

Essay

# Artist Ethics and Art's Audience: *Mus Musculus* and a Dry-Roasted Peanut

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**Abstract:** The museum's instrumentalisation of contemporary art as a visitor attraction has come to mean that any use of live animals in art now must participate in and acknowledge the politics of spectacle, which for other animals means the optics of the zoo or the circus. At the same time, established social media can now deliver mass criticism of an artwork, requiring artists to learn how to manage reputation as a matter of professional art practice. In this article, I examine art's changing ethics by working from a dilemma I faced recently as an artist over a simple 30-s video I had made featuring a wild house mouse that I had trained between COVID-19 lockdowns to take food from my shoe. Subsequently, I decided not to exhibit, publish or broadcast that video. I argue that it is the digital—its exposure of the micro-issue, its close focus on the individual case, its onus on linguistic precision and its diligent proofing and testing of arguments large or small—that now transforms the work the artwork does. This may now push artists into a much wider range of ethical decision-making about artworks to arrive at the artist's regular mode of reflection and evaluation via a level of hyper detail and super nuance that, historically, artists of no particular celebrity have had little or no reason to engage with before.

**Keywords:** art; artist; animals; ethics; audience; digitalisation; censorship; human-animal studies



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*"The old have had technological revolution all our lives. We actually saw the visual tsunami rush in. The young have swum in the aftermath always."* (McGoldrick 2020)

The museum's instrumentalisation of contemporary art as visitor attraction means that international mainstream art's largely infrequent use of live animals has had to participate in and acknowledge Debord's old politics of spectacle, in which art must be commodity and gallery visitors must be consumers (Debord 1994). I'm thinking of the profile artists Joseph Beuys' performance with a wild coyote at the Rene Block Gallery in New York *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974); Jannis Kounellis' *Untitled (12 Horses)* in which twelve horses were tethered to the walls of the Galleria L'Attico's interior in Rome (1969); Paola Pivi's *My Religion is Kindness. Thank You, See You in the Future* (2006) in which white llamas, white geese, white horses, a white cow and white rabbits roamed free in an abandoned warehouse at the Porta Genova train station in Milan and Mircea Cantor's *Deeparture* (2005), a looped film featuring a wolf and a deer uneasily circling one another, trapped by the same white cube gallery space (first edition now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York). For the animals, this has implied the optics of the zoo (gallery as enclosure) or the circus (gallery as theatre). The latter was in full play mode when I first encountered the social power of the digital paradigm in art. This was the worldwide online petition by over four million animal lovers against the little-known artist Guillermo Vargas' inclusion in the Central America Biennale 2008, following his reported starving of a street dog tethered in an art exhibit at Galeria Codice in Managua, Venezuela in 2007 (Couzens 2008). Ever since, I have been to academic conferences around the world for my university research, where I've met with the learned like-minded, listened to animal activists and academics and discussed critical theory. For my own part, I continue to make some art arising from animal-human

issues, perhaps touching on animal rights and welfare but in an abstract way, so avoiding live animals. To this end, I have built up a social media network of a reasonable size among artists and academics. This has created at least the potential for an art audience of sorts, which has since faced me with the new ways in which an audience or, to bastardise the term used by the Villa Arson art school at Nice, a *public* (Madoff 2009) impacts on the ethics an artist might now consider before displaying art that addresses animals.

A case in point. Since the early 1990s, I have lived in Hackney, London in a late-Victorian mid-terrace house. Over that time, I have discovered there are spells when mice will take up in the junk dump that is the house's cellar, tenancies described by others as pest or vermin infestations. After regular humane and failed interventions to remove the creatures, I discovered the mice would vanish unexpectedly. The proximate cause for such disappearance remains unknown, but my best guesses were disruptive building works next door, an influx of a larger rodent species or traps and poison at a neighbour's house. Other mice would then recolonise the cellar several years later, only to vacate without notice again sometime afterwards.

