**Transcript: Corinna Ghaznavi**

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**Producer: Troy David Ouellette**

**Speaker 1: Troy David Ouellette**

Hello and welcome to episode two of Media Art Other, the podcast where we discover the various practices of media arts professionals who work in everything from sound art and video to artists and curators who explore the curation of media art theory. Media Art Other, was generously funded by the Humanities Research Institute at Brock University. I’M your host, Troy David Ouellette. The Media Art Other podcasts are intended to enhance our understanding of otherness using media art examples as a platform for expressing differences that include things like: Identity, Disability Arts, Media Art Design and Interfaces, Environmental Otherness, Indigeneity and Post Colonialism. Each Artist and Curator brings unique perspective and scholarship to the fields of curation and media art practice. Included in the webpage, will be links to the researchers and organizations associated with each guest. In this second episode, I am pleased to present Researcher Dr. Corinna Ghaznavi. Dr. Ghaznavi is an independent curator and freelance writer who lives and works in Gray County, Ontario. Her research interests include examining human and non-human relationships as a way to move beyond binaries, racism and capitalism.

In 2012 she produced a touring exhibition entitled “Animal”, which featured the work of Lois Andison, Kenn Bass, Dagmar Dahle, Tom Dean, Rebecca Diederichs, John McEwan, Arnaud Maggs, Lyndal Osborne, Sue Rynard, and An Whitlock. The exhibition explored our relationship with animals as the embodiment of the natural, uncultivated realm, subjected to the scientific methodologies of field observation, specimen collecting and classification and it challenged the viewer to consider the Animal as the non-human “other”. Animals instill in us feelings of wonder, fear, loathing, and apathy or ambivalence. Please join me now in exploring the fascinating topic on animals with Dr. Corinna Ghaznavi.

**Speaker 2: Corinna Ghaznavi**

Animal, the term refers to a ghostly presence and a real being. The name covers everything non-human from insect to megafauna animals exist somewhere between humanity and technology, as companions as machines, labour, and as raw material processed in the same way as other manufactured commodities. Animals threaten human sovereignty in that they can never be fully controlled either physically or conceptually, which is why humans try to control animal representation, animals and their stories have traditionally been confined to sanctuaries circuses, zoos, curiosity, cabinets, and museums in the 17th century philosopher. René Descartes claimed that because the animal had no soul, it was merely a mechanical being, setting the stage for humans to both disregard and exploit animals for centuries to come. Cognitive euthologists studied animals in controlled environments rather than in their natural habitats. It was only in the late 20th century that euthologists demonstrated that animals have perception, purpose, intent, and consciousness that animals did not merely react, but responded. In both philosophy and science, humans manipulate data to ensure that they come out as superior, but if we shift the narrative, then we see that animals are often better than humans. Bird's ability to map, bats, ability to echolocate, a canine sense of smell and hearing, an orca’s ability to communicate and travel through vast distances and an ants ability to build high-rises complete with air conditioning. Who controls the narrative and who controls representation also controls how animals are treated. Animal representations abound in advertising, pop culture, YouTube videos, et cetera, and yet almost all of these images are linked to a controlled narrative. Animals have no human language and therefore no ability to self-represent in the human world. Cognitive euthologist, Donald Griffin was one of the first to say that even if it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to understand the nature of something, not understanding it does not mean that a different consciousness and experience does not exist. Philosopher Mary Midgley wrote, "We cannot limit ourselves to just describing outer manifestations we also have to refer to an agent's experience because actions convey feelings and intentions." In the interactive installation "Skull Stories", from 2012, Jordan Bennett makes space for the integrity of animal life cast skulls of a bear beaver rabbit and coyote are placed on pedestals. A USB drive is set into where the spinal cord would have been. When used by a viewer. A video is triggered showing the imagined, key moments, in that animal's life from the perspective of that animal. In the wild, in the natural world, pausing, observing, seeing, smelling. Bennett, a Miꞌkmaq, artist is interested in tapping into an animal's memory, energy and his ancestors relationship with and connection to animals. Donald Griffin, Mark Becca, Mary Midgley, Erica Fudge, and many, many others have written, "Just because there is a point beyond which we cannot see, measure or know; doesn't mean that we can just negate the interior life of another being." In his installation, Bennett re-imagines this interior life. In his 1974 text "What is it like to be a Bat", Thomas Nagel writes that the experience of a bat is so specific and so other that the limits of our own nature make it impossible for us to fully understand bat being without relying on the imagination. How then, can we imagine something so completely different than ourselves? In 1996, Brooklyn artist, Ken Bass pulled up two floorboards in an abandoned building in Soho and filled the space beneath with swamp water and plants. Over the course of 21 days, a hoard of mosquitoes was bred and released through an open window onto the streets of New York. Mosquitoes are "pests" and vectors for infectious diseases; however their larvae feed copepods essential for the global ecology and carbon cycle and a major food organisms for fish, whales and sea birds. This damp, sticky environment then captures an essential aspect of the animals life. Aganetha Dyck has used these to create sculptures. Sherry Hatt has collaborated with her companion animal to produce ravaged chew toys. Working with real animals can push past issues of representation. In 1967, Jannis Kounellis

