



HEAD ON
FERN HELFAND

The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper

**HEAD ON
FERN HELFAND**

January 10 - February 11, 2012

Commentary by Julie Oakes

Artist Catalog: Fern Helfand - Head On
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This catalog was created for the exhibition titled “Subtle Slurs’ ”
presented at Headbones Drawers Gallery, Vernon, BC January 10 - February 11, 2012

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Commentary © 2012, Julie Oakes

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Before the magical manipulations of digital techniques, the photograph was looked upon as recording a moment in time with absolute veracity. A portrait was a secure testament that the subject existed; it had been photographed. Helfand has captured the heads of a variety of animals in a portrait format that causes admiration for she presents these wild animals in a close range with a full frontal gaze and little blur as if the animal had consented to remain still for the shot. The animals are usually head on, looking straight ahead with a trust and calm that belies their normally timorous nature in the face of man. Helfand grants the privileged opportunity to look into the eyes of these animals and experience appreciation for their specific physiognomies. They appear dignified in their composure before the lens as if caught by the camera for the curious perusal of the human species and yet their capture raises no questions of animal rights or attendant sorrow. The nicely boxed faces give no cause for guilt at man's relentless desire to document and study.

That these are taxidermic animals alters the clear conscience. A second, closer look is required as a myriad of issues arise. The contemplation of death, man's inhumane proclivities and the unavoidable domination of species over species overwhelms the once simple understanding of the framed animal portraits. In particular, we study the eyes, amazed that they are made of glass

and that the glint is a reflection of ambient light upon hardened silica rather than the sun bouncing off a living lens. Even armed with this knowledge, it is hard to resist the character that seems to reside in the gaze. There is a symbiotic identification akin to regarding the photograph of a pet.

Helfand photographed displays of stuffed wild animals in museums where the click of the shutter disturbs nothing. Her portrait gallery of dead animal faces brings the animals back to the land of the living where they are granted a second consideration. And with Helfand's 'capture', not a single animal was startled. The extreme quiet of the non-reaction yielded dignity to the subject.

The ethics of collecting and presenting is at varying stages throughout the world. Not only the animal but also the acquisition of artefacts and their cross border exportation is currently being reassessed to avoid mistaking the relationship that we have known on a more natural level with the animal kingdom and putting in place a concept of their existence only in relation to man.

Helfand's is a rare research, one that would be impossible, of course, to accomplish with a human subject. Human sentience is difficult to emulate through prosthetic eyes, bodies hollowed of innards and replaced with straw or foam, soles spiked in order to position and epidermal coverings made of leather or rubber.

Fern Helfand's work helps us butt heads with great concepts. It calls into question man's acquisition rights. It is a sociological anomaly that the

dominating species - human - can be sufficiently concerned about the other species to desire knowledge yet ruthless enough to kill the animal rather than transmit the amazement of it's diversity in the living state.