When COVID arrived in the UK in early 2020, my house had for two months been subject to another mouse recolonisation. My dog was old and blind in one eye, with a chronic kidney disease that would end in euthanasia that September. Despite his breed's sporting reputation, no small rodent found my dog's presence disturbing enough to shun the space. And anyway, he wasn't a cat.

One routine in the ennui of lockdown was on the sofa before dinner, dog asleep, to watch a soap on the relentless television with a small bowl of nuts and a glass of wine. Now, the exposed brick of the living room's disused fireplace has its foundations in the old cellar. Every summer evening at around the same time, what I have reason to believe was the same house mouse (*Mus musculus*) would squeeze itself out of a hole in the mortar there to take a run on the floorboards by the skirting and scout for morsels.

With little else to do, I soon learned the mouse liked dry-roasted peanuts. I then found idle solace in training the mouse to take one from the top of my shoe. This only worked because of a mouse's powerful sense of smell. The method, over a week or so, was as follows: spot the mouse and throw peanuts near it, then cast some closer and closer to my foot, finally placing a peanut on my shoe. Before long, the mouse had established its route to get as soon as possible beneath the sofa I was sitting on, then to emerge to take the nut lightly from the shoe's upper and make a dash for the fireplace again. Then start over, until it had taken three or so, at which point it would vanish back into the depths of the chimney breast. Over the course of several weeks, the mouse came to take a peanut from my hand, despite that species' reported aversion to the distinctive smell of humans. Hours of fun.

I have some history here, I guess. A few years before, I set up and left whole baguettes on known mouse-runs during the night to photograph them as bored-through crust-only sculptures the next morning, aligned in the manner of Nancy Holt's concrete pipe *Sun Tunnels* (1973–1976) the famous site-specific land art installation at Wendover, Utah in the USA. Quite how a mouse or even lots of them (for I suspect that where there's one, there's always an extended family nearby) can stow away such a volume of breadcrumbs remains a mystery to me.

After my dog died that autumn, I missed his animal presence and found myself each day looking forward to an evening's interaction with a non-human sentient being. Although the mouse-feeding wasn't quite the companionship afforded by a dog, there was certainly a mutual understanding that carried minor gratification on both sides. I described this to my 92-year-old father, who later when he telephoned me would always ask after "your friend Michael" (naturally referring to the famous Disney character but discreetly claiming the tiny creature for old Ireland, too). I filmed an evening's mouse action and shared it with Dad. The plot was good—nice bit of suspense and a big comic turn at the end. Afterwards, I edited a 30-s video from the footage to share with another audience—a largish following on social media.

I then chose not to post the video at all, preferring to avoid controversy, instead. In this private decision lies an examinably wider issue around the idea of an artist's current duties to her subject (here, the animal), her audience and herself.

The choice by me as the artist at this point was clearly after the event of making the artwork. After all, I didn't check or stop myself when I was training and feeding the other animal and making the video. As a non-expert training and feeding an undomesticated animal, my part here might be considered unethical, although at the time and in an animal way I understood our small interaction as beneficial to both parties. An artist's choice not to publish or exhibit isn't a sensitivity edit, either, as it might be for a curator selecting work for a show. I didn't change my artwork at all or destroy it but put it away in a virtual folder on the Mac, instead.

