

Local Thorp artist's work will be featured at Leach Gallery in Portland

[dailyrecordnews.com/news/local-thorp-artist-s-work-will-be-featured-at-leach/article_ae6123e4-9121-5619-](https://www.dailyrecordnews.com/news/local-thorp-artist-s-work-will-be-featured-at-leach/article_ae6123e4-9121-5619-)

By RODNEY HARWOOD staff writer

October 15,
2019



October is turning into Rocktober for local artist Justin Gibbens. His illustrations for award-winning author David Guterson's latest publication "Turn Around Time: A Walking Poem for the Pacific Northwest" just came out

The Thorp artist is currently working on a series of paintings called "Liminal Spaces," which will be on exhibition exhibition at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, Ore., Nov. 7 through Dec. 29.

"This show will be comprised of the observational studies of mostly regional birds, moths, butterflies, rabbits, etc.," said Gibbens, whose work has been exhibited nationally, is also in numerous collections including the Washington Arts Consortium (Bellingham), Microsoft (Redmond), 4Culture/King County Portable Works Collection (Seattle), the City of Seattle (Seattle), the City of Kent (Kent) and the Tacoma Art Museum (Tacoma).

“Several of these pieces resulted from my artist residency at (Joshua Tree Highlands Artist Residency) back in March/April of 2019.”

Gibbens was trained in both scientific illustration and traditional Chinese painting, a skill set he employs in his subversive zoological drawings. Gibbens received his bachelors in painting and drawing from Central Washington University in 1998 and a Scientific Illustration Certificate from University of Washington in 2003.

Premeditative thought is as much a part of his creative process as the drawing and the ink itself. He does some preliminary sketches, then hones it to come up with the concept.

From the sketch he does an overlay with tracing paper where he can make corrections. The design and ideas are worked out on the tracing paper before it goes on a projector, which allows him to adjust the size to its working formula.

“I need to know exactly where the lines are going to be,” said Gibbens, who was recently awarded a MAC fellowship grant by the McMillen Foundation, an award that supports working artists in Washington state.

'Sea Change' and allusions to climate change among artworks at local galleries in January

seattletimes.com/entertainment/visual-arts/sea-change-and-allusions-to-climate-change-among-artworks-at-

By Michael
Upchurch

January 2,
2018



Justin Gibbens: "Sea Change" Gala Bent: "Particle Playlist"

Trained as a scientific illustrator, with some background in traditional Chinese painting as well, Washington artist Justin Gibbens combines naturalistic detail with surreal flights of fancy in his "subversive zoological drawings."

In his new show, he focuses mostly on the cetacean world. His "Decoy" paintings, in watercolor, gouache, ink and tea on paper, show frolicking whales with cartoonish shark teeth. In "We Can Joust or We Can Just Make Out," two aquatic animals sporting unicorn horns do indeed seem poised between sparring and canoodling.

In some works, Gibbens drops whimsy for melancholy metaphor. In “Plume,” he depicts a whale as a burning oil well. In “Sigh,” a blowhole exhalation takes a fatal-seeming blood-spraying twist.

In “The Squid and the Whale,” he turns the tables on predator and prey, as a gigantic pink squid swallows a miniaturized whale. There’s a sense in all of “Sea Change” that Gibbens isn’t just toying with zoological fantasy, but creating a visual shorthand for the creative/destructive ways our own lives go.

The odd painting out is “Daisy Chain,” in which a flamingo and three other long-beaked birds seem to be engaged in an orgy, as depicted by John James Audubon.

Seattle artist Gala Bent’s graphite/ink/colored pencil/gouache drawings in “Particle Playlist” tend more toward abstraction. But the titles she gives them elicit a creaturely essence. “Fluent in at least three languages,” for instance, plays with contrasting forms — organic, crystalline, geometric — that intersect and interact in ways that almost make them feel sentient. Other drawings with equally evocative titles (“Ruffle and Flutter,” “Rock with a Mouth of Jewels,” “Magnetic Trio”) also reflect the animistic energy with which Bent imbues supposedly inanimate forms.

In both its variety and its playfulness, her work has an affinity with Paul Klee’s — although her visual vocabulary and the ways she combines and recombines motifs are distinctively her own.

11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Wednesdays-Fridays, 11:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays, through Jan. 20. G. Gibson Gallery, 104 W. Roy St., Seattle (206-587-4033 or www.ggibsongallery.com).

Justin Gibbens: Master Draftsman

juxtapoz.com/news/justin-gibbens-master-draftsman

February 03, 2014 | in [Juxtapoz](#)



A master draftsman, [Justin Gibbens](#) was trained in both scientific illustration and traditional Chinese painting—a skill set that he employs in his zoological drawings. Gibbens' stylized and embellished beasts speak of evolution, mutation and biodiversity, and perhaps serve as cautionary tales and stand-ins for our anthropocentric selves. By lifting the formal conventions of classic natural science illustration, Gibbens imagines legendary and diabolical beasts through the lens of a 19th century field artist.

Justin Gibbens received his BA in painting and drawing from Central Washington University in 1998 and a Scientific Illustration Certificate from University of Washington in 2003. He is a founding member of PUNCH Gallery, an artist-run gallery located in Seattle, WA. Gibbens was the recipient of a 2006 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award and a 2008 Artist Trust Fellowship Award. He has shown nationally and internationally and lives in rural Thorp, Washington.

Justin Gibbens's Paintings Celebrate Wildlife

by Nastia Voynovskaya Posted on March 5, 2014 Hi-Fructose Magazine



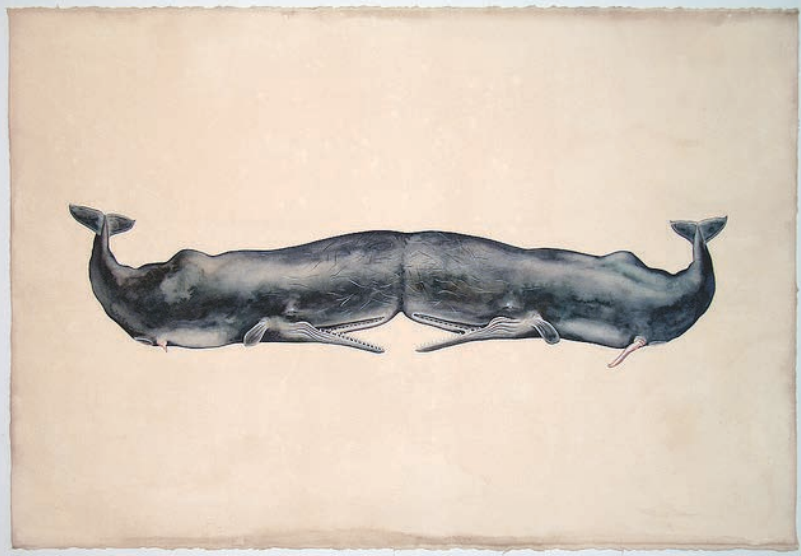
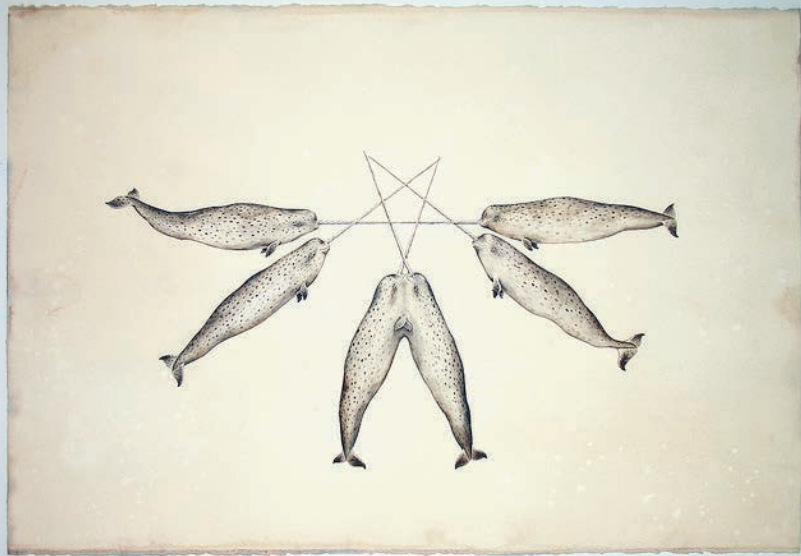
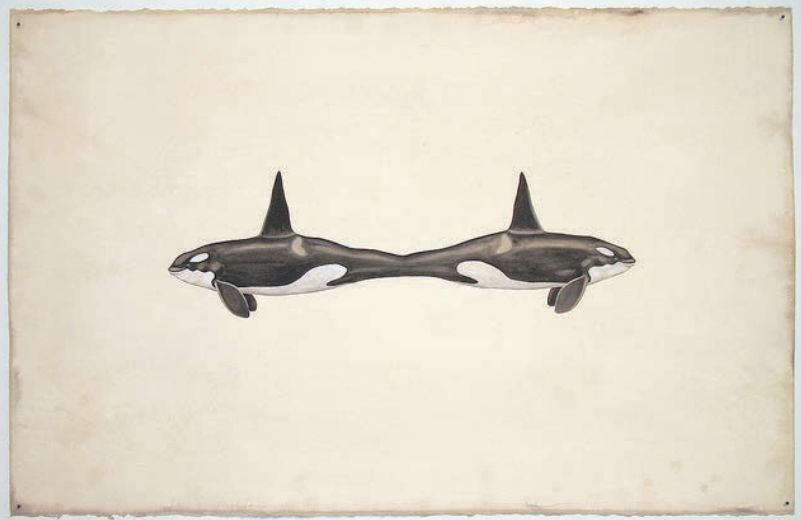
Based in Thorp, Washington, Justin Gibbens describes himself as a nature boy. The various creatures that abound in the Evergreen State as well as his imagination find their way into Gibbens's paintings, which often combine media such as watercolor, gouache and tea. Gibbens has formal training in both Chinese painting techniques and scientific illustration — two influences that do not seem so disparate when combined in his sparse yet impactful artworks. “It’s probably no surprise that much of my inspiration comes from all things that scamper and poke about in the thickets and undergrowth, inhabit the tide pools and ocean depths and fly through the ether,” said the artist in an email to Hi-Fructose. “Field guides, natural history museums and David Attenborough documentaries are also good.”

