The Animal and the Human in Netherlandish Art

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Art begins with the animal
- Deleuze and Guattari (1991)

If the topic of the animal and the human in Netherlandish art evokes images of aristocratic hunt scenes, lap-dogs or Boschian hybrids, current ecological and ethical concerns reveal persistent questions of why and how artists have engaged with the nonhuman animal as subject and object of depiction. From Bosch to Snyders to Broodthaers to Fabre, Netherlandish artists have probed, and continue to probe, changing understandings of the relations and shifting boundaries between the human and the animal. Yet despite the importance of the visual arts to 'the question of the animal', the abundance of Netherlandish imagery of animals and human-animal relations has not received sustained attention. Volume 71 (2021) of the Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek invites investigations into the animal and the human in the art and visual culture of the Low Countries and its diasporas in all periods.

In recent decades the field of animal studies has attracted increasing interest as scholars from various disciplines take other animals seriously as subjects. Animal studies pays close attention to the ways in which humans anthropomorphize animals, whilst adopting a post-humanist perspective in recognizing animals as beings-in-themselves, separate from our interests in them. The field has roots in questions about human beings' co-existence with and use of other animals, extending the possibility of feeling emotion and pain to other sentient creatures. It also arises from cultural and philosophical interest in attempts to define the self and humanity through interactions with and representations of other animals. Giorgio Agamben for example, has examined the ways in which Western thought has produced 'the human' as a distinct and superior animal, or as different in kind from 'the animal'.

The distinction made by René Descartes, who lived in the Netherlands from 1628-1639, between a self-aware, thinking human subject and a reflex-driven beast-machine was an important symbolic moment in the separation of 'the animal' from 'the human'. The early modern period witnessed a tendency to depict animals as objects. Here, knowledge of the nature of a specific species of animal was not a matter of symbolic references and emblematic meanings, but of accurate, 'scientific' depiction. Depicted 'ad vivum' became an advertising slogan – whether the artist had seen the

creature with his or her own eyes or not. In the early 18th century, for example, the magnificent printed publications after Maria Sybilla Merian's drawings were authorized by the claim to be 'naer het leven'. This claim to lifelikeness went hand in hand with experiments in observation and representation. One could think of the technologies of the microscope, photography and other forms of imaging including the digital. One might also cite interest in insects, animal anatomy, vivisection, comparative anatomy, taxonomy, or in the natural habitat of animals and their reproduction, animal curiosities, wonders, and genetics.

A sense of wonder could be evoked by the techniques of representation and the materiality of works of art. For example: Joris Hoefnagel and Otto Marseus van Schrieck famously inserted real insect-wings in their images, like, later, Fabre. This opens up the question to the use of animals in works of art in a broader sense: as a source for pigments and dyes, for glue and for brushes; or as source for parchment and vellum; or as elements of site-specific installations. How were these animal products obtained and processed? How did/does awareness of this affect interpretation of the works they constitute?

This volume invites new work that engages with the humanities beyond the human. Contributions might explore northern European art works that visualise animal mutations, metamorphoses, fables, struggles, fetishizing, speciation, preservation, and the monstrous. They might also engage with artistic critiques of taxonomies, habitats, hybridities, consumption, and the post-human.

The NKJ is dedicated to a particular theme each year and promotes innovative scholarship and articles that employ a diversity of approaches to the study of Netherlandish art in its wider context. For more information, see https://brill.com/view/serial/NKJ

Contributions to the NKJ (in Dutch, English, German or French) are limited to a maximum of 7,500 words, excluding notes and bibliography.
Following a peer review process and receipt of the complete text, the editorial board will make final decisions on the acceptance of papers.

Please send a 500-word proposal and short CV by 10 February 2020 to:
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Schedule of production
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