This was a retreat—a pre-emptive internalised censorship by me as an artist, arising from a straightforward fear of unwanted moral criticism from your average human exceptionalists and of just plain abuse from internet trolls. After all, many on social media would object to what they see as the anti-social behaviour of actively feeding an animal legally classified as vermin. Mine clearly wasn't the pathologised action of a compulsive animal feeder (who in their routine dispensation of food for animals in public places may suffer from a disorder not unlike a compulsive hoarder's), but it's undeniable that in any human setting, mice may quickly present a health risk to humans by contaminating with their urine and faeces foodstuffs that we store and surfaces that we use to prepare those foodstuffs. Thus, encouraging mice in my own house may well have been at my own risk, but there was also little certainty that once in a house they wouldn't move between neighbouring properties and so present a health risk to other humans, too. I thus owed some socially ethical consideration to my human neighbours here, who might not share the latitude I dispense towards the creatures. However, there may be some mitigation. House mice seem to belong to Josh Milburn's useful category of "animal neighbour" (Milburn 2022). We have no obligation to feed, say, hedgehogs, garden birds or urban foxes, but some may well extend their hospitality to these animals as guests if they so choose. And what constitutes a "pest", exactly? The legal definition is on statute, but perceived degrees in kind of pestilence arise, as does a range in levels of social tolerance or intolerance associated with those perceptions. Some of these issues (especially around pigeons) were addressed in the artist collaboration Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's *Uncertainty In The City* project in 2009–10 and the relational art interaction of their *Radio Animal* unit with the public in Lancaster and Morecambe over that time.

Critical replies and commentary about my short video might also have come from quarters closer to home for artists: a negative response from those art activists at, say, The Justice for Animals Arts Guild, who might advocate against use of live animals for human entertainment, especially in art, because this so often objectifies or exploits other animals in the service of human cultural expression, a residual harm that may perpetuate poor art practice as an embedded model. The onus on the artist here could instead be posthumanist, or more precisely, more-than-human, as suggested by the Canadian artist Julie Andreyev, a way of thinking by which it may be possible to decentre the human artist from the artwork that includes the live animal (Andreyev 2021). The more-than-human permits and develops, in an aesthetic extensionist way, creative collaborations with one or more other species. These are reciprocal arrangements with animals, in an art field stretched way beyond Rosalind Krauss's idea of expansion (Krauss 1979). In political science around citizenship, the more-than-human might be understood as ideal theory, an account of a telos, in aesthetic terms an art with animals that artists could, even should aim for, if all things were reasonably favourable. From this stance, I think that if I had broadcast it, my own short mouse video might have been censured by critical animal studies as old-school, demeaning and anthropocentric. Such an outcome would be harmful to an artist's reputation in that arena, even if she were sure that while she may imagine and try, she cannot experience the world outwith her own species' sensorium, even if she were

certain that while she may dream and make, there is no escape for any living human from the material and zoological bedrock that both frames and centres her human consciousness.

There might have been admonitions, too, from veterinary nutritionists instructing a diet for mice more proper to their welfare than cooked and seasoned groundnuts. There are after all duties in how “animal neighbours” are fed, not only in terms of avoiding food dependency (and so influencing their social behaviour) but also in the nature of the food they find or are given to eat when this involves humans killing other animals. While “animal companions” in the house such as cats are obligate carnivores, some “animal neighbours” such as mice are omnivores and so will eat meat-based cat foods if they find access. If one knows mice may have access, there is perhaps a vegan obligation not to keep such pets and their pet foods at all, or at the very least absolutely to secure those foods from mice (Milburn 2022).

These deliberations are an artist’s ordinary anticipation of reaction, imagining how others might think of the artwork, an internal dialectic with an imaginary viewer—the cautious empathy that characterises any sort of artist reputation management, careful of the artist and full of care for both the artist’s subject and the artist’s audience. Conversely, any attempt to predict criticism and so pre-rebut or steer around negative response before it arrives will be understood by some artists as risk-averse or high-ground posturing, a type of cowardice improper to a liberal view of art as no holds barred.