Many of Gibbens's pieces focus on mutations, a surreal element of his work that hits close to home when one considers the myriad of human activities that have altered and depleted the world's ecosystems. “The health of our natural environments is a profound concern of mine, though I'm not interested in making any overt, didactic statements about it through my work,” explained Gibbens when asked about his politics. “I'm mostly concerned with celebrating nature in all its weirdness and wonder and depicting pageantry that abounds.”









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UNNATURAL SELECTION

Engaging a wide range of issues, from natural history to art history and beyond, artists are putting hybrid mutant animals on center stage. Step right up and see the four-headed goose!

By George Melrod

Mutant animals: they're everywhere. A new hit computer game, entitled "Spore," invites players to create their own species, guiding them from cellular organisms through various 'tweener phases of creaturehood, as they ascend the evolutionary ladder. Players get to shape their animals to their liking: adding diverse sensory organs, claws, hands, mouths, beaks: like a Mr. Potato Head for biologists. On cable TV, one sees ads for National Geographic specials using computer animation to depict how turkeys descended from raptors and whales once had feet.

Such portrayals make a fitting present for Charles Darwin, whose 200th birthday fell on February 12 of this year. To look at Darwin's careful sketches of Galapagos finches, portrayed in profile, each diverging from its cousins in slight, telling ways—the shape and slant of the beak, the position of the eye—is to gaze at a family tree of our own scientific ancestors; in their prim propriety, they speak (warble?) to us of an earlier era, in which our understanding of the natural world was more formal and incomplete. Yet it's worth noting that in the natural world, at least in Darwin's model of it, variety—mutation—is not a bad thing. Indeed it is the central pivot of the evolutionary mechanism that, along with mating, allows species to improve their lot in relation to their fellow species and their ecosystem, and allows them to adapt.

In ancient civilizations, hybrid animals, such as the hydra or griffin, often raised their garbled heads as mythological figures. Yet modern images of mutant creatures have often taken on a fearful aspect. From P.T. Barnum's "Fiji Mermaid" to the two-headed snakes and livestock paraded before us in Ripley's Believe It Or Not, mutant animals have been presented to us as freaks of nature, to inspire both wonder and dread. In recent decades, with more advanced understanding of genetics and the myriad effects of pollution, chemical waste and atomic radiation—and if that's not enough, global warming—on the natural world, mutant animals have come to represent something still more frightening: humanity's ability to wreak devas-

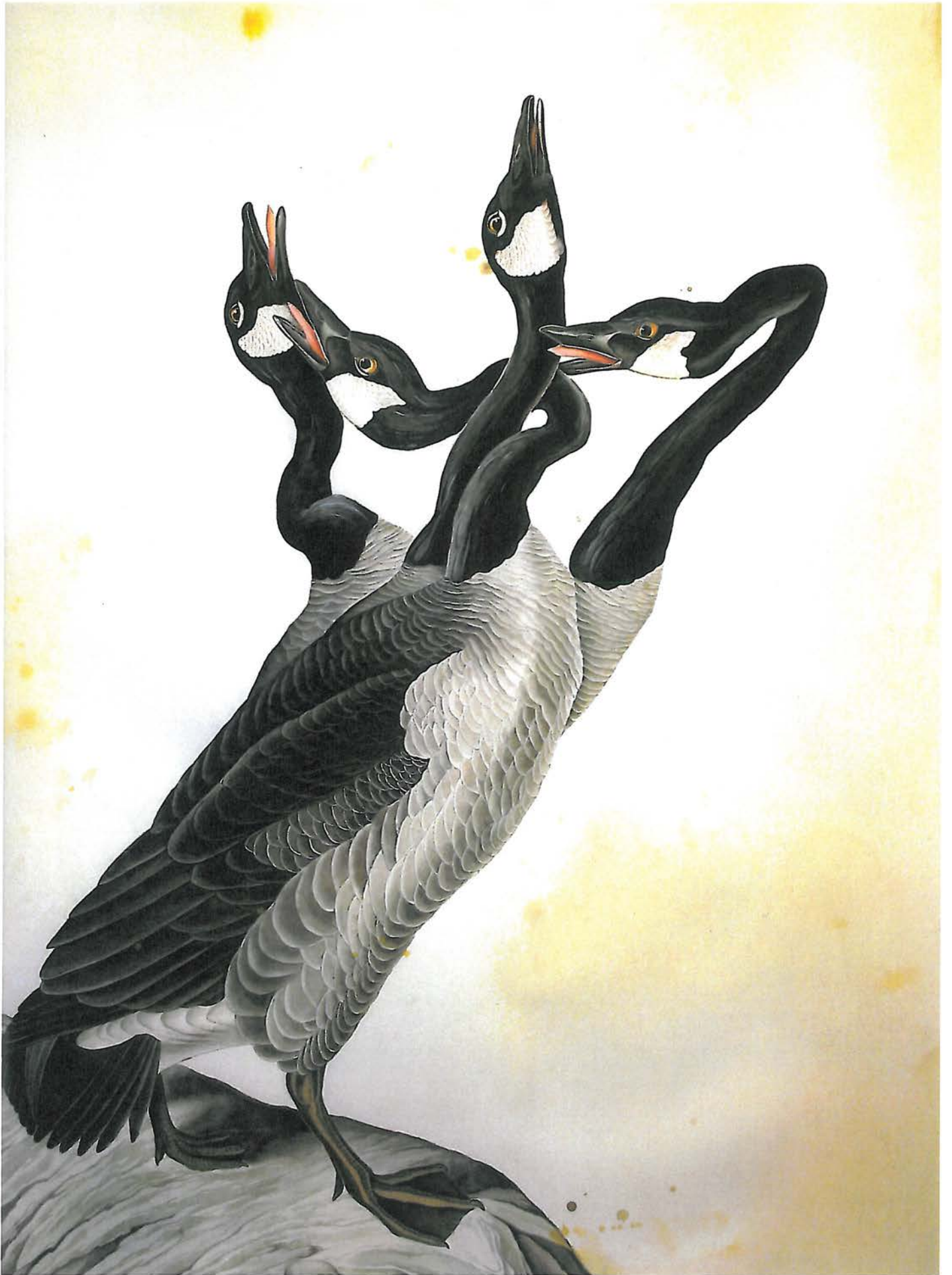
tation on its kindred species and our shared environment, down to its genetic building blocks. And with the advent of cloning, Dolly the Sheep lends a benign ovine face to the existential Twilight Zone drama that is technology's ability to mass-produce living beings like Xeroxed pages from a corporate report.



