

CRAVE

"Interview | Curator Megan Rook-Koepsel on "King of the Forest: Adventures in Bioperversity"

By Miss Rosen

We have entered the Anthropocene Age, the era when human activities have begun to have a significant impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems. Soviet scientist began using the terms as they recognized the shift in the 1960s; the Holocene era had been completed, as human civilizations had completed their expansion across the globe, nestling into every corner, and in doing so, exterminating native populations, flora, and fauna. With the expansion of humanity came the inevitable shift, one that has just occurred and more than accounts for a vast cultural longing for a return to "the good old days," or the blind denial of the significant and irreversible advent of climate change.

Although the international commissions and unions have not officially approved this term as a recognized subdivision of geological time, there is mounting evidence that we have incontrovertibly entered a new age, many have become increasingly sensitive to the dawn of a new day. In addition to scientist, a number of artists have been at the vanguard of this conversation. *King of the Forest: Adventures in Bioperversity*, currently on view at the Arlington Arts Center, VA, is a powerful exploration of humanity's changing relationship with other species.

Curated by Megan Rook-Koepsel, *King of the Forest* features the work of thirteen contemporary American artists from the mid-Atlantic region, including Joan Danziger, Rebecca Clark, and Leslie Shellow. As Roek Koepsel observes, "We don't understand the power of the natural world to adapt around us in spite of us."

King of the Forest asks the challenging questions so many of us seek to ignore. By examining the impact of human activity on the animal kingdom, we begin to examine the ways in which our habits, beliefs, and practices make us complicit in these changes. Rook-Koepsel reveals, "It took six months to curate. It opened my eyes. I've always been one to think about conservation, and going through this show, I've begun thinking more about the way we impact our environment. For example with drones, we work very hard to make advancements in technology and have created these drones so we can observe nature in the wild. But what about how these animals will react to the presence of drones? We need to stop and think about what impact these drones will have on the species themselves."

Each artist featured in *King of the Forest* wrestles with their own ideas, exploring issues across the field. For example, Lisa Crafts' video works explores the long-term effects of The Age of Discovery, and the resulting consumerism and globalization. The impact this expansion has had on the environment and humanity's relationship to and understanding of the other species of the planet features prominently in her dystopian half-real/half-imagined scenes.

Dystopian energy runs riot through King of the Forest, reminding us that the power to manipulate the earth's natural resources to personal ends has dire consequences, no matter how we spin it. Jonathan Monaghan's computer-animated video works get at some of the most anxiety-producing aspects of human society. In Life Tastes Good, he explores the behavior of a polar bear as it slowly dies. With the familiar markings of the Coca-Cola mass-marketing campaign, Monaghan's video considers the way consumerist and capitalist tendencies creep into the understanding of and relationship to animals.



Jonathan Monaghan, *Life Tastes Good* (still), single channel video installation with looping HD computer animation, 2m 55s, 2010. Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

As the darkness of the dystopian world sinks in, a new vision of the apocalypse emerges. Talia Greene's print series *Ruination*, explores devastation. Inspired by historical techniques and concepts, Greene imagines ruins of man-made and natural disasters given over to nature as wildlife preserves, suggesting that nature will continue to rise up in the face of humanity's perceived power over it. A sad yet poetic reminder of what is to come.

King of the Forest challenges viewers to reconsider their assumptions and reexamine their beliefs, with the hopes that a new understanding can alter the course of future events. Rook-Koepsel observes, "The beauty and visual quality has allowed people to get into it, and to work with a very serious and difficult subject. It asks a lot of the viewer. It is an indictment of behavior but it is also a call to change and to action."