While not as profound as rejection-sensitive dysphoria, in which the brain is unable to regulate rejection-related behaviour, the ordinary fear of negative response aligns with the fear I encounter in so many art students in what are called art school group crits. Many art students would prefer not to hear a fellow student’s critique of their work at all. It might be useful to hear positive strokes, neutral analysis and constructive criticism of artwork on which the artist has spent much time and effort, but an art student can be rightfully afraid of hearing that investment undermined or destroyed in public, whether by peers or, more crucially, by seniors. Such unethical pedagogical technique is, after all, still present in the arts in higher education: we have read only recently of disciplinary action taken by University College London against architecture tutors at the Bartlett alleged to have used humiliation in the studio to teach their students (Jessel 2022). My ongoing experience as an art tutor is that lack of confidence, serial distraction and the exigencies of neurodiversity continue without remission among creatives as a group long after art school, perhaps for life. Many art tutors have learned to mitigate this by mediating group art crits to hedge and qualify the negative if it appears. My own job as an art school tutor has been to teach all art students (not just a favoured few) to produce their best work and as much of it as possible by learning as artists to manage condition or contingency with deliberation, as best they can. In this context, fear of critique is always useful, if a student learns to recognise her fear as such. Fear of critique either fosters a productive engagement with that critique or a strong, one-tracked double-down refusal—both outcomes will be positive for an artist, but the former may open a route to more outcomes.

On reflection, my concerns and fears about audience reaction brought me later to an understanding of my short video as small but dynamic context for a static artwork (a sharp, abstract wall sculpture). I mean by this that while its standalone publication or broadcast had little or no ground beyond entertainment, the video might, as a virtual sketch in the expanded field, have an ethically reasonable life stored on a hard drive or in the cloud as evaluative, even explicative background for and reflective stage-post in a display of collected artworks.

Now, a housekeeping interlude for this essay’s audience. Pronoun issues! While this article may certainly be read from the human-animal studies perspective, I reckon the role of any academic writer is to communicate with a wider audience than a particular field. For reasons of parsimony and even elegance, I don’t wish to appear repetitious in my prose and I hope I haven’t been. To avoid the opaque, I try in the usual way not to begin sentences with the English pronoun “it”, but I may well use that pronoun within a sentence for, say, a mouse, if I don’t know the sex of the creature and if I’ve used the given English name

for the animal, say, twice in the closely preceding prose, as well as already used the words “animal” and “creature” as stand-in nouns. Those are, I think, in the circumstances strict but reasonable conditions before any demeaning resort to the use of the word “it” for a mouse. I also fight shy of the principled refusal to use “it” for any animal individual because I think the neutral ambiguity of that pronoun neatly matches the neutral ambiguity that follows on a human’s knowledge of another animal’s individual identity, which in any inter-species way is necessarily more limited than knowing a fellow human’s. On a related matter, I disagree with the partisan argument against referring to an animal as a thing (which could mistakenly be understood as objectification), first because I have a thing for things (I’m a sculptor, so the way that thing theory queries subject-object relations in given spaces at given times is deeply pertinent) and secondly because it strikes me that the name-noun for any animal in any language is a questionable but understandably major reification itself, one which naturally arises (and so begs prior attention) before any query of the humble pronoun “it” here. If one first had to deconstruct every reified name-noun for any animal before using “it”, an essay might soon become unintelligible. There is, however, an artwork I am making that addresses this very issue. Of which more elsewhere, but not here.

I began this article intending it as an examination of art ethics around animals in the age of the digital audience, moving from my own particular to a wider generality. It’s still that, but now has an art historical aspect, too, largely because many of the ethical issues I encounter in making art now simply weren’t present when I started out as an artist. I reckon my generation’s experience is rare, in terms of art history. I think of my undergraduate time at art school in the late 1970s, talking to and making work with the postgraduates upstairs. My public was then as Villa Arson had defined it—my tutors and fellow students, visiting art professionals (if any) and some art technicians (Madoff 2009). Not so much an elite as a small circle of tradespeople at different career stages, much as it might have been for several centuries before, give or take some crucial changes in technique and subject. An artist might then have gained a wider audience via exhibition, but there was little or no artist interaction with that audience. Now, even though an artist might have little or no fame, her own public can extend in numbers a long way beyond the old remit into a social media audience with a capacity for some degree of art control over her, in a way very different from any curator’s or gallerist’s contractual power. I was subject to exactly that control in my minor decision not to broadcast the short video of the mouse and the peanut.