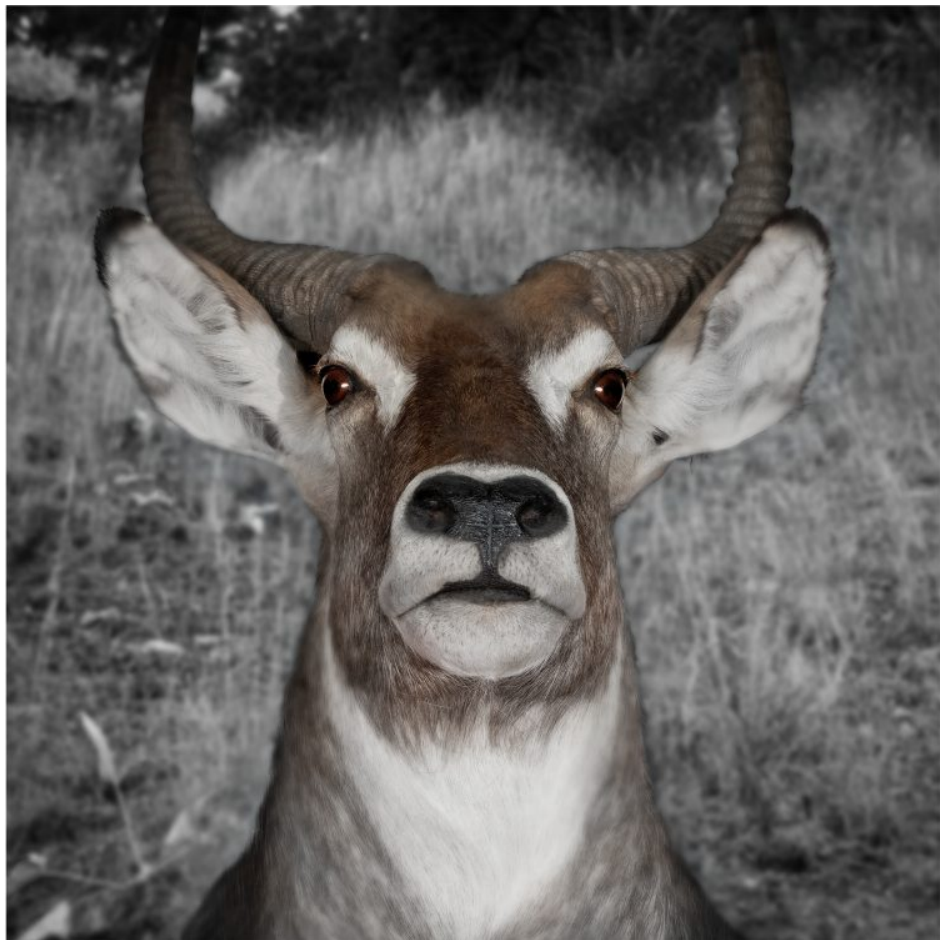
Julie Oakes - 2012



Fern Helfand - *Animal March*





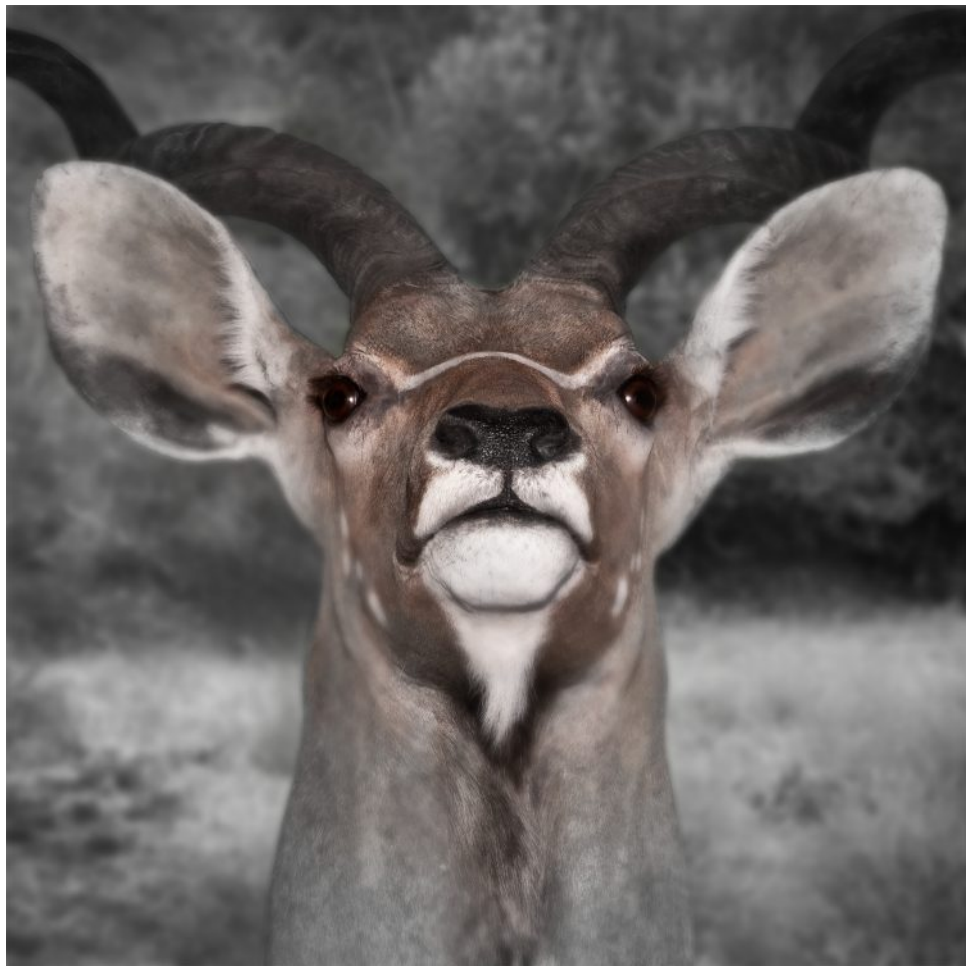




















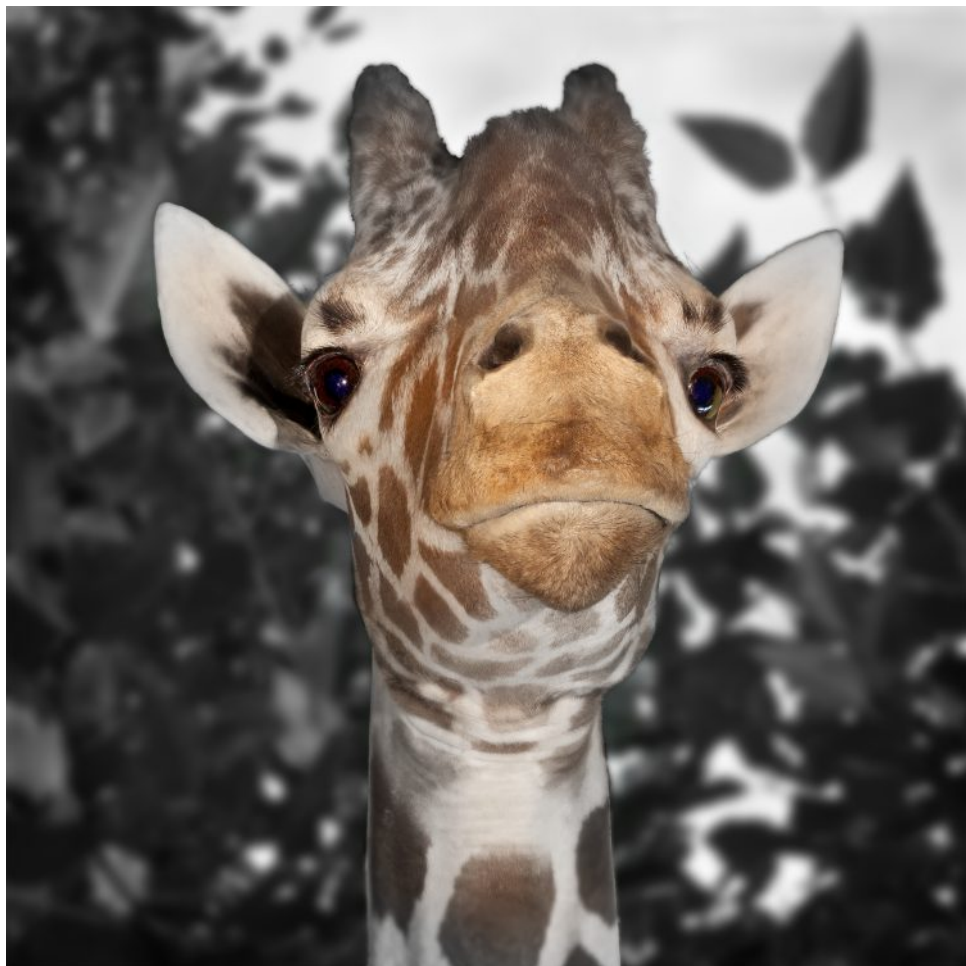












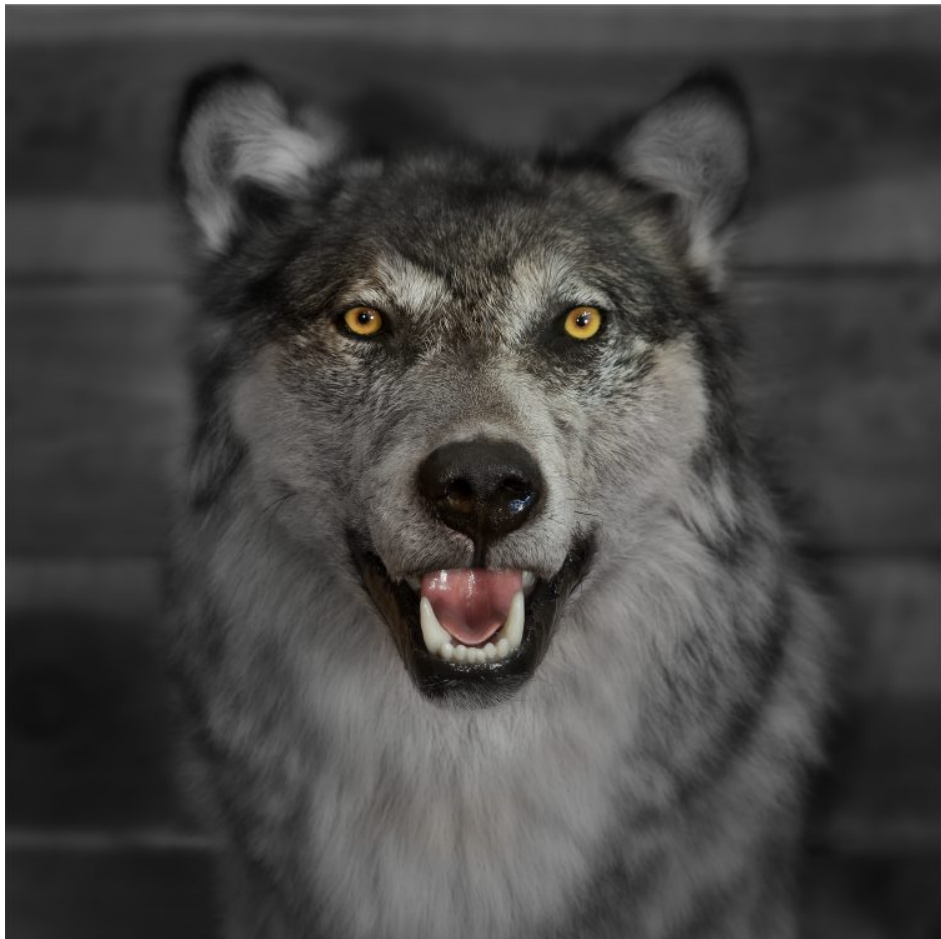










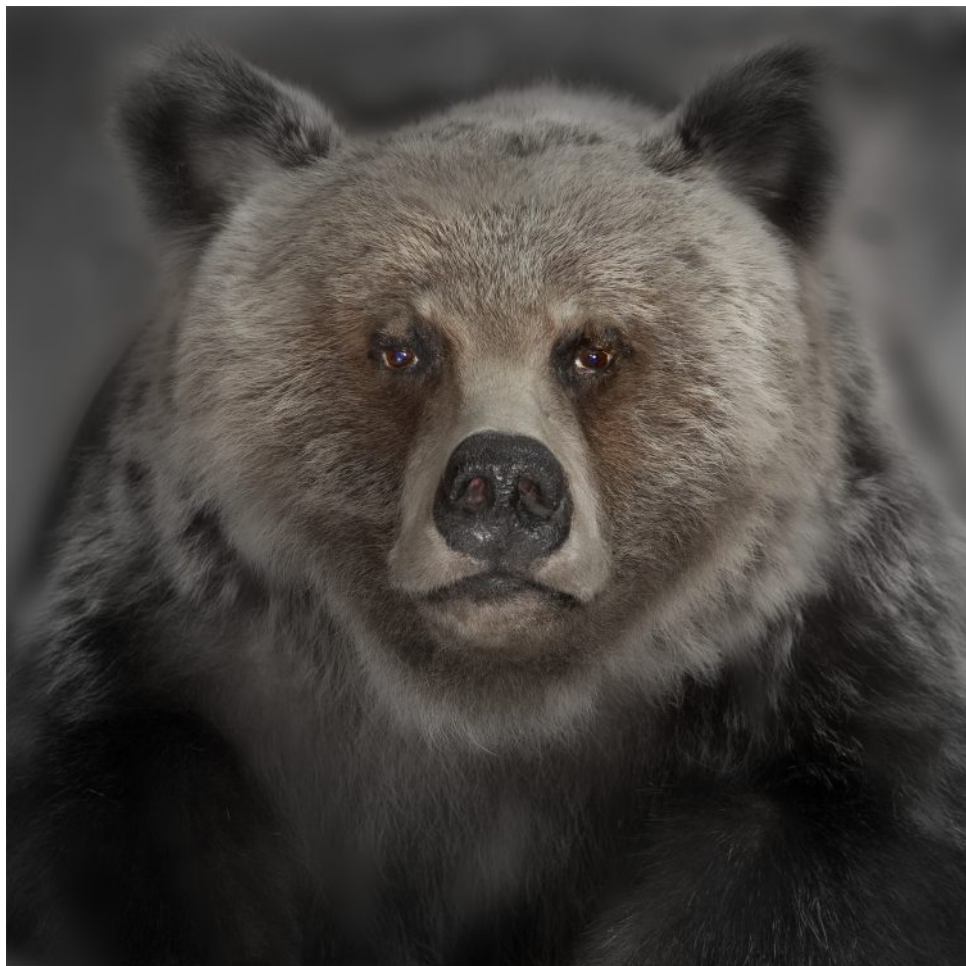




























Fern Helfand - *Zarafa*

Fern Helfand

Born: Toronto, Ontario: 1952-

Education

Post Diploma, Computer Graphics, Sheridan College, Oakville, Ontario

Master of Fine Arts, The University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida

Honours B.A. in Studio Art, York University, Toronto, Ontario

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2011 *About looking*, Vernon Public Art Gallery, Vernon, BC (catalogue)
- 2007 *Piazza San Marco A Photo-installation*, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 2006 *From Forested Hills to Paved Plateaus*, One-person exhibition, Kaunas
Photo Days 06, Annual Festival of Photography, Kaunas, Lithuania (catalogue)
From Forested Hills to Paved Plateaus, International Visual Sociology Association
Annual Conference, University of Urbino, Urbino, Italy
- 2003 *Valley The Photo Passage*, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Ontario
- 1999 *Fabricated Communities*, McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
Millennium Lament, Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario,
- 1995-00 *Another Time, Another Place* (Photographs from Malaysia and Nepal) Curated by James
Patton, The London Regional Art & Historical Museums, London Ontario. (catalogue)
- 1992 *Sightings*, Presented and funded by *L'Alliance Française de Penang*, Penang, Malaysia

Group Exhibitions (Selected highlights)

