who were overlooked (Chyna).

There is a secret world that exists in witnessing an animal, between you and them, a memory that you might hold which is funny, sad, and ephemeral. In *Pretty Bird looking at some Pretty Flowers in a Pretty Garden* (2019), Brigid Hanrahan shows how other animals might appreciate beauty in nature too. What does nature's beauty look like when you feel that you are also nature? Danielle Freakley presents *Portraits*, a self-

portrait performance that explores how our ephemeral individual identity folds back into the oceanic, timeless identity of our species. Tahlia Palmer presents *The Problem of Deer in Australia* (2026), a digital video about deer in Victoria, which are an introduced species that is destructive to their environment, and yet protected by the state (largely for the purpose of gaming).

For many people the most intimate regular contact they have with other animals is in eating their bodies. I became vegan so that I can think of eating as a spiritual practice, connected to Buddhist compassion and my hope for a future without industrialised farming. It was meant to be a first step, but until this exhibition I have not taken the second step. What does solidarity with those deer look like when their existence in that environment results in the death of an ecosystem?

Animal Gift is an attempt to learn from the many ways people understand their relationships with animals. If multispecies life demands anything, it is not a single model of care but a plurality of ways of caring. This is why I have tried to include as many artists as possible: as a gesture towards the abundance of being, and towards the many ways humans come to know, love, fear, imagine, and live alongside animal others. I believe there are infinite simplicities to be felt and thought when looking at and loving animals.

I would like to carefully trace out a conflict between critical disability, animal, and human-animal studies and movements, and give some context. Arts Project Australia is an internationally leading visual arts organisation that champions neurodivergent artists and artists with intellectual disability. Over 150 artists actively and regularly attend the studio at Arts Project Australia. *Animal Gift* is a guest curated exhibition that brings together Arts Project Australia artists and

their contemporary art peers from outside the organisation. Some of the external artists identify as neurodivergent artists but they can also be neurotypical and non-disabled.

Disability studies and critical animal studies both examine the human/animal binary to show how this distinction has structured oppression and exploitation¹. Yet they often move in different directions. Critical animal studies frequently seeks to blur the boundary between human and animal: we are all animals, and animals deserve liberation². Disability studies (alongside critical race studies), by contrast, exposes the long history of violence enacted against people who have been dehumanised by being cast as animal within ableist, speciesist White-Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy³.

Perhaps our relationship to identity itself needs to change? Kirsty Liddiard, Katherine Runswick-Cole, Rebecca Lawthom, and Dan Goodley, in their DisHuman Manifesto, celebrate the revolutionary potential of disability to think again about what it means to be human. While acknowledging the desire for many people with disabilities to be thought of as human, they argue that disability is a necessary reminder of relational intimacy as foundational to being human⁴. Critical animal scholars such as Sue Donaldson, Will Kymlicka, Sunaura Taylor, and Kelly Oliver build on critical disability studies scholarship to argue that dependency and vulnerability are the animal/human condition⁵, as anyone who has loved a pet knows.

The more that you think about the boundary between what is human and what is an animal, the more similarities and differences you notice, the more you question what a human or an animal is. In *The Animal that I therefore Am*, Jacques Derrida describes this as a limitrophy, an atrophy or deterioration of a limit or boundary. It is like the difference between the second of time you are

currently experiencing, and the next⁶. Donna Haraway sidesteps the problem of fixed identities by instead speaking of relationality, which is the concept that you are who you are because of the beings around you. Haraway speaks of becoming-with: the recognition and practice that "to be one is to become-with many"⁷. Companion species do not simply coexist; they become what they are through ongoing intra-action with other species.

Likewise, the artworks in this exhibition. While I have approached this exhibition with my own life experiences, this is the culminative moment of many lives. The beautiful thing about art is that we don't have to decide what things are just yet. We can pause. We can let animals and artworks reveal themselves in our regard.

You know, a gift is that we, too, are regarded by animals.

Gok-Lim Finch 林

¹ Lundblad, M. author. (2026). *Disanimality : when disability, illness, and animality meet* / Michael Lundblad. Oxford University Press.

² Sze, J. (2020). *Race, Animality, and Animal Studies [Review of Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question; Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human; Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age; Race Matters, Animal Matters: Fugitive Humanism in African America, 1840–1930, by B. Boisseron, J. Drexler-Dreis, K. Justaert, C. J. Kim, & L. Johnson]*. *American Quarterly*, 72(2), 497–505. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27066939>

³ Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). *Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability*. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.730511>

⁴ Ellis, K., Garland-Thomson, R., & Kent, M. (2019). *Manifestos for the future of critical disability studies : volume 1* / edited by Katie Ellis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Mike Kent and Rachel Robertson. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

⁵ Jenkins, S., Struthers Montford, K., & Taylor, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Disability and Animality: Crip Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003014270>

⁶ Derrida, J. (2008). *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Fordham University Press.

⁷ Haraway, D. J. (2007). *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press.

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