The impact I attach to this singular and apparently trivial minutia of the digital age is now instructive for any contemporary artist, whether her subject is animals or any other contested ground. The tininess of even this miniature detail here about art and animal ethics is now on point, art historically. Over the last half-century (my lifetime), the phenomenon of digitalisation and automation has first replaced intense and repetitive labour and, later, other less onerous sorts of labour, too. The conventional theory is that this replacement has freed up employment for cognitive, analytical and intellectual work of higher value. While that may be the case, the time freed up by digitalisation and automation has also since extensively enabled a multitude of tasks and decisions once of a lower value, actions formerly unconsidered, de-prioritised or overlooked. The granular context for such actions around issues once submerged or invisible assumes now a currency and salience surprising to those who witnessed the growth of the digital paradigm, yet who had also known what things were like before. In art, technology now extends, even transfers connoisseurship and aesthetic discrimination from the art manager to the audience. This appears to be a democratisation in art, albeit a democracy in which any voting is done with the feet. Now is a time when personal choices, first scoped by a programmer at the level of an individual refinement deep in the nested or stacked control statement of an algorithm, emerge online at the top of returned search results on a par with, even as relevant as, decisions formerly made by group consensus only. Similarly, personal commentary once kept in ethical check not so much by policy or code of conduct, but by the scarcity of time and opportunity, now achieves instant multi-broadcast. Groups have morphed to form new alliances in the political field and those groups’ ethical codes have reshaped themselves to

acknowledge this upheaval, in what are decried as culture wars. If the personal really is still political, then its minutiae now serve as shibboleth between tribes (the second-wave feminism from which the “personal is political” slogan arose is, of course, currently under siege from misogynists, yet appears to be giving as good as it gets). What one writes online is now subject to a dress code in the doorways of the virtual clubland that is social media. Artist ethics around animals and the audience for any art that addresses such ethics are no exceptions to this rule.

This can now spell a digital ordeal for anyone from one group who might give offence to another group by acquiring the platform of an art exhibition or art publicity, from the suspension from Tate Modern of the international curator Mark Godfrey over his comments on the postponement of the Philip Guston retrospective he had organised, following institutional concerns (with a view to the #BLM Black Lives Matter movement) over Guston’s 1970s “Ku Klux Klan” paintings, which feature KKK hoods in a provocative confrontation of racism (Greenberger 2021) to the Royal Academy’s apology to the artist Jess de Wahls after its removal of her textile work from its gift shop, following accusations of transphobia over comments she had published in a 2019 blogpost (Bakare 2021). This is a model of art offence quite different from the postmodern instances regularly cited in the art history of censorship: the American anger at the boomer blasphemies of Andres Serrano’s 1987 photograph *Immersion (Piss Christ)* of a Catholic crucifix submerged in an a glass tank of urine or the bared breast of elephant dung and porno cherubim in Chris Ofili’s 1996 painting *The Holy Virgin Mary*; the disgust at what appeared to be late-century-modern indecencies in Tracey Emin’s 1998 installation of *My Bed*, her own chaotic, unmade double-bed replete with her own discarded bedroom paraphernalia, or in Jake and Dinos Chapman’s sexualized child mannequins (penises relocated to where noses should be and vulvas or anuses to mouths) in their *Zygotic Acceleration: Biogenetic, De-Sublimated Libidinal Model* of 1995. The gallery was more exclusive then; institutional critique was ratified internally by the art organisation itself as both an art problem and an exhibition solution, a happy solipsism peculiar to that old art world. Artist celebrity coupled with museum security could permit the so-called transgressive with the impunity regularly afforded to elites. Any reactionary response could be gamed by art managers to increase visitorship by appealing to a kind of prurience then immunised from shame by gallery as sequestered cloister.

