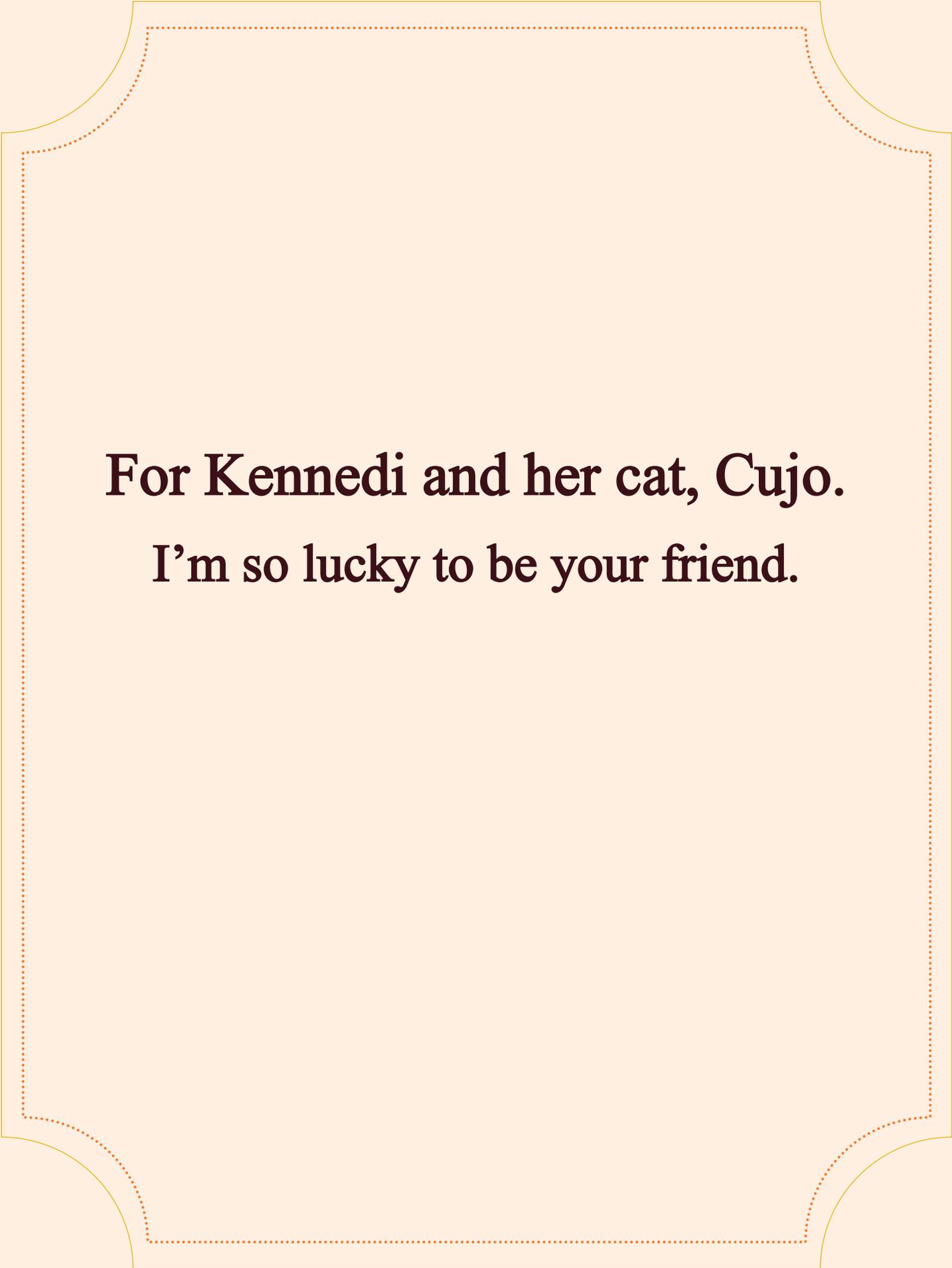




# **Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art**

Curated by Alessandra Waugh



**For Kennedi and her cat, Cujo.  
I'm so lucky to be your friend.**

# Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art

A Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art Virtual  
Exhibit

Curated By Alessandra Waugh



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**Alessandra Waugh is a student at Utah State University pursuing a Bachelor's of Fine Art in Drawing and Painting with a minor in Folklore. With her main mediums being pen, ink, graphite, and oil paint, she is always looking to expand her understandings of artistic expression through different methods, contexts, and conceptualizations.**

# Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art

*A Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art* analyses the representation of animals in Latin American artworks to interpret the intimacy of self and our relationships. The transitory nature of experience and relation is often manifested through the ever-evolving practice of art. Art becomes a mirror in this way, for the artist, the viewer, the world, much like the animals in these works.

