

Furthermore, this relationship is interested in exposing the delusion taxidermy seeks. The heads with their glass eyes are there to convince us, yet they lose this power. When compared to images of the corresponding animals, such as a cow or a duck, that were photographed in nature, they take on the appearance of death masks.

In *Beautiful Creatures*, Waldron compromises her own individuality, by donning various roles, as well as the individuality of animals, by displaying their heads severed from their bodies, and their bodies cut in pieces. How could we not then pursue this game begun by the artist that consists in combining the distinctive features of beings and categories: the self and the other, the animal and meat, the creator and the worker, man and woman? In doing so, will we not ultimately merge with the animal?

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1. This observation comes from my PhD thesis on the use of food products in performative practices, from the first avant-garde to relational art (UQAM, 2011).

2. I am thinking, among others, of emblematic works such as *Spring Banquet* (1959) by Meret Oppenheim, *Meat Joy* (1964) by Carolee Schneemann, and *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987) by Jana Sterbak.

Beautiful Creatures

Kim Waldron

March 9 – April 13, 2013

Back to Animality

In our contemporary societies, we are detached from death. Death has become an incidental event, even a media spectacle, beyond which actual contact with pulsing blood is infrequent. There where, as if by magic, a pig's legs are turned into ham and a lamb's into shanks, the death of livestock is hidden. Thus, we almost forget the meat's source, as if the animal and its flesh are two independent entities.

This distinction, which makes living with our meat diet easier, is applied to almost all areas of society, even current art practices. Works in which food functions as a reference to the animal, and vice versa, are in fact rare¹. The project *Beautiful Creatures* (2010-2013), by Kim Waldron, does this without ever sacrificing the eminently complex relationship that links us to the animal. This long-term project explores all the steps involved in bringing the animal to our plates.

Waldron assumes the roles of the hunter, tracking small game, the slaughterer, killing animals from fowl to cattle, the butcher, cutting, carving and preparing red meat and poultry. The cook, who previously worked in a restaurant in Montreal, plans the menus, one for each type of animal slaughtered. They are served at home, among friends, or in the broader context of a restaurant or a spit roast, for the animal's size and the legislation relative to it affects how it is consumed.

From this quickly sketched yet laborious process, that lasted over a few years, follows a rich and protean work, that comes out of performative action and questions the status of documents, since the main remaining trace are photographs, with the stuffed—and emblematic—heads of the slaughtered animals, and an artist book inspired by cookbooks. For every exhibition, Waldron remixes and reorganizes these documents. OBORO is showing the most complete narrative thread thus far.

The real connection that these photographs show between the artist and her “participants”—from the slaughterhouse owner to the dinner guests—makes evident the contribution of the relational approach to this project. However, its driving source remains autofiction. From this, undoubtedly stems the interest to reengage with the documentation, to recompose the story of the *creature* from the real information gathered. The training that it took to slaughter an animal and carve its meat was genuine, meanwhile Waldron is not a professional slaughterer or butcher. She plays with this dichotomy of fiction and non-fiction but who is she revealing, the worker or the artist?

With *Beautiful Creatures*, Waldron deepens a practice that mixes fiction and autobiography, which she began ten years previously with *Working Assumption* (2001). For this series, she dressed in the clothes of professionals and photographed herself in action in their workplaces, as a way of questioning women's status in traditionally male-dominated jobs. The artist now takes up this type of work once more, expanding her critique of the female body. Firstly, because women are generally compared with animals or meat—a *cow*, a *chick*—and secondly, because women artists make distinctive use of animal flesh. As of the mid-twentieth century, their work has addressed what is at stake in femininity—appearance, sexuality, pregnancy—by suggesting a reversal of the corporeal layer, from the inside out². This proposal, which is perhaps secondary in Waldron's *creature*, is nevertheless reinforced by two juxtaposing photographs in the artist book: on the left, meat on a spit, on the right, the artist several months pregnant.

In 1929, in the sixth issue of the magazine *Documents*, Georges Bataille established a relationship between two photographs: one, by Elie Lotar, of cow hooves leaning against a wall, the other, anonymous, of dancers lined up on a stage behind a lowered curtain with only their legs visible. He associates light entertainment with the serial carving of animals. Thus, the frivolous image is imbued with morbidity and that of the slaughterhouse reveals the carelessness with which animals are killed. In *Beautiful Creatures*, Waldron associates photographs of animals before being slaughtered with photographs of their stuffed heads. Here too, this results in crossing pleasure, of a hunt whose trophies reveal the ornamental aspect, with the impact of a carcass.