- 2011 *Works from the Interior* AHVA Gallery, UBC Vancouver, BC
Insight: Artists as Educators, Penticton Art Gallery, Penticton, BC
Opening borders/Opening Objects University of Western Ontario on-line exhibition
- 2008 *Boundaries*, UBCO Faculty Exhibition, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC (catalogue)
- 2006-7 *Hybrids: Biennial Small City Art Museums Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, Kelowna Art Gallery
Two Rivers Gallery, Prince George, BC. Art Gallery of Swift Current, Saskatchewan,
The Little Gallery, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Estevan Art Gallery and Museum, SK
Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery, Saskatchewan, Esplanade Art Gallery, Medicine Hat, AB
Hourglass, Creative Studies Faculty Exchange, University of Willongong, New South Wales, AU

Group Exhibitions (cont'd)

- 2005 *Oasis*, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 2004 *Panoramic Vision, Making sense of new landscapes*, Kelowna Museum, Kelowna
Looking Back: Reflections of the Okanagan Mountain Park Fire, Kelowna Art Gallery, BC
Faculty Exchange Exhibition, University of Washington, Bellingham, Washington
- 2001 *Artropolis*, Celebrating Contemporary BC Visual Art, CBC Broadcast Centre Studios, Vancouver
- 2000 *Valley 2000, A photographic record of life in the Okanagan During the Year*
The Sun Never Sets, Burnaby Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C
Niagara! curated by Robert McKaskell, Windsor Art Gallery, Windsor, Ontario
- 1992 *Bengawan Solo Sekali Sekala, Balai Seni*, Maybank Building, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia, (catalogue)
Wanita dan Kreativiti, National Art Gallery of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1991 *Penang Women Artists*, Penang State Art Gallery and Museum, Penang, Malaysia
Framing War, Penang State Art Gallery and Museum, Penang, Malaysia
One World, No War, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Arts And The Social Context, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Framing War, Creative Centre, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1990 *International Invitational Exhibition 1990*, State Museum and Art Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Wajah-Wajah Malaysia, (National Gallery of Malaysia), *Muzium Sultan Shah Alam* Malaysia
- 1988 *London/Havana Exchange*, curated by Jamelie Hassan, Casa de las Americas Havana, Cuba
Documentary Styles, Seven Contemporary CDN Photographers, Burlington Cultural Centre, ON
The Artist as Traveler, The Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, ON
5th Anniversary Exhibition, The Embassy Cultural House, London, Ontario

Publications (selected)

- 2012 *Head On*, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC, (catalogue)
- 2011 *About Looking*, *Vernon Public Art Gallery*, Vernon BC, (catalogue)
From Forested Hills to Paved Plateaus *The British Columbian Quarterly*, #169, pg 9-20
- 2004 *Interface*, ***Disaster!*** *dANdelion Magazine* issue 30.1 *University of Calgary*, cover + p 81-82

Art Work in Public & Major Collections (selected)

Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
Kelowna Museum, Kelowna, BC
Fortis BC
Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, Ontario
The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, Ontario
Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, Ontario
London Life Insurance, London, Ontario
London Regional Art and Historical Museum, London, Ontario
The McIntosh Gallery, The University Of Western Ontario, London
The National Gallery of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Victoria Hospital, London, Ontario
Salah Bachir, Toronto, Ontario

Grants and Awards (selected)

2007 Internal Research Grant, UBC Okanagan,
Hampton Travel Grant, UBC Vancouver
2006 Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies Faculty Grant
2005 Okanagan University College, Grant in Aid
2004 *Fortis BC Award* to conduct multi-disciplinary research and create museum exhibition
The Meaning of Home and the Okanagan Fires, 2003
2000 The Government of Canada's Millennium Bureau's Partnership Program Grant, *Valley 2000*
2004, 02 Okanagan University College Professional Development Grants
1999 Canada Council Travel Grant,
1998, 97 Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance Grants in Visual Arts
1990 *Balai Seni Lukis Negara*, (National Gallery of Malaysia), First prize, Natl.. Photography Exhibition

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