In *A Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art*, 10 works are presented as vehicles to expand upon death, duality, identity, and connection in a fleeting world. Including fantastic and mythologic creatures, this exhibit harbors an assortment of animal elaboration in addition to the artistic variety. Diverse in style and formulation, some of the artists featured in *A Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art* include Tarsila do Amaral, Rufino Tamayo, and Eugenio Dittborn.

Latin American art utilizes animal representations to explore the expression of ephemeral themes. Themes of death, of duality, of identity and characterization, of connection. With animals as a guide for the mediation between human conceptualization and natural processes of change, *A Transient Nexus: Animal Representation in Latin American Art* illuminates the often murky and illusioned notion of understanding.



Tarsila do Amaral, *A Cuca*, 1924, Oil on Canvas.

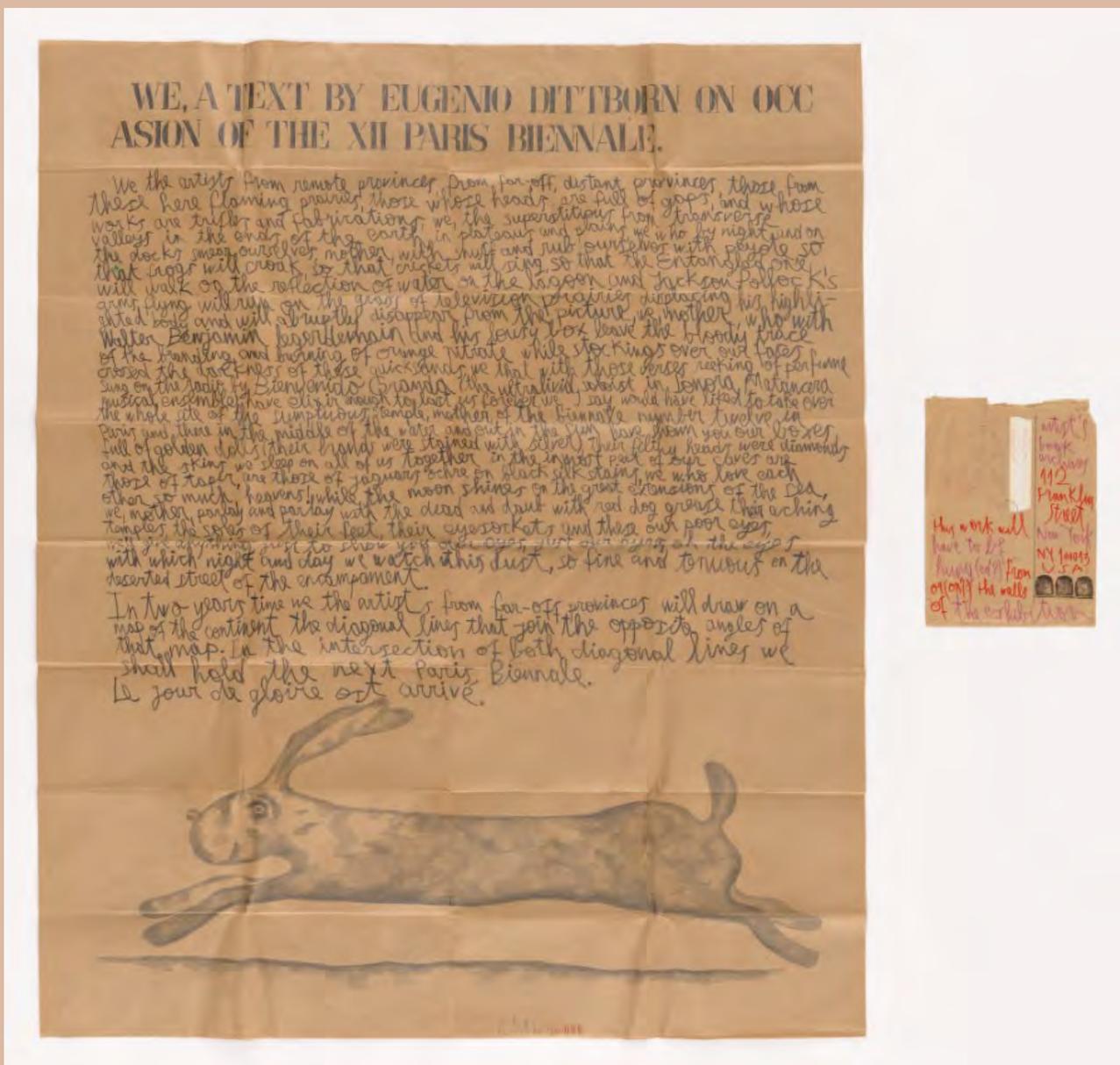
Tarsila do Amaral was at the forefront of the Brazilian Modernist movement, with her volumetric cubism and usage of bright colors, her work continues to inspire. *A Cuca* is a bright and colorful scene of a meeting of animals, both fantastical and realistic. In a letter to her daughter, Amaral writes about this painting, “a strange animal, in the middle of the woods, with a frog, an armadillo, and another invented animal”. A *Cuca* is a recurring folk figure in Latin America, the creature is a boogeyman archetype, stealing and punishing children who misbehave. In the Brazilian representation, she is a fearsome alligator humanoid.