The social media storms and pile-ons of today are not as pliable. With some clarity, cultural lines are now determined in the audience demographic long before any art exhibition is planned. The threat of cancellation for an artist is in terms of art history a new power for art’s audience. While there may be some precedent for today’s trolling in the organised claques of French grand opera in the 1830s, the political agency of the wider non-elite audience in the 2020s is very different from the once exclusive power exerted by an elite milieu of art impresarios, critics and gallerists. The audience universe for any art exhibition that tests ethics is if not exactly halved now, then far more deeply fractured than a generation ago. Any reduction in audience tests a museum’s or art gallery’s pockets and so reputation management kicks in.

Gallery reputation management may be considered unethical by some in that visitor or audience may to some extent be deceived by lack of transparency, unaccountability, cover-ups, lacunae, silence and omissions in exhibition policies. Others find such reputation management to be necessarily ethical in an age where the art audience universe has brutal freedom of expression in commentary on social media, whether accurate or not. Either way, responsibility for reputation management is now shifting from the gallery to the artist herself.

Ethical consideration of audience in reputation management makes for a detail and nuance in current art thinking that artists would rarely have experienced before digitalisation and automation. Patrons, gallerists and museum curators were then keepers of the single gate between an artist and her public. Any studio sale between artist and customer, for instance, was then perhaps a singular and private affair; now it is a business model

for self-organised artists worldwide. Before the digital, the language of art was certainly not inclusive: many artists spoke eloquently of art, but if some wrote about art, it was usually by hand in artist sketchbooks or notebooks and rarely on a typewriter. Others were meant to do that—critics, art historians and gallerists. In a short time, digital mastery of the QWERTY keyboard is now universal, and any relation of image to text is unremarkable. Literary style is honed to effect optimal communication speed in limited digital reading time. Sentences are short and pared of clauses (think Hemingway, not Henry James). Composition now defaults to simpler syntax, tone parsed by software for the least emotion, pushing for the clarity of a well-crafted instruction in an equipment manual or government website form. Indeed, the foundation in 1979 of the company Plain English Campaign may be seen to demarcate the beginning of a digital era writing style, coinciding as it does with the exponential growth in that related but more ascetic discipline: the parsimony of program coding. Written sources for all manner of published material about contemporary art now often derive indirectly from artists themselves. In the academy, art students have been asked since the millennium and before to write not only essays about art but also audience-facing artist statements; slideshow presentations of their work to audiences; digital portfolios; bios and blurbs about themselves and their artworks. Artists have thus come to inscribe their own barely mediated narrative, as such material then emerges copied, modified or paraphrased in art organisation literature via the shortcuts required of “just-in-time” scheduling for art publicity. The autobiographical may thus soon come undetectably to inflect much of this era’s common source material for art history, which has its own implications for academic research ethics in that field. Another recent effect of digital broadcast on art is that writing in English about art for this much wider audience seems largely to have shed its long-held reputation for jargon as artspeak. The unadorned style is increasingly apparent in the poster-size graphics of contextual and art history explications that over the period discussed here have appeared on the walls of many art exhibitions in our major public museums, as the audience is directed or informed in a designed journey flow from one gallery room to the next. These written stories necessarily fold around the displayed artworks in the usual untestable interpretation from an opaque authority, but in their greater simplicity, they do so in a way more communicable to much greater numbers.

How might this new facility in art language in and around art exhibitions now relate to the ethics around animals and art? My observation is that what has been the arcane or abstruse nature of aesthetics around art and animals for an exclusive circle of appreciators has now opened up almost without intention to a worldwide audience of potentially millions, one that hosts large groups with powerful ethical codes and whose cultural directions have usually pointed elsewhere. Artists who make work about animals increasingly carry a heavier burden for this wider audience: not only to add to their art tasks by now writing explication of their art in that simpler and more inclusive language described above, but also in having to display their art in the new and differently censored arenas afforded by that wider audience, whatever offence that might bring. This new load on artists’ shoulders thus appears to have much of the weight of the old one, that old mission of much of early and late modern Western art: to proselytise.

