

Dear Kroot, Dear Alex, it is quite easy to regard your Performances for Pets as a sharp comment on the decadence of human/animal-relations, as criticism of the anthropocentrism et al. Yet something tells me that you like people just as much as pets. Am I wrong to assume so?

Yes, of course, pets are people too.

In your FAQs, you state that the only function pets in contemporary households today still fulfill are emotional ones. They do not have to „work“ anymore, just be themselves. Like most of their human owners, who in the post-industrial age do not fulfill any ‚real‘ function anymore (though this discussion is a bit older, of course). A wonderful or horrible scenario for you as artists?

Both, or neither, the ambiguity of the situation is what triggered us to this whole project.

I find it funny how several animals – even birds, racoons e.g. – appear to appreciate the amenities of human life so much that they prefer it to their animal lifestyle. Have you ever performed for wild animals or other pets than cats and dogs? Would you like to?

We also find it funny to observe these self-domesticated wild others join in. Even the distinction wild/not-wild does not apply any more, we are all to an extent wild and domesticated, animal and human.

A lifestyle is a choice. A choice of how to live, where to live, who to live with and who to share space with. What it reveals is a purpose, a purpose of enrichment. Humans and other animal species often look for mutual enrichment in the proximity to one another. The practice of forming alliances has been vital for human survival since early uncivilised communities as much as it is now to animals attempting to find a place alongside humans. These non human species are attempting to find a lifestyle that is not threatened by humans and their lifestyle choices.

We mostly perform for cats and dogs, but had also some opportunities to meet and perform for rabbits. One of the conditions for our performance is that the animals be sharing the living space with the humans and therefore we do not perform for animals that live in cages. Our work remains too obscure for them, to form any point of communication. But we do have a separate project involving rodents. It's called WORKSHOPS BY PETS, where we have invited rats, mice, hamsters, guinea-pigs and gerbils to teach workshops together with their owners to humans. At the Grazer Kunstverein in Graz and at the Manchester International Festival we had young people bring their pets and developed specific workshops together taught by those pets. For example we learned how to best sleep in a pile from 5 rats, and we learnt how to eat vegetables from the hamsters, and there was a very old (4 years) gerbil who delivered abstract knowledge simply by looking at us.

The exhibition in the Opelvillen will be called „Kunst für Tiere“, Art for Animals. What can we encounter when looking at animals looking at art? Do you think the cats and dogs are making any difference of e.g. one of your performances and „regular“ playing with their owners?

Our “play” for the cats and dogs is maybe a little more confusing than what you call “regular” play. We like to say we present the pets with a game the rules of which are ambiguous. And what comes to our own mind when we look at animals looking at art is how do we even know what art is and when and how. We like to think that since contemporary art is by definition so

contemporary it is still undefined, so we could just as well let our cats and dogs define what art is and isn't.

Do you train for your performances, looking what works, trying out new parts?

yes, we do! every performance is also a training (and we have performed for over 300 times). We usually ask the owner of the pet to document the performance so we can go through it afterwards to understand what happened, sometimes frame by frame. There is a great deal of "body language" shared between species, such as dogs or cats, which we as humans can also easily learn. We have had great help from our "dramaturges" the dog behavioural therapist Bina Lunzer and the cat coach Petra Ott in Vienna.

Did you encounter anything special when working in Rüsselsheim? Any remarkable situations, did the pets react differently than in other towns and regions you have worked in? (Maybe a difference between country- and city-pets?)

In general our animal audience crowd is much more international than their humans. However there are some regional differences, mainly due to training and education methods, which is linked to preferences to either rescue/shelter animals or animal breeding, so the differences are due to the differences in humans rather than the pets themselves. All the pets encountered in and near Rüsselsheim were very special!

Finally, would you say you make art for animals – or do you actually make it for humans? At least, your art still gets exhibited in art galleries, museums etc. made for and by humans...(My question is aiming to a scenario where there is no ultimate human audience for your pet performances – the Human

Humans have often asked us this same question. And we always said, we know it is hard to understand that something is not for humans, however this performance is REALLY for pets. Although about one year ago as we came to a house, the owner met us by the door, handing us the keys to her apartment saying she would go shopping and we should please leave the key in the mailbox when we are done performing for her cats. First off we were pleasantly surprised by the level of trust that a human had in us, leaving us alone with her cats and in her apartment. So we did what she asked and performed and let the key to the mailbox, but what we left with was a strange feeling after this show, we felt as though we had provided a service. And then we understood that an important aspect of the work is for humans but not artistically but rather pedagogically -in short - we want the humans to actively take the position of a passive companion to their pet. To reverse their regular relationship for the duration of the show. So in that sense this performance is very much also for humans — to train themselves to understand that it is not for them but for their pet.

Oh, and: Can anyone ask you for a Pet Performance?

yes, anyone.

Do you have a thesis on why pets, in contrast to circus or zoo animals, are so much more socially accepted? Even animal rights' activists or hardcore-environmentalist-art curators like the former documenta-director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev don't seem to bother criticising our anthropocentric way with animals in general, but holding pets as their own.

It doesn't have to be a full thesis, of course – just curious to get your thoughts on this!

Hahah, we remember sitting in a film screening at the documenta, dominated by the barking of that specific dog you mentioned.

You are right, this is weird. Maybe it because most zoo and circus animals are too large or dangerous to take home or put in a bag and travel by plane. Is it because pets have managed to assimilate to our culture and become just exactly what we need? Their ability to “perform themselves” can be something we human performers and other artists and immaterial workers can learn a great deal from.

We ourselves are of a double mind about the very idea of pets, it surely reflects not just human kindness and companionship but also our colonial history, not to mention the direct connotation to slavery even in the way people are called “owners”. So we are aware of the ambiguity in making a work for pets, and at the same time looking away will not bring us further either. We do hope that even if the difference we make is small, that it would still contribute to the transformation of the relationship between humans and other animals.