Amaral’s rendition, however, is bright and appealing with an air of playfulness and warmth. In direct conflict of her appearance and purpose, the viewer derives that her role has altered from predator to companion. The surrounding environment as colorful and bright as she is, the mind reverts to a child-like imagination of the world around us, things are not as threatening as they seem.

A Chilean-born artist, Eugenio Dittborn was a leading member of the Avanzada. Dittborn's *Airmail Paintings* are a series of political-conceptual art objects, made from materials easy to acquire and ship. Dittborn's work is one of transience of both a socio-political nature and physical nature as the piece is changed by its journey from artist to museum, museum to viewers, and to artist again.

The rabbit drawn on this *Airmail Painting* is a direct representation of this transience, in a perpetual state of extension, the propulsion of the actions before it allows for the stride that crosses boundaries. This can be further interpreted as the artist's intention to depict a call to action to care about Latin American artists and people on a global scale, as they continue to suffer under oppressive dictatorships and a lack of recognition. A vital change must be made.

Eugenio Dittborn, *Airmail Painting*, 1982, Pencil on paper, envelope with marker, ballpoint pen, stamps, and pressure-sensitive tape with stamps.





Miguel Calderón, *Serie Historia Artificial #8*, 1995, Photography.

Miguel Calderón, A Mexican contemporary artist, uses provoking imagery to illicit controversy and reactionary responses. Meant to be a commentary on the violence of Narco culture, *Serie Historia Artificial* consists of a collection of photographs of Calderón holding guns to a variety of taxidermied animals.

In *Serie Historia Artificial #8*, he is shown forcing a handgun into a tiger's mouth as it is frozen in its attack. The tiger is unable to fight for itself, despite its nature and appearance. A projection of how powerful drug lords hold leverage over a people, Calderón's audacious aggravation flaunts his autonomy and mocks the tigers, the peoples, lack of. A cruel coin whose sides depict the generational trauma of colonization, brutality and death resulting.

Tolsá was trained in classical and neoclassical sculpture at the Academia de San Carlos in Valencia. Tolsá moved from Spain to Mexico and made the controversial *Equestrian portrait of Charles IV* in Mexico City. A tyrannical conqueror in the homeland of the people he disempowers, the horse acting as an extension of tyranny, a means of that conquer. It is not a native species; it is not here as a peaceful traveler. During the Mexican Independence, many wanted the statue destroyed and replaced, but it was relocated due to its artistic importance. A tribute statue of *Equestrian portrait of Charles IV* made by the Sebastián stands where the original once stood, it's been dubbed "*El Caballito*" which translates to "The Horse". A decision to embody a new subject. A successor to the previous legacy? No, a new piece made to allow for the narrative, the identity, the people elect. Not the subjugation forced upon them by foreign powers.

Manuel Tolsá, *Equestrian portrait of Charles IV* ("*El Caballito*"), 1801, Bronze





Saturnino Herrán, *La Cosecha*, 1909, Oil on Canvas.

Sarurnino Herrán was a key proponent of the Mexican Modernist movement. In *La Cosecha*, a group of people are loading their harvest onto 2 oxen, a woman and her baby are under the shade, but still, she is carrying both her child and a bundle of crop.

The inclusion of the oxen is designed to complement the woman's identity. Oxen are steady and reliable, strong and of even temperament, the compositional parallel and her bold, yet soft features affirm that they are each other's mirrors. The relationship of the woman and the oxen is one of solidarity and labor, but working with the harvest, the change, rather than against it.



*El Lanzón*, Chavín, c. 900 – 200  
BCE, Granite.

Located in the middle of a dark maze in Chavín de Huantar, an ancient temple built by the Chavín, *El Lanzón* towers above the viewer at 15 feet tall. The structure resembling a plow, it's hypothesized that this is a depiction of an agrarian god.

The looming statue is a composite creature, a vertically symmetrical anthropomorphized jaguar-esque carving with