Thus it is no surprise that contemporary artists would adopt mutant or hybrid animals as mascots of a sort, to address a wide range of subjects, starting with man's conflicted relationship to nature. One can't help but be struck by the sheer range of artwork featuring such misfit organisms. From paintings that reference—and satirize—staid genres from art history to work that emulates fantastical or lowbrow tropes, young artists are employing mutant animals as unwitting spokescreatures for their own projected observations of society, nature, and the world around them: a world that has come to seem increasingly off-kilter. A number of unrelated West Coast group shows highlight this improbable trend, among them "Tales From An Imaginary Menagerie," on view at the Palo Alto Art Center through April 26, and "Natural Blunders" at the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University, which runs through March 20. A recent group show at San Francisco's 111 Minna Gallery titled, "Freak of Nature," featured a range of artists veering from campy and illustrative to psychedelic and surreal: unlike "Nature Freak," a group show at the Kirkland Art Center, in Kirkland, Washington, which could be seen last fall, or "(un)Natural," which features eight Bay Area artists and runs through June 13, 2009 at di Rosa Preserve in Napa Valley.

ABOVE:
"TROPHY HEAD (GOLDEN SPLIT 3 OCULAR 6 AUDITORY)," 2007
Joshua Levine
MIXED MEDIA, 33" x 32" x 26"
PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DEN CONTEMPORARY ART

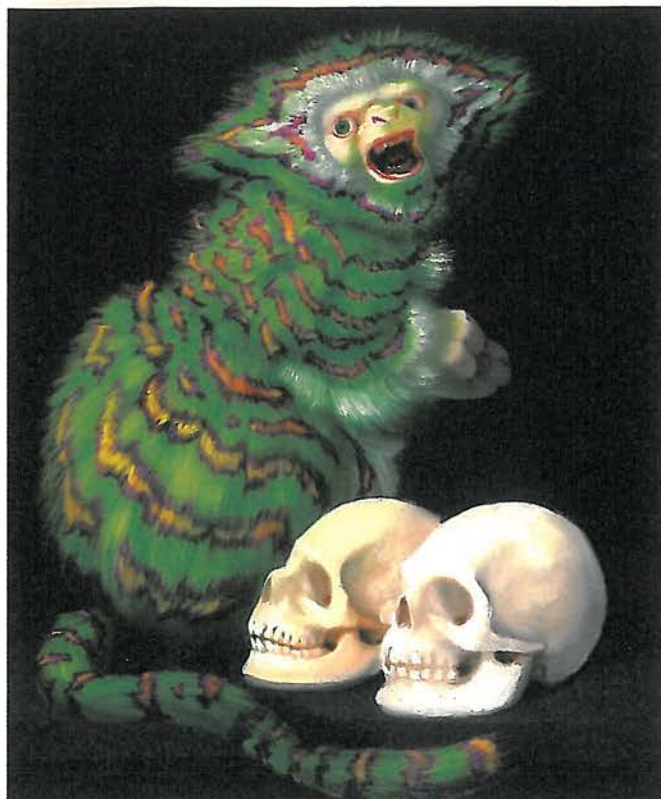
RIGHT:
"BIRD OF PARADISE XVIII: CANADA MEDUSA," 2008
Justin Gibbens
WATERCOLOR, GRAPHITE, GOUACHE, OOLONG, MAGIC ON PAPER, 40" x 26"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST & G. GIBSON GALLERY, SEATTLE



It is no surprise that contemporary artists would adopt mutant or hybrid animals as mascots of a sort, to address a wide range of subjects, starting with man's conflicted relationship to nature.

That such shows should vary so widely attests to the spectrum of genres, guises and purposes that animals have been allotted by the current generation of artists. Whether examining genetic modification or the commodification of the environment, whether investigating the unintended consequences of technology or the subtle power struggles implicit in interpersonal relationships, we can always set forth animals to make our case for us, calling them to the stand like so many injured furred-or-feathered witnesses for the prosecution. That these creatures don't always understand their own malformity or plight only makes their tales more arresting, their situation all the more poignant. In some cases, these hybrids seem perfectly at ease with their eccentric anatomy. Often, however, their defects or dislocations do *not* seem to their benefit; rather these alterations seem detrimental, capricious, parasitic, imposed on them, or just plain wrong. In their disfigurement or displacement, these creatures do *not* seem like happy travelers on the Darwinian flow chart toward biological adaptation and collective self-betterment; rather they seem to be the result of a more malignant, distinctly *unnatural* selection.

While fully cognizant of Darwin's legacy (as well as that of Audubon, Oppenheimer, Freud and David Lynch, for that matter) today's hybrid portraitists seem likewise well aware of Barnum, and the theatricality, humor, and pathos their subjects' unnatural beauty inspires. We marvel at them doubly, standing in awe at their wondrous natural design, even as we stand aghast at their even more unlikely, *unnatural* aspects. Step right up and see the four-headed goose!

