Catalogue essay by the artist

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**For the Love of Animals**

*Many of us … love animals. There are a few people who don’t, yet the vast majority of us love the dogs, the cats, and the wildlife that add richness to our lives.*[1](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote1sym)

Like most people I grew up loving animals. In addition to our household cat, I had numerous pets – frogs, lizards, rats, turtles, fish and a rabbit and a family of adorable ducks. My childhood was replete with books about animals, animal toys and images of cute and cuddly animals printed on fabrics and all manner of stationary. There were animal characters on TV – the friendly fuzzy puppets of “Sesame Street” and the “Muppet show”. There were films about smart and intuitive animals like “Skippy” and “Lassie”. Animals were everywhere and they were mostly lovable individuals – affectionate, quirky, funny, moody, smart, shy … it was easy to see that other animals had personalities. Like humans they were sentient beings with their own wants and needs.

… *the observation that animals are sentient is different from saying that they are merely alive. To be sentient means to be the sort of being who is conscious of pain and pleasure; there is an “I” who has subjective experiences.*[2](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote2sym)

Paradoxically, there I was, like most children, growing up believing I loved animals yet I was consuming animals and animal products daily without stopping to think about how those “products” came to be on my plate. Whilst my love of animals was fostered, my taste for animal products was simultaneously cultivated. It seemed that everyone around me subscribed to the doctrine that meat, milk and dairy were “important” and “necessary” components of our everyday diet, and therefore not an issue to be questioned. As a young child it was not even clear to me that meat came from slaughtered animals. This is not exactly a topic one’s parents are usually keen to discuss, and of course the meat and dairy packaging falsely advertises happy healthy animals roaming freeing in lush pastures. For some time, I could only assume that we ate them when they had died of old age.

…*we attempt to compensate for the murder of our fellow sentient beings in bucolic images in stories and animated films of happy, healthy farm animals grazing and sunbathing in lush fields, joyously bounding about, scratching, sniffing the earth, cuddling their human companions, and so on.*[3](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote3sym)

I soon came to understand the brutal truth and simply could not reconcile my love of animals with harming them, let alone killing them. With plenty of other food options to choose from, at age 16, I decided to become a vegetarian.

Much later, in 2010, I finally made the connection between all animal products and animal suffering and decided it was time to shift from vegetarianism to veganism. It seems an obvious thing, yet it so often goes under the radar that leather, fur, and some food products such as traditional rennet and gelatine are by-products, if not the main products, of animal agriculture. The vast majority of contemporary animal agriculture is on an industrial scale to accommodate the increasing demands of an exponentially growing world population, and of course the more cramped the animals are, the more profitable it is. Thus, modern animal farming has bought with it oppressive terms like – “gestation stalls”, “battery hens”, “broiler hens”, “veal crates” and “feed lots”.

*Farmers routinely …lock animals in tiny cages, mutilate their horns and tails, separate mothers from offspring, and selectively breed monstrosities.*[4](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote4sym)

As a vegetarian, cheese was my favourite food and eating dairy products had seemed so benign to me, yet this is far from the truth. Dairy cows are kept almost continually pregnant via artificial insemination, so that they can produce milk, not for their young, but for human consumption. It’s remarkable how many people don’t even consider that a cow must be pregnant to produce milk, as if cows were some rare breed of permanently milk-laden mammals. The calves that result from each pregnancy are taken from the cows almost immediately after birth at great distress to both mother and child. Male calves or ‘bobby calves” are destined to become veal for human consumption and they suffer immensely in their brief, miserable lives, bereft of their mother’s love. The mother cows continue this cycle of impregnation, birth and calf separation until around 5-6 years of age, when they are deemed too old and are also sent to slaughter. A cow’s natural lifespan is about 20 years.

