

Grunt and Squeak and Squawk With the Animals at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art

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Katherine Patterson's *CatSnake*, graphite on paper



Now calm down. I've got a cheeseburger for you right here

Talk to the Animals

Grunt and squeak and squawk with the animals at OCCCA

The better you get to know an animal, the more paradoxically mysterious it becomes. No matter how much a pet seems like a part of the family, like some weird little brother in a fur coat, it has an irreducible animalness, its own set of codes and compulsions that you can never totally understand. Even the sweetest dog can get too charged up while playing around, and then its lupine nature suddenly comes out and it tears a fat chunk out of your hand before it knows what the hell it's doing. A cat is a dotting fuzzball one moment, and then you somehow offend it, and it won't even look at you for hours.

And if the animals we love will never make complete sense to us, the animals who appear most alien often turn out to have more in

common with us than we might like. Chickens seem unknowable, all bobbing heads and staring eyes, but one is told that these birds can make wonderful pets. There are smart chickens and idiot chickens—they can be cheery companions or total jerks. (Here's hoping that every chicken I ever ate was one of the idiots who had it coming.)

"Animal Magnetism," a sprawling show at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, aims to look at our fanged, feathered, flippered and furry friends in all their wonderfully inhuman complexity. Fifty-four artists offer their own eccentric takes on the animal kingdom. It's like visiting a zoo of ideas, each picture frame a kind of gilded cage holding a human concept about an animal, rather than the real thing. Even so, you better watch yourself. Some of these creatures are pretty fierce—they might just escape from their canvases and follow you home.

Katherine Patterson's *CatSnake* is featured on the show's promo materials, and it's not hard to see why. Perched on the precipice between Magritte-esque surrealism and heavy-metal album cover, this meticulous graphite drawing is a ghastly eye-catcher depicting a hissing hybrid of feline and reptile. It's like some failed experiment from the lab of Dr. Moreau, and this godforsaken kitty-serpent just should not be.

If you're an oversensitive soul, there are other nasties in the show sure to upset your delicate constitution. Cheryl Ekstrom does this thing with a cow skull that's kind of pornographic, even though she doesn't actually do much to the skull. I know that doesn't really make a lot of sense, but trust me: when you see this thing, you'll be glad I didn't go into more detail. You'll admire her ingenuity, and then you'll hurry on to the next piece.

After a punch to the eyeballs like that, it's comfortingly familiar to once again encounter the grassy-animal installation of Amy Caterina, straight from "This Used to be Real Estate, Now It's Only Fields and Trees," Caterina's unforgettable debut solo show at Grand Central Art Center (see "[Really Going Green](#)," July 25). Caterina covers fake animals with green "Fun Fur," making them look like they stood still just a bit too long and were overtaken by kudzu. The effect is equal parts playground cute and 3 a.m. fever dream.

There are also a couple of surprisingly lovely crow-themed pieces. Terry Daffit Powell's *Wafting* is a black smear of beauty, capturing one of these scavengers in the midst of wild, sinister flight. Dale Clifford's *Shame of the Son* takes an entirely different approach, a linocut depicting two feuding crows (presumably father and child) with the lush, golden browns and elegant, undulating lines of Art Nouveau. Crows have never looked better . . . although one does wonder if these belligerent little bastards really merit such loving treatment. (Maybe chickens can be sweet- or sour-natured, but I've yet to meet a crow who wasn't a total asshole.)

If any one piece here doesn't bite you, there's still much more to see, such as the grim, dancing scorpion couple of YUME's tattoo-like acrylic, *Last Tango*; Chris Basmajian's light-show deal with the monkey-men from *2001: A Space Odyssey*; Robert Weibel's *Bison No. 1*, featuring an ungulate depicted through actual gunpowder. Jesus, it's hard to even write about this show without it starting to sound like *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*. "Animal Magnetism" is more than worth your time, but you'll have to run (or fly, or slither) over there fast—it closes Saturday.

"Animal Magnetism" at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, 117 Sycamore St., Santa Ana, (714) 667-1517; www.occca.com. Open Thurs.-Sun., noon-5 p.m.; call for Fri.-Sat. evening availability. Through Sat. Free.