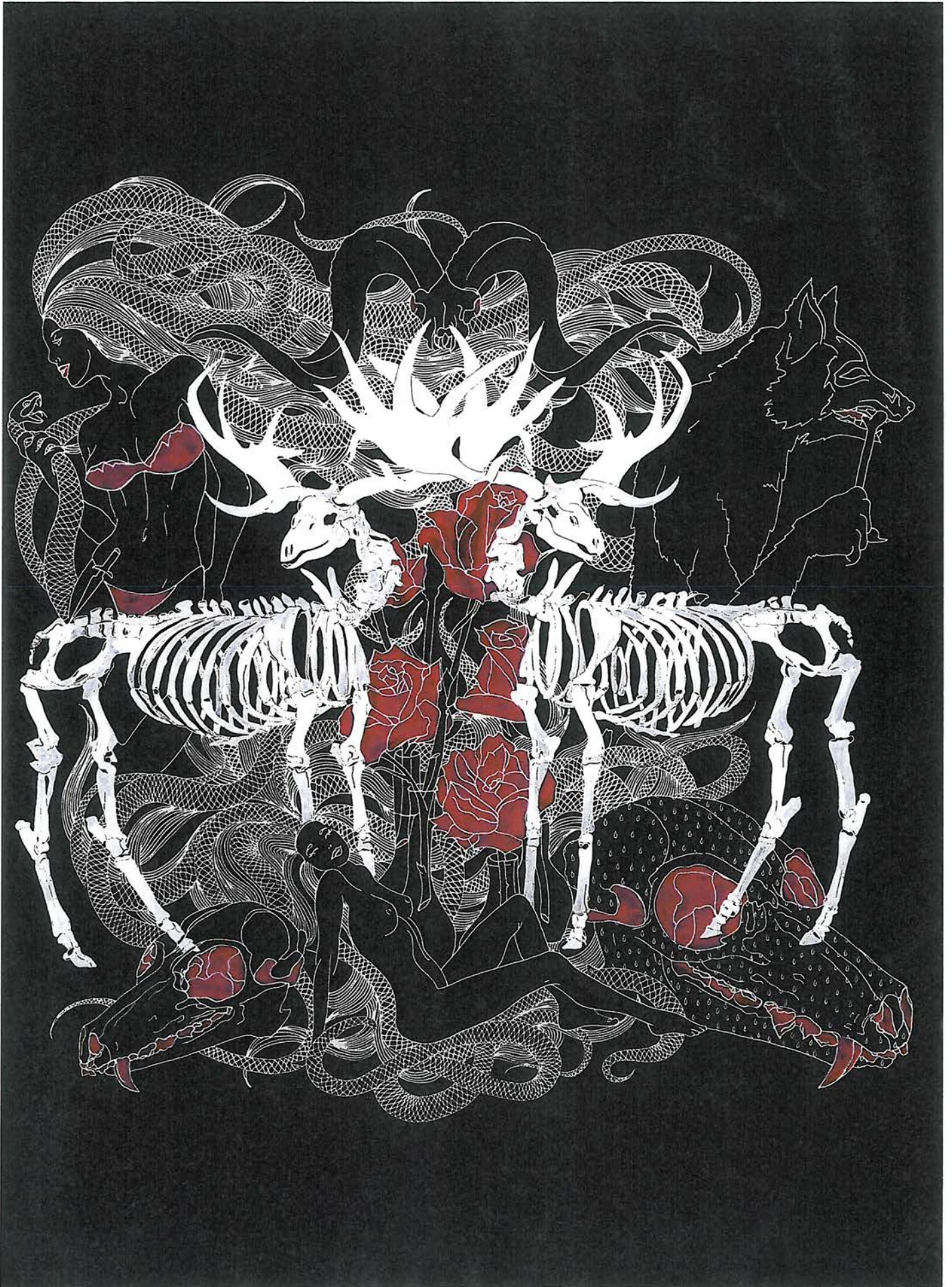


In fact, to see a four-headed goose, one need go no further than the work of **Justin Gibbens**, a young painter based in central Washington who has shown throughout the Northwest, including G. Gibson Gallery in Seattle and **Elizabeth Leach** in Portland. Trained both in scientific illustration and in Chinese painting, Gibbens create lushly seductive animal portraits, using watercolor, graphite, gouache and acrylic on tea- or coffee-stained paper. Like New York-based painter **Walton Ford**, whose sumptuous, often dazzling paintings consciously emulate the style of famed 19th Century naturalist **John James Audubon**, Gibbens' work overtly cites Audubon as a precedent. But unlike Ford, who cleaves more closely to fact, while posing his beasts in staged scenarios featuring implicit violence and/or humor, Gibbens delves directly into the realm of fiction. Some depict fantastical or pseudo-mythological creatures: a half-lion half-eagle griffin, a horned owl with antlers, a surprisingly functional melding of an aquatic sea-monster and a grebe. The recent series shows birds with multiple heads. This polycephalic aviary includes hawks, spoonbills, blue jays, herons, and that four-headed Canada goose, which rendered via Gibbens' deliberately antiquated verisimilitude, takes on a surprisingly believable aspect. One recent picture echoes a famous image of a flamingo by Audubon; in Gibbens' version, the bird's snake neck wraps around one of its legs, an oddity just plausible enough you almost buy it.

ABOVE RIGHT:
 "TWELVE MOMENTS OF SATURDAY MORNING TV
 -THE COLONIZATION OF MY CHILD'S MIND (GREEN WITH STRIPE)," 2006
Laurie Hugin
 OIL ON PANEL WITH ARTIST MADE FRAMES, 9 1/4" x 8 1/2"
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF KOPLIN DEL RIO, LOS ANGELES

LEFT:
 "THE ANGRY YOUNG RODENT IS COMFORTED," 2004
Samantha Fields
 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 42" x 24"
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

RIGHT:
 "SNAKE MOTHER," 2008, **Hannah Stouffer**
 INK ON PAPER, 20" x 20"
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF 111 MINNA GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

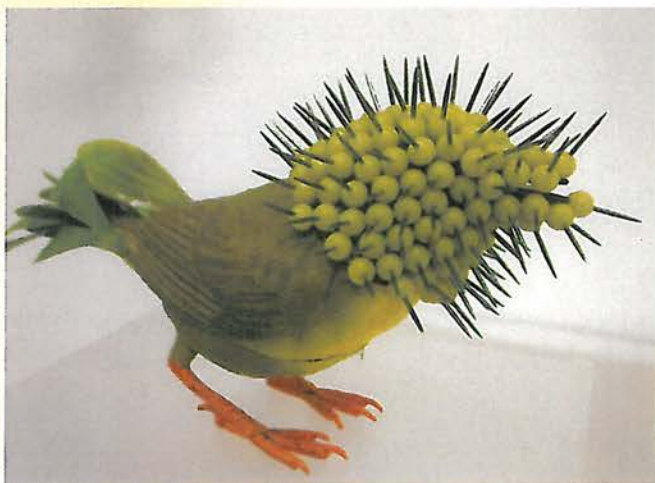


Audubon's legacy is complex; though his name now stands for eco-activism and nature calendars, Audubon killed his avian models prior to posing and immortalizing them. That several of the 497 species from his monumental volume "Birds of America"—from the Carolina Parakeet to the Great Auk—are now extinct only makes his project more admirable. Yet because of humanity, these birds have sadly migrated from fact to phantom, a distinction that lends painful resonance to the deliberate blending of fact and fiction in these contemporary artists' work.

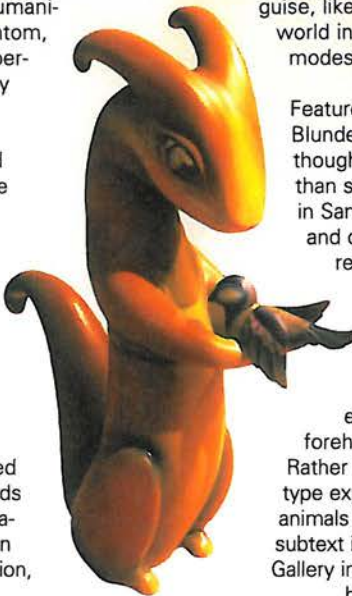
Merging keen factual observation with the heightened realm of fiction, painter Tiffany Bozic brings impressive skill to bear on her lovingly rendered animal tales. Based in San Francisco but raised in Arkansas, Bozic was a resident artist at the California Academy of Sciences in 2006-2007. Her images, painted in acrylic on maple panel, feature the sort of brilliant colors and elegant dramatic compositions that suggest illustrations from a book of children's fables from a century ago (her solo show last spring at Kinsey/Desforges in Culver City was called "Bedtime Stories"). One painting depicts a mother vulture shielding a brood of piglets while its chicks feed on the dead mother pig below. Other works depict birds engaged in courtship rituals, mating octopi, or sea creatures such as starfish, crabs, or sea urchins engaged in epic battles. Despite its unblinking depiction of predation, death, and parasitism, Bozic's work also invokes rituals of animal romance and rearing young; augmenting factual accuracy with internal nuance, her depictions of obscure animal realms bear odd parallels to human society. With their implied delinquencies of animal morality, her works read as cautionary fables that animals might tell each other before tucking each other in, or, at their grandest, murals for their public buildings.

More deliberately fictive, the elegant drawings of Adonna Khare posit dreamlike scenarios in which mutant animals dangle from swings and carry entire cities on their backs. Ranging from small, precise works on paper to 30-foot long installations, as in her 2008 show at Santa Monica's Lora Schlesinger Gallery, her works play freely with scale, casually grafting together animals and people, as in the anthropomorphic beasts with lions' heads and human limbs. More rooted in the arena of fantasy than that of science, Khare's emotionally charged narratives portray her hybrids as complex theatrical characters, suggesting "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for animal mutants.

Tara Tucker, based in San Francisco, also crafts meticulously rendered drawings of animals interacting with each other with rich emotional complexity. However, the hybridization in Tucker's work



apparently derives from cross-species interbreeding, as if these species have merged to adapt to rapidly shifting circumstances. In some of her works, the animals have even fused with vegetation: sprouting mushrooms, flowers, stalks or roots from their shaggy pelts, her birds and animals are oddly at ease in their new guise, like peculiar hybrids from a brave new near-future world in which their survival depends on finding new modes of adaption.