If the ethical implication that digitalisation has brought for art around animals is that the now much wider audience insists first on an artist encounter with its diverse ethical groupings and their own associated ethical codes, then the artist should know those groups are likely first to require some parlay and entreaty before further accommodation. That element of the new art audience already convinced of the issues addressed by human-animal studies is just a choir: exhibition to them is to rally the faithful only. Turning one’s back on those enjoying their Sunday elsewhere means one never gets to see their reaction and response: as it stands, this is its own art censorship, its own Levitical prohibition. The artist’s fear of the wider audience is the fear of feedback. Any lessons for artists in how to proceed may come from turning around and facing up to that audience, with a view to learn what constraints may and what options must apply, in the nonconsequentialist way. There’s

a curious exemplar here. Since his recent purchase of the social media company Twitter, the controversial businessman Elon Musk has recently publicised his counter-intuitive unblocking on his account there of all the people he had ever blocked in his life, in order to learn more closely from negative feedback (Novak 2023). Under the ever-renewing conditions of capitalism's ineluctable marketplace, in which art appears to be no exception, artists who make artwork around animals need negative feedback not so much to improve their art, as to nuance and inform the aesthetics that may then leverage, entreat, convert or persuade the resistant and the unengaged in the new audience. This is an audience which undoubtedly includes the critical animal studies partisans; human exceptionalists; zoophobes; meat eaters; hunters; animal lab workers; gamekeepers; poachers; livestock and dairy farmers; those who force animals to labour and those who invest and participate in animal sports. In short, those who may appear to be in a kind of opposition, ethically.

So, I suppose I may have to exhibit that short house mouse video sometime soon, if only to learn from the negative feedback a few art truths I may not have understood before. The social media post will of course be a manipulation of the mouse, a miniature circus trick for broadcast. Which in turn means some continuity here, for I shall of course be back with Guy Debord in my introduction, from whom I understood that live animals in late-century-modern art have historically been commodities and their viewers consumers. Just that the walls which surround the images now will not be a gallery's plasterboard, timber and brick, but the metal and plastic of a smartphone.

Being a human animal means it's impossible to be any other sort of animal. In meeting those elements of the new art audience for debate, artists shall no doubt encounter that very special character of interspecies ethics, the inescapable anthropocentrism and speciesism (forms of human exceptionalism) which serve to allow much criticism of transgressions of ethics around animals in art to go overlooked, in contrast to the great traction enjoyed by criticism of those ethical transgressions in art cited earlier: those intra-human concerns of blasphemy, obscenity, racism and misogyny. There are perhaps three questions arising for artists whose subject addresses issues in human-animal studies, questions of what I think are political ethics that may now hopefully lead out from this article into new art responses. All three are eventually questions for artists only, although onlookers are welcome to try their hand. They are questions I've touched on in this article; all come from facing the new audience and each addresses an area whose exploration in art may now open up animal ethics for that new audience. The first stems from the history of recent ethical transgression in art that I have referred to in this article and what once seemed a duty to shock. To what extent are such artists obliged to make artworks about animals that may offend the resistant or the unengaged? The second question addresses the shift in arenas for art encounter (from gallery to smartphone) that I've had to examine here. In what sort of new display spaces afforded by the new audience can art now intervene for animals? And finally, a question arising from my own art practice, for that practice necessarily but passively informs this article. Does abstraction (as opposed to representation) in art step back from the mission for animals here or make vital inroads into the territory?

In posing these three questions for response, I am of course indebted to a single mouse, whom I must acknowledge as inspiration and catalyst for the thinking here. Already, it seems a long time ago. Shortly before Christmas that year, I brought a new dog into the house (a rescue stray from the dog-pounds of Serbia, who smelled to high heaven that very first day). I think I saw my COVID friend for the last time that evening, at the threshold of the hearth. A hopeful twitch of rodent nose for the savoury allure of the usual dry-roasted peanut must have caught instead the powerful new whiff of wet dog hair, anti-flea spray and long-time farmyard yokel. A discerning critter, that mouse: off, and not to be seen again. Thank you, Michael.

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