

CAROL SELTER
ANIMAL STORIES



JUNE 11 - JULY 16, 2011

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Charlie James Gallery is delighted to present a solo show of Bay Area artist Carol Selter. The exhibition brings together three bodies of work that use dead animals to look at deadly threats to living animals from the actions—or inaction—of humans. The dead animals are taxidermied or jarred specimens and animal death masks originally from university teaching collections. The deadly threats encompass habitat destruction from deforestation, agricultural encroachment, and exotic invasive species; changes in ocean chemistry and sea level as climate change progresses; pollution both chemical and physical; deliberate killing of species labeled pests; overharvesting both legal and illegal, even accidents.

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The Calendar Pictures

The photographs of *The Calendar Pictures* (1990/2011) mock the conventional wildlife calendar that soothes us into thinking all is well with happy animals in undisturbed nature. Here also, dilapidated specimens (in some cases the same as those in the videos) are the subjects. But these animals were actually transported to their natural habitats on field trips in acts of symbolic reparation. There they were helped to “live again” and photographed in the manner of classical wildlife pictures. We see the familiar scenes and settings but they are unexpectedly populated with dead subjects. The ridiculous ways in which the dead animals have “been brought to life” are uncomfortably hilarious.



January, *The Wolf*, 1993/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).



February, *The Ground Squirrel*, 1993/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).

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March, The Meadowlark, 1993/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).



April, The Pond Turtle, 1990/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).

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May, The Seagull, 1990/2011. Pigment print,
24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).



June, The Weasel, 1993/2011. Pigment print,
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July, The Red-Shouldered Hawk, 1993/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).



August, The Frogs, 1990/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).

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September, The Opossums, 1990/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).



October, The Bats, 1990/2011. Pigment print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).

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November, The Duck, 1990/2011. Pigment print,
24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).



December, The Hummingbird, 1990/2011. Pigment
print, 24" x 30" (on 30" x 36" paper).

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A Turtle and Two Squirrels...

In the videos that comprise *A Turtle and Two Squirrels Walk Into a Bar...* (2011), taxidermied animals comment on or question changes that have occurred in their lives. Such events as deforestation or loss of fresh water cause consternation or bewilderment. A sea turtle swims laden with marine debris. A seagull searches for the inundated shoreline where it used to nest. The predicaments they experience are serious. Yet to see the clunky “animation,” to hear the specimens “speak” is to be amused. Humor and pathos form a dynamic equilibrium in these works.



Goddamn cars. video still, 2011, Single-channel video with sound, 0:57 min. Edition of 5.



I'm confused. video still, 2011, Single-channel video with sound, 1:06 min. Edition of 5.

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Where's the shoreline? video still, 2011, Single-channel video with sound. 1:09 min. Edition of 5.



Where's the water? video still, 2011, Single-channel video with sound. 1:06 min. Edition of 5.

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My god. video still, 2011, Single-channel
video with sound. 0:34 min. Edition of 5.



No comment. video still, 2011, Single-channel
video. 1:06 min. Edition of 5.

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God it's hot. video still, 2011, Single-channel video with sound. 0:52 min. Edition of 5.



Eichhornia crassipes,... video still, 2011, Single-channel video with sound. 0:26 min. Edition of 5.

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Burning Down the House

By contrast, the found animal death masks of *Burning Down the House* (2010) convey no shred of humor. They are solemn, dignified, the essence of gravitas, vastly silent and weighted. Named for perils facing their wild populations, their meaning expands to make them symbols of all creatures that stand to meet their demise because of human activities.

The animals of the death masks differ from those in the videos and photographs in another way. Those of the death masks retain their animalness, their “otherness,” undiluted by anthropomorphism. The creatures are mysterious and fascinating. In the photographs and even more so the videos, the specimens are deliberately anthropomorphized, given a mantle of human-like personality in order to make their situations more familiar and meaningful.



Agricultural Encroachment, 2010. Found death mask (anteater). Plaster, paint, anteater bristles, 3 1/4" x 15 1/2" x 8."



Deforestation, 2010. Found death mask (gibbon). Plaster, gibbon hair, sand, 3 1/4" x 8 1/2" x 9 1/2."

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Hunting, Trapping, Poisoning, 2010. Found death mask (coyote). Plaster, paint, coyote fur, 8" x 8 1/2" x 11."



Poaching, 2010. Found death mask (elephant calf). Plaster, paint, elephant bristles, 5" x 30" x 15."

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Marine Debris, 2010. Found death mask (fur seal pup). Plaster, paint, seal whiskers, 3" x 7 1/2" x 5."



Ocean Acidification, 2010. Found death mask (dolphin). Plaster, 17" x 11" x 12 1/2."



Car Hits, 2010. Found death mask (raccoon). Plaster, paint, raccoon hair, 6 1/2" x 6" x 8."

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Animal Stories, in installation at Charlie James Gallery - June 2011

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