"HOPE," 2008, **Rebekah Bogard**
EARTHENWARE, UNDERGLAZE, GLAZE
OIL PAINT, 25" x 5" x 19"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE VINCENT PRICE ART
MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

Featured in both "Imaginary Menagerie" and "Natural Blunders," Misako Inaoka also crafts animal hybrids, though her language derives more from wind-up toys than scientific verisimilitude. Born in Japan and based in San Francisco, Inaoka creates small mechanical birds and critters from what looks like die-cast plastic and resin. Powered by hidden motion detectors, her birds often chirp or twitter when viewers approach: an effect at once engaging and off-putting. These droll hybrids do not aspire to biological veracity, as with the bird with an extra head in place of its tail, or the two-headed pig which sprouts a sprig of leaves from one forehead and sits perched atop a pair of bird legs. Rather their unlikely forms suggest artificial Frankenstein-type experiments, or the grotesque lengths to which animals might evolve to ensure survival. Their Darwinian subtext is no accident: her 2007 show at Stephen Wirtz Gallery in San Francisco was called "Origin of Species" in homage to Darwin's seminal manuscript. In recent works, her birds sprout elaborate clusters of berries or vegetation from their heads, covering their faces: a strangely maladaptive design that looks more suited to a surrealist ladies' hat than a viable response to the natural environment.

The ceramic sculptures of Reno-based Rebekah Bogard also resemble toys, or the cutesy world of Japanese anime. Seen this winter in two separate LA solo shows—at Sam Lee Gallery and the Vincent Prince Art Museum at East LA College—Bogard's work features a menagerie of mutant beasts, resembling baby squirrels with long lizard-like tails or antlers, that despite their adorability almost resemble larvae. At first glance, the scenarios she posits for them seem sweetly affectionate, but their interactions are often steeped in melancholy or sexuality; their emotional vulnerability reads as an allegory for human interaction, particularly as it relates to gender roles.

LA painter Samantha Fields also conjures animals whose superficial innocence belies a subtext of adult truths. Although Fields has since moved on to more realistic depictions of natural catastrophe, her work from 2004-06 portrays cartoony big-eyed animals in electric colors, often perched in tree branches and sporting odd deformities, such as bubbling cysts or weird prong-like growths. With such coy titles as "Bubbles" *the tree cat eyes visitors warily* and *The angry young rodent is comforted*, her work melds a goofy Animal Planet-type voice with an aura of menace, suggesting an upbeat documentary on mutated baby animals coping with some untold disaster.

Painter John Valadez comes out of the Los Angeles Chicano muralist tradition; his works generally portray the day-to-day verities of Latino life, from hanging out at storefronts to relaxing at the beach. The genre took a mythological turn in his 2008 show at Craig Krull Gallery in Santa Monica, in which Valadez showed Latino beachgoers frolicking amidst fantastical sea creatures such as giant sea serpents or toothy, gaping whales. Whatever their origin—be it ecological disaster or evolution—Valadez' sea beasts serve as potent embodiments of the unknown.

LEFT:
"GREEN-PIN BIRD," 2006
Misako Inaoka
PLASTIC MOTION-SENSORED TOY, PINS, FOAM, RESIN AND PAINT
7" x 8" x 11"
PHOTO: COURTESY STEPHEN WIRTZ GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO



"FOREST RAM; FOREST EWE; FOREST LAMB," 2007, **Tara Tucker**
 MIXED MEDIA, 29" x 21" x 23"; 27½" x 21" x 23"; 22" x 13" x 19"
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

Hannah Stouffer, seen lately in 111 Minna's "Freak of Nature" show, and in a solo show at a small storefront gallery on Western Ave. in LA, is an illustrator and designer as much as an artist. Her omnivorous work gobbles up references, from vintage design to color field painting and the Pattern and Decoration movement, to such lowbrow mass artforms as cartoons, surfboat art, silkscreens or tattoos. Her imagery suggests items from a punk natural history giftshop: animal skeletons prance alongside tails from giant lizards and hawks bedecked in falconry garb; in numerous works, toothy mammal skulls, of horned goats or prehistoric cats, grin from the trunks of the looping pythons, who wrap around each other, among skeletal beasts or reclining nudes. Stouffer's designs, which she has also applied to a line of t-shirts, present mutant animals as a subcultural icon: the sort of trophy you'd ink into your biceps or affix to the grill of your truck.

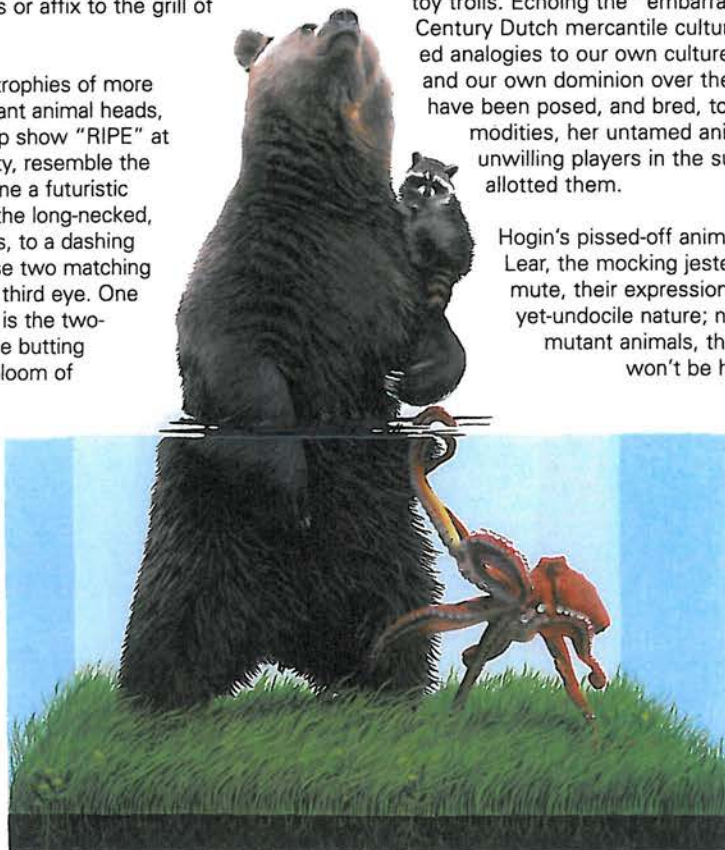
LA artist Joshua Levine creates trophies of more visceral sort. His sculptured mutant animal heads, as seen last summer in the group show "RIPE" at d.e.n. contemporary in Culver City, resemble the sort of wall trophies that might line a futuristic hunting lodge. They range from the long-necked, two-headed doe joined at its ears, to a dashing golden deer with five ears, whose two matching heads are conjoined by a shared third eye. One exceptionally disturbing creature is the two-headed dark grey antelope whose butting foreheads merge in a festering bloom of lifelike, querying glass eyes. Unsettling on a number of levels, these works suggest that as unnatural as these beasts are, they're good enough to be killed and set out on display by human sportsmen.

Fueled by a simmering sense of outrage infused by a wry sense of humor, Oakland-based, Tacoma-born artist Josh Keyes is deeply attuned to the plight of animals in a human-dominated world. Although not technically hybrids, Keyes' animals exist in a distinctly hybridized

world; their own ecosystems apparently eroded, they appear stranded in the manmade landscape, amid human detritus or abandoned statuary. At once poignant and absurd, Keyes' studious drawings and paintings depict animals isolated dramatically amid fragmentary slices of land or water. Seemingly lost and bewildered in their dreamlike stage sets, they look like protagonists in some existential drama on global warming written by that popular writing team of Samuel Beckett and Al Gore. In images such as the grizzly bear standing in water next to an octopus, holding a raccoon, Keyes asks where these creatures might go once humanity has fully usurped their natural environment. Faced with a challenge to adapt-or-die, one also wonders what they will become if they survive their radically displaced environments. Previously seen in Los Angeles at George Billis Gallery, Keyes' newest work comes to David B. Smith Gallery in Denver this spring.