So what about eggs? Thanks to the great work of animal protection organisations, most of us are now aware of the horrific conditions endured by battery laying hens. At the request of consumers, many supermarkets now only stock free range, organic and cage-free eggs. Whether these products are truly what they claim to be or not, this change reflects that humans will, where possible, choose the less cruel animal product. Whilst the latter egg varieties represent a huge improvement for egg laying chickens, the cruel fate of male chicks sadly remains the same. The male offspring of the chicken industry, whether free range or battery, are considered unwanted by-products. These unfortunate chicks are separated from the females shortly after birth and then either “…*thrown alive into electronic mincers or instantly gassed to death.”*[5](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote5sym) A brief few moments of life followed by horrific death.

My transition to veganism not only heightened my awareness of the suffering of animals raised for food, leather, fur and other products. In addition, I became increasing aware of the exploitation of animals in science and medical laboratories, in circuses, zoos, sport, hunting, in certain religious practices and in numerous forms of animal entertainment. I developed a strong conviction of the need to reassess our relationship with animals, to consider their sentience and to approach more ethical ways of co-existing with them.  My art began to reflect the discourse of animal ethics, depicting various narratives of problematic and exploitative human – animal relationships. My mixed media paintings in particular were now more overtly political, examining controversial issues, raising questions about justice, ethics and human accountability.

I find myself simultaneously fascinated and frustrated by our contradictory treatment of animals. Our human-centric perspective of the animal world positions rabbits, for example, as both cuddly companion animals but also as, laboratory specimens, meat and fur “products”. We support an industry that raises millions of pets that are accepted members of families yet trap, cage, torture and kill billions of animals annually for food, fur, leather etc.  My work seeks to expose such obvious contradictions in the face of widespread, culturally ingrained acceptance of this schism.

Whilst my art focuses on animal social justice issues, it is also about oppression in the broader sense – denigrating, suppressing, hurting and exploiting the “other”, both animal and human. This is apparent through the insistent use of anthropomorphism in my work. In the context of my narrative images, anthropomorphism serves as a reminder of both our similarities and differences in behaviour to other animals. Animals and humans are depicted as both protagonists and victims. Given Western civilisations history of oppression – of women, children, ethnic minorities, people of colour – we can readily recognise oppressor and victim behaviour as distinctly human. Ironically, animals can only ever be victims in these narratives. They may prey on weaker animals for food, but they do not hunt other animals in order to drug them, cage them, and train them to fight, race, work or perform tricks, let alone slaughter them en masse.

Animal exploitation is analogous with the victimization of many “others” throughout western “culture”. Whilst those “others” eventually were granted emancipation, animals remain captive, enslaved and exploited at the hands of their human oppressors*.*Our belief in human supremacy has until recently, inhibited us from any serious consideration of the psychological, emotional, intuitive, cognitive and communicative lives of other animals, (with the ironic exception being those companion animals with whom we happily share our homes). Attitudes are now changing with research continually providing evidence that animals are far more sentient, more complex and intelligent than previously believed. Despite this, animal emancipation remains the last big social justice issue, the last frontier for the social incorporation of all “others”.

Claude Jones

Artist

[1](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote1anc) John Robbins (forward) in Melanie Joy, *Why we Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows,*Page 7

[2](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote2anc) Gary Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: your Child or the Dog?,*Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2000, Page 6

[3](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote3anc), Zipporah Weisberg, ED. John Sanbonmatsu, *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, Roman and Littlefield, USA, 2011, Page 190

[4](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote4anc) Yuval Noah Harari, *Industrial farming is one of the worst crimes in history,* The Guardian, 27th September, 2015. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/25/industrial-farming-one-worst-crimes-history-ethical-question)

[5](http://claudejones.com/home/about/catalogue-essays/for-the-love-of-animals/%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote5anc) Louise Gray, *40 Million Chicks on Conveyor Belt to Death,* The Telegraph, Nov 4th, 2010, (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/earthnews/8107957/40-million-chicks-on-conveyor-belt-to-death.html>)