placed 12 horses in a gallery in Rome. The exhibition itself was the physical confrontation between viewer and animal where the real presence of the animal was undeniable. In 1974, Joseph Beuys performed, "I Love America" for which he spent three days with the coyote and the Rene block gallery in New York. In 2005 Francis Alyse released a Fox named Bandit into the national portrait gallery in London where the Fox, his movements were recorded on 20 surveillance cameras situated throughout the museum. Foxes aren't our species, animals who have adapted to human presence and who thrive in close proximity to them. So even though this Fox has been manipulated into the museum, the work also speaks to the successful human and animal coexistence already happening in many urban centers. In 2002, Douglas Gordon brought a young Indian elephant "Mini" into the Gagosian Gallery, in New York city. In the large empty gallery space she performed a series of tricks. The resulting videos were projected onto two large screens set at odd angles to each other in the very gallery where the work was shot, but who was Mini? The large screens only ever show her, partially, suggesting she is too large contain physically or conceptually.

Other real animals used in art are dead animals. In 1991, Damien Hurst placed a shark into a tank of formaldehyde. For me, there's extreme discomfort, reminiscent of curiosity, cabinets and 17th century experiments in this work, along with the fact that the shark was caught in Australia and had to be replaced in 2006, because Hirst didn't like the way that it was disintegrating, which for me demonstrates the highest disregard for the animal and animal life. Another artist working with taxidermied animals quite often is Maurizio Catalan, he produced a dog curled up on the gallery floor, seemingly asleep because it looked so real. In 2008, he created two dogs and a chick choosing to focus on domestic animals that we live with and breed. Animals surround us all the time. So how can representations help us come nearer to animals and animal being.

Sculptor John McEwen has been using animals since the 1970s and his approach to representation is to suggest an animal figure rather than fully represent it. His steel slab animals appear, whole from a distance, or as a line when viewed from the front. But once we arrive at the sculpture, it is merely a metal plate. In this way, McEwen claims to protect the integrity of the animal because the artwork suggests, but does not confine it. Marianne Barkhouse often references first contact when French colonizers arrived in Canada. She displays porcelain objects on ornate tables and rich fabrics that mimic the opulence of Louis the 14th's court. But an animal is always inserted. An Arctic Hare or a coyote that has gripped to the end of the tablecloth and its mouth, and is on its way to bringing it all crashing to the ground. The animal always stands in for resilience, ecological balance, and indigenous knowledge. In "Settlement", a coyote and a badger stand side-by-side in a three sisters garden, strangely coyotes and badgers are cooperative hunters, so they become both a real example and a metaphor for sustainability and healing. In her video "Second Nature: Feral", Veronica Berklee proposes a different end, a land without humans. An immaculately constructed model house complete with joists and studs, wire and drywall and insulation is placed into a natural environment and with each season it becomes more and more one with its surroundings. The beams sag, the furniture is upturned and the bed becomes a feral den when a fox discovers it. Berklee has also made sculptures from repurposed wire, plastic and rubber. Here unidentifiable animal figures, lie prone like a decaying body found in Spring, but then it moves in small spurts when the kinetic mechanisms are triggered. A moment of resilience or a last sigh. We are experiencing a global pandemic facing the consequences of imperialism and colonialism of resource exploitation of the relentless push of capitalism. The climate is in crisis. The planet is in crisis. How we represent animals, how animals are treated, reflect not only on how we survive, but also how we consent, ethically, in this world. To be animal is to be both human and non-human as J.M Coetzee wrote, "To be a living being is to be full of joy." We are all interconnected. We ignore animals at our own peril.

**Speaker 1: Troy David Ouellette**

I want to thank you for listening. As we looked at the work of Dr. Corinna Ghaznavi, if you want to connect with some of the projects that Dr. Ghaznavi has produced and curated, please follow some of the show notes and links provided on the media art other podcasting site. I want to again, give a shout out to the listeners for taking the time to listen to Dr. Ghaznavi's in-depth research about animals. One thing that struck me was how she was able to bridge philosophy with ethics, science, and representation. She showed how the history of animal used by humans has been somewhat disastrous in the case of humans over other animals she pointedly states. "If we shift the narrative, then we see that animals are often better than humans. Bird's ability to map bats, ability to echolocate and canine sense of smell and hearing for instance, or an orca's ability to communicate and travel through vast distances or an ants ability to build high rises complete with air conditioning."

She goes on to say, "Who controls the narrative and who controls representation also controls how animals are treated." Join me next time. As we look at the work of Kevin Curtis Norcross, who has traversed the world, listening to the sounds of flora and fauna as a way to document movements, communication, and behavior which is disappearing in nature before our very eyes and is diminished as humanity expands into the hinterlands. If you enjoyed this podcast and you'd like to support the podcast, please share it with others. This is Troy David Ouellette saying, stay safe and be well.