Chicago painter Laurie Hogin wields her brushes, and knowledge of art history, with unerring skill to interrogate the long-standing, highly loaded relationship between humanity and the animal world. Intended as social critique, her work alludes to specific genres of European painting, particularly 17th Century Dutch still life, with its tendency to fetishize objects from nature as exotic trophies to be possessed and presented as aestheticized commodities. However, Hogin's trophy animals do not sit still for their masters, but rather openly express their fury and contempt: her world is peopled by snarling bunnies (who often bear the telltale patterning of tigers or other wild cats), angry dogs, bleating deer, irate chickens, even outraged sheep. In recent years (as seen on the West Coast at Koplín Del Rio Gallery in Culver City), Hogin's colors have grown ever more dazzling and artificial. Proffering albino white or electric-red alligators, brilliant green ducks, mottled fuchsia lizards, and candy-colored bunnies, amidst the usual suspects of growling furred beasts, her psychedelic group portraits now feel more like something out of 1969 San Francisco than 1600s Antwerp. The artificiality of her palette is especially potent in her recent solo monkey portraits: their fur dappled toxic pink, sticky lemon-lime, or grape punch purple, posed beside human skulls to mimic *vanitas* paintings, they sit grimacing or grinning smugly, like a set of toy trolls. Echoing the "embarrassment of riches" of 17th Century Dutch mercantile culture, Hogin's bestiaries pose pointed analogies to our own culture of insatiable consumerism, and our own dominion over the animal world. Looking as if they have been posed, and bred, to serve as vulgar aesthetic commodities, her untamed animals still snarl at their fate, unwilling players in the subservient role humanity has allotted them.

Hogin's pissed-off animals are the angry id, the raging Lear, the mocking jesters, of the mutant world. Though mute, their expressions speak on behalf of a captive, yet-undocile nature; next time you step up to see the mutant animals, they may be staring back. They won't be happy.



"TOTEM II"
 2008
Josh Keyes
 24" x 18"
 ACRYLIC ON PANEL
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF
 DAVID B. SMITH GALLERY, DENVER



Justin Gibbens • "Tentacled Flicker," watercolor, gouache, pencil, green tea on paper, 23 x 30 inches
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, Oregon

Unnatural History

Justin Gibbens at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, Oregon

The ribbon-tails on Justin Gibbens' starlings are knots waiting to happen. Plumage on his red bird of paradise is baggage much bigger than the bird. The extended tail on his blue bird of paradise makes the body of the creature look like a dull afterthought. I thought these paintings were a metaphor for our dreams of wanting to become more fantastic than we already are, a state that would, once achieved, render us too cumbersome for life. But then Gibbens told me that many of the birds he paints actually exist.

"Birds of Paradise is a kind of umbrella term given to some types of birds down in New Guinea," says the artist; "They are called that because they are so extravagant in their plumage...they're like peacocks. They seem like they wouldn't be able to function and that's simply because they exist on an island where there aren't a whole lot of natural predators, or at least up until more recently. They've evolved over time these probably really cumbersome tail feathers and things like that."

After hearing this I began to think that the paintings could instead be a metaphor for artists who get too big and are too protected by their entourage to have natural predators. This eventually ruins their original function—to entertain—because they don't get out of their own way and eventually become satires of themselves. Like, say, Woody Allen.

Gibbens riffs on John James Audubon (1785-1851) the way Jimmy Hendrix riffed on 'The Star Spangled Banner'—he reinvents yet holds to what is timeless and true. In the new series now on exhibit entitled "Birds of Paradise" Gibbens, as his press release says, "lovingly transforms...once-familiar avian



Justin Gibbens • "Red Bird of Paradise" watercolor, gouache, pencil, green tea on paper, 40 x 26 inches
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, Oregon

species into new forms of embellished life, further perpetuating a stylized version of a subversive natural history."

"When I look at old books of early specimen drawings," says the artist, "I am just taken by them because there is a certain naivety but there is also an earnestness. The artists didn't know any better so there is a charm there. A lot of times the artists were working from second or third hand sources. If they weren't out on some expedition themselves and an explorer or naturalist came back and conveyed a description of a rhinoceros—what's an artist going to do with that?"



Justin Gibbens • "Double-headed Red-tail" watercolor, gouache, pencil, green tea on paper, 40 x 26 inches
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, Oregon

In other paintings Gibbens seamlessly dovetails innate elegance with the surreal, causing a flutter of conceptual realism. "Double-headed Red-tail"—a watercolor, gouache, pencil, and green tea painting measuring 40 by 26 inches—portrays a hawk with two heads. We are so conditioned to accept the genre's authoritativeness that to actually 'see' an unlikely pair of heads demands a double take.

Another work—one of many small collages that are also on display at Elizabeth Leach—entitled "Appalachian Pelican" is humorous because the bird is perfectly fitting his jaw into the curve of his own neck in order to subtly call our attention to his design.

"I go on eBay and periodically order a batch of [old Audubon] prints," Gibbens says; "I just cut them up. It seems that rather than sketching it's a quick and easy way for me to flesh out ideas and to give me a break from painting. For "Appalachian Pelican" I...cut off the head of Audubon's pelican and put it on top of a turkey. The scale was the same and the tones were the same. I try to do it seamlessly so you can't really tell where the cut is."

Gibbens credits much of his artistic influence to the countless hours he spent watching David Attenborough documentaries—although he also draws the road kill he keeps in his freezer. He received his BA in painting and drawing from Central Washington University and a Scientific Illustration Certificate from University of Washington. He is a founding member of PUNCH, an artist-run gallery located in Seattle. Gibbens, the recipient of a 2008 Artist Trust Fellowship award, lives in Thorp, Washington and really appreciates the art of Walton Ford, Alexis Rockman, and Patricia Piccinini.

Molly Norris

Molly Norris is an arts writer and artist living in Seattle, Washington.

"Birds of Paradise: New Watercolor Drawings" is on view from December 4, 2008 to January 3, 2009, at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery located at 417 N.W. 9th Avenue, Portland, Oregon. For more information, please call (503) 224-0521 or visit the website www.elizabethleach.com.



Justin Gibbens • "Blue Bird of Paradise" watercolor, gouache, pencil, green tea on paper, 40 x 26 inches
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, Oregon

art ltd.

Justin Gibbens

By Suzanne Beal

Jul 2008



"I've been drawing since I could hold a pencil," says contemporary wildlife artist Justin Gibbens, a 2006 recipient of a Pollock Krasner Foundation Award and a 2007 Artist Trust GAP award. A master draftsman, Gibbens employs watercolor and gouache on archaic-looking oolong tea stained paper to adeptly mix science and science fiction, his formidable skills of representation used to depict creatures that inhabit the most wondrous place of all: the human mind.

Gibbens received a BA from Central Washington University where he concentrated mainly on process-oriented work before discovering the pleasures of observation drawing. He went on to complete a program in scientific illustration at Seattle University in 2004, afterwards working briefly as an illustrator. "I didn't find it as satisfying as I had hoped," explained Gibbens, "but it was a great introduction to 17th, 18th and 19th century scientific illustration. I saw in them earnest works full of inaccuracies." The contrived details he discovered have inspired his current work. "I'm interested in the strangeness of nature," says Gibbens, "as well as how humans interface with nature."

In two simultaneously running exhibits in Seattle, "Unnatural History" at G. Gibson Gallery, and "Animal Spell" at Punch, Gibbens created realistically rendered birds and beasts with unusual animal accouterments. In "Unnatural History," Gibbens presented a series of drawings, (collectively titled Birds of Paradise), copied from John James Audubon's multi-volume set Birds of America. Gibbens sketched out Audubon's prints in their entirety before drawing in extra legs or heads and occasionally granting them far-fetched abilities such as fire breathing.

Audubon occasionally placed his taxidermy models into somewhat exaggerated positions in order to achieve more dramatic results. Gibbens used what he has termed these "points of awkwardness," as a point of departure. The neck of Audubon's Flamingo descends towards the ground in an inverted angle that mirrors the hyperextension of the bird's front knee (technically the flamingo's ankle). Gibbens exaggerates the bird's apparent elasticity in his own Asp-Necked Flamingo, threading the bird's neck between its legs like a winter scarf. The artist's Hammerhead

Pelican sprouts two heads that face one another forming a stylized, if somewhat flattened, heart shape, while Fire Breathing Chimney Swifts cover the paper with plumes of trailing smoke.

In "Animal Spell," Gibbens' subjects were furred, not feathered, influenced by a recent trip to Bavaria. In a monumental drawing exhibited on the back wall titled Jackalopes Von Regenbögen Land, a pair of jackalopes (mythical animals generally represented as rabbits with antlers) leap towards one another to dramatically lock horns under a scintillating rainbow. Red mushrooms burst forth from the ground on the left while blue fungi erupt on the right. It's a good example of the way in which Gibbens marries cultural history to contemporary kitsch. His drawing alternately references the leaping stag paintings associated with hunting lodges or ski chalets while the opposing colored flora, and his folkloric fauna, suggest a contemporary clash between the jets and sharks of the underbrush.

