



The wisdom of animals

Description

Cats never smile. This is what makes Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat so uncanny. Animals are expressionless, contributing further to their capacity to present to us humans as other — both familiar and alien according to Paul Shepard.

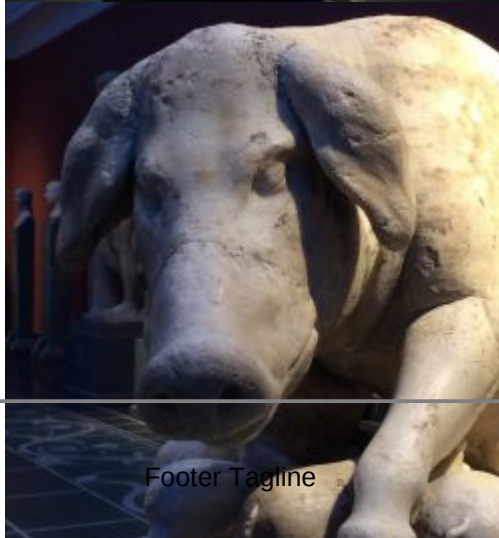
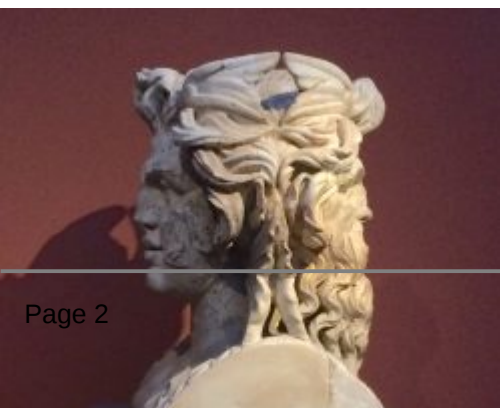
Deeply committed to the play of facial features and the power of expression, we find the immobile faces of other animals to be suspiciously concealing, or to be the guileless mind of pure (130), untroubled divinity — transcendent, serene, detached, innocent, knowing. Fish, amphibians, reptiles, and birds are even less expressive and the most uncanny. Even in the fox's mask we sense a being essentially like us and yet beyond us, in the guise of a special wisdom that denies the ambiguity of our own fluid look. Sheep, bat, weasel — each has a fixed species aspect, as if contemplating its own monstrous or wonderful secret, an idea made perfect, as if for our attention (131).

He discusses the grotesque display of mounted animal heads in places that celebrate the hunt. Whether mounted, stuffed, kept in zoos, or bred as pets, we wait for some recognition as co-inhabitants of planet Earth.

We await a reunion with absent beings on a crowded yet increasingly lonely planet (141).

To this desperate quest for recognition — and even forgiveness — from our captive animal siblings add endless YouTube animal clips. If only the cats, puppies, emus, and geese would laugh along with us, but they never do. In this resides the wisdom of the flock, herd, skein and glaring.

On the subject of a glaring of cats, here is a menagerie of animal sculptures. Does the face fixed in neutral, inscrutable gaze always imply wisdom?





Reference

- Shepard, Paul. 1996. *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*. Washington DC, Island Press.

Notes

- Egyptian, Greek, Roman and neoclassical sculptures at the Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. animals

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