Painting isn't the only way in which Gibbens, a resident of Thorp, in Eastern Washington, has proven his creative mettle. In March of 2006 Gibbens, along with five other artists founded the gallery Punch, creating a visual arts arena for area artists living outside Seattle. The collective, currently boasting twelve member artists, has been the subject of numerous reviews since its inauguration. Gibbens, like the creatures he depicts, is an unusual mélange of adaptation and metamorphosis whose survival skills will come in handy both in and out of the gallery.

"Bird of Paradise III: Asp-necked Flamingo," 2007
Watercolor, graphite, gouache, oolong on paper, 40" x 26"

"Animal Spell" (a two person exhibit featuring the work of Justin Gibbens and Amy Ross) was on view from April 3–27, 2008 at Punch Gallery, 119 Prefontaine Place South, Seattle WA 98104 (206) 621-1945 www.punchgallery.org

"Unnatural History" (a two person exhibit featuring the work of Justin Gibbens and Nealy Blau) could be seen from April 3–May 10, 2008 at G. Gibson Gallery, 300 South Washington St., Seattle WA 98104 (206) 587-4033 www.ggibsongallery.com



Artist Profile - Justin Gibbens



Justin Gibbens imitates the conventions of 18th and 19th century zoological illustration and traditional Chinese fine-line painting. In his latest series, *Birds of Paradise*, Justin has transformed John James Audubon-like illustrations into monstrous hybrids, reptilian dragons, and other forms of daemonic life. He has exhibited at the G. Gibson Gallery and PUNCH Gallery in Seattle, and Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, Oregon. He received his BA from Central Washington University in 1998 and participated in a traditional Chinese painting exchange program at Anhui University in Hefei, China in 2002. Justin completed the University of Washington Scientific Illustration certificate program in 2003 and was recently featured in the Summer 2012 issue of *American Artist Watercolor*.

Justin received 2007 GAP Award funding to support a project entitled *Wonderland*, in which the artist hiked along the 93-mile path known as the Wonderland Trail, which loops around Mt. Rainier, and traversed high alpine meadows, deep river canyons, rugged lava slopes, and groves of old growth forest. Employing his background in scientific illustration, he created on-site sketches of the life forms encountered along the trail. The artist painted each piece with pigments made from the natural materials on hand: mud, plant material, pollen, animal scat, or insect guts. The completed series of drawings was shown in a traveling exhibit beginning with Gallery One, Ellensburg, in the fall of 2007.

As part of his Fellowship's *Meet the Artist* requirements, Justin's *Operation Bigfoot* explored the intersection of contemporary art and cryptozoology. Both contemporary wildlife artists, Justin and Eugene Parnell, former grant recipient, conducted a survey of the public, both online and in person, about their personal experiences with the cryptozoological phenomenon known as Bigfoot or Sasquatch. The artists were on-site at Seattle's Westlake Park on July 11, 2009 as a part of ARTSPARKS, to act as real-time forensic sketch artists, giving visual form to the eyewitness descriptions of Bigfoot provided by interviewees. Finished sketches from the project are available at www.eugeneparnell.com/bigfoot.

<https://artisttrust.org/artists/justin-gibbens/>

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Justin Gibbens' show at G. Gibson Gallery an unnatural look at nature

By Sheila Farr
Seattle Times art critic

The creatures in Justin Gibbens' show at G. Gibson Gallery are a strange, discomfiting group: 21st-century takeoffs on Audubon's "Birds of America" that seem to reflect the current state of the planet, with its increasing toxic load and diminishing wildlife habitat. In a second show, around the corner at Punch gallery, it's a different story. Gibbens' creatures appear lighthearted, more like fantasy illustrations for children's books.

At G. Gibson, the birds are mutants. It struck me that this is how some birds of America could end up looking if they survive the centuries to come: like chemically induced accidents. They sprout multiple heads and dangling sets of extra legs. In one painting, a pair of chimney swifts dive like struck bombers, trailing smoke and flame.

Audubon, of course, was a double-edged environmentalist, documenting birds and animals by first shooting them. His method was quaint compared with the implications of Gibbens' watercolors, which are both appealingly attractive (as paintings) and sort of creepy, like those Mason-jar preserved freaks you see at county fairs. Inspired by the work of early nature painters, Gibbens tried to make his work look like it came from another era, staining the paper with tea for an aged and weathered look.

Gibbens' bird paintings are displayed at G. Gibson with Nealy Blau's photographs of faux natural settings that she devised by shooting museum dioramas up close. You can't distinguish scale, so the images give you the impression you're looking at scenes from nature,



COURTESY OF JUSTIN GIBBENS / G. GIBSON GALLERY
Attractive and creepy: Justin Gibbens' "Bird of Paradise V.: Loch Ness Grebe," 2007.



COURTESY OF JUSTIN GIBBENS / G. GIBSON GALLERY
Gibbens' 2008 "Bird of Paradise IX.: Truly Magnificent Frigatebird." The artist stains paper with tea for an aged and

though you're left with a lingering sense of unreality. Conceptually the two bodies of work — jointly titled "Unnatural History" — suit each other. Visually they don't. Gibbens' paintings grab the spotlight and neither artist benefits from the combination.

There's a similar problem at Punch with the pairing of Gibbens' paintings and those of Amy Ross. Clearly the two artists' fantastical wildlife imagery is related, yet visually the paintings don't hang well together. Ross' watercolors are sweeter in color and content: little quail, ducks and bunnies blossoming from magnolia buds, or birds with fanciful mushroom heads, all delicately limned on stark white paper. Gibbens' work again has that aged look from oolong-tea washes and, instead of birds this time, depicts mythological creatures such as unicorns, jackalopes and wölperingers. The artist said he was inspired in part by local legends and antique taxidermy he encountered traveling in Bavaria. He developed his watercolor technique studying traditional art practices in China.

The two artists' work is just similar enough to be confusing and different enough to distract. In this case, there's nobody to blame for the matchup but Gibbens. As a co-founder of Punch, he chose Ross, a Boston artist whose work he first encountered on the Web. He said he invited her to show with him at Punch because she was working in a similar bent and had included his work in an earlier show she assembled. That kind of networking is both an advantage and a drawback of artist-run cooperatives: There may not always be the best curatorial vision guiding what's on the walls — but at least the work is getting out there.

Sheila Farr: sfarr@seattletimes.com

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weathered look.



JUSTIN GIBBENS

Gibbens' lighthearted "Unicorn Feld Mäuse" is on exhibit at Punch.

Exhibition review

"Unnatural History": Justin Gibbens and Nealy Blau

Through May 10, G. Gibson Gallery, 300 S. Washington St., Seattle (206-587-4033 or www.ggibsongallery.com). Gibbens and Blau will talk about their work at 2 p.m. April 26 at G. Gibson Gallery.

"Animal Spell": Justin Gibbens and Amy Ross

Through April 27, Punch, 119 Prefontaine Place S., Seattle (206-621-1945 or www.punchgallery.org).

★ JUSTIN GIBBENS

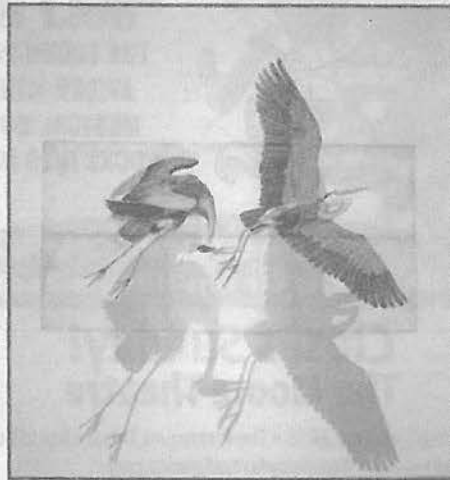
A master draftsman, Justin Gibbens was trained in both scientific illustration and traditional Chinese painting—a skill set that he applies to his subversive zoological drawings. His latest show, *Relations*, consists of works on paper and wall drawings of birds native to the Pacific Northwest. **Elizabeth Leach Gallery**, 417 NW 9th, 224-0521. elizabethleach.com. Free. First Tuesday-Sat. Through July 7.

June 7, 2007 **Portland Mercury** 43

Northwest creatures come to life in Gibbens' 'Birds and Bees'

When Barnett Newman said, "Esthetics to me is what ornithology is to the birds," it was his rebuke to critics (but it didn't stop him from writing very long and beautiful essays about his own work). Justin Gibbens, a recent recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation award, has an esthetic that is expressed in avian; ornithology is only part of it, after all.

His solo show "Birds and Bees" follows Howard Barlow's excellent show "Riddled" and demonstrates why Punch Gallery is a force to be reckoned with on the alternative scene. Tapping his background in scientific illustration, Gibbens renders life-size portraits of insects and birds native to the Northwest with detailed flair. The artist mimics conventions of 18th- and 19th-century zoological illustrations and "Audubon's Birds of America" to explore natural history and the inevitabilities of life.



Great blue herons by Justin Gibbens.

The title reflects the territorial and conjugal concerns that drive every species, while the work itself depicts struggles between animals for mates, food and dominance. The birds, singled out from their surroundings on mostly white backgrounds, are depicted with long shadows that extend beyond the paper and on to the walls. Without overplaying his hand, Gibbens lets these scenes become symbolic and fraught.

The work has a delicacy and conviction that belie any easy irony. This isn't kitsch; it's the daily struggle, the survival that we all wrestle over, thrown into high relief by the isolated scenarios.

"Birds & Bees" is at Punch Gallery, 119 Prefontaine Place S., 206-621-1945, punchgallery.org, through Feb. 25. Hours: Noon-5 p.m. Friday-Sunday.

- Nate Lippens

review printed in *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 9, 2007

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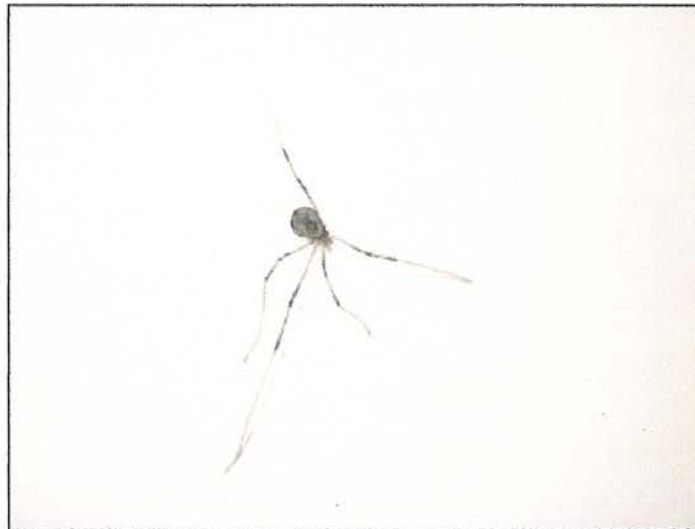
And the Galleries Marched in Two by Two

by Carrie E.A. Scott

Since June of 2004, at least 13 galleries have settled into the Tashiro Kaplan (TK) Building's available commercial spaces. Which makes it pretty hard to keep up; off the top of my head, I am not actually sure I can name every gallery now in the vicinity of Third Avenue.

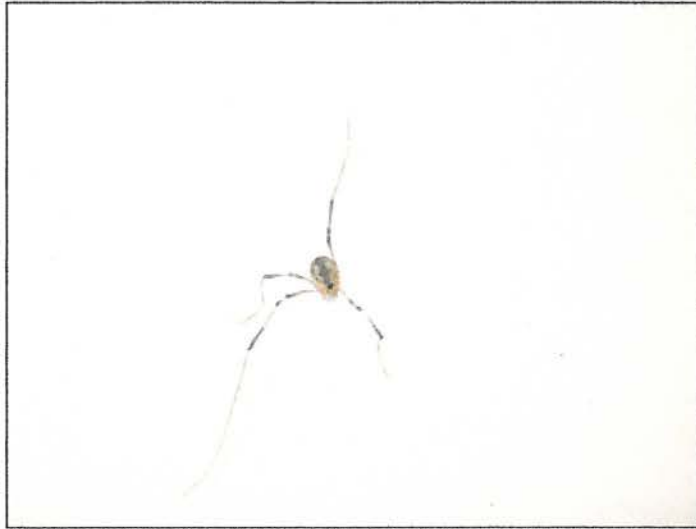
And April brought another, PUNCH, the newest artist-run gallery to open on Prefontaine Place, debuting with a show cleverly titled *Round One*. Displaying work by four of their eight members — yes the next show, *Round Two*, will boast the art of the other four — PUNCH has made a strong first appearance. Both the space and the art are refined.

Justin Gibbens' drawings, for instance, pack a humorous but nonetheless eloquent punch (sorry, I couldn't resist). *Countdown (Quiet Meditation on the Act of Dismemberment)* is masterful. On nine large sheets of thick paper, Gibbens has rendered a spider, a daddy-long-legs of sorts, in various states of dismemberment. On each piece of paper, his drawn arachnid is less one leg. By the ninth panel the only thing left of the tiny animal is its beautifully detailed, albeit mutilated, brown body.



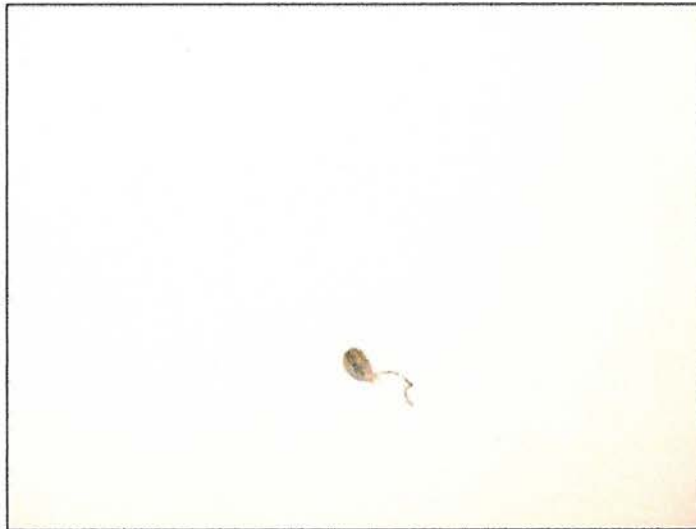
Countdown (Quiet Meditation on the Act of Dismemberment) Panel 4
Justin Gibbens 2006

Jen Erickson's highly conceptual drawings are similarly playful. Using 1s and 0s, Erickson draws bug-like characters that are sweet, even innocent. However, there is nothing childlike about the drafts(wo)manship; her hand is steady and measured.



Countdown (Quiet Meditation on the Act of Dismemberment) Panel 5
Justin Gibbens 2006

But what is most exciting about PUNCH is not so much that the work shown thus far is strong (even though it is). Nor is it that we have yet another gallery in Seattle (though that, of course, is also a good thing). Rather, excitement for this debut can be garnered from the fact that it was founded by a group of artists who are, as their mission statement describes, "eager to participate in the dynamic cultural exchange resulting from the emergence of other artist-run galleries in Seattle."



Countdown (Quiet Meditation on the Act of Dismemberment) Panel 8
Justin Gibbens 2006

Why is this so thrilling? Because it seems Seattle's scene is finally fueling itself. Galleries are taking off not because big institutions are supporting art but because, on a most basic level, there is a self-perpetuating energy; artists and art goers want to "participate," and they want more to participate in.

In a city known for its laid-back behavior (some call it passivity), this is no small thing.

Thanks for this increased vigor in the community can't go to any one place; a number of art-driven forces are to blame.

For example, other galleries in the TK Building like Garde-Rail, Platform, and SOIL, as well as the usual suspects the Greg Kucera Gallery, James Harris Gallery, and Howard House, are all certainly fueling the fire. The above have in fact recently banded together to call this new art hub "The East-Edge Galleries," referring to being on the eastern side of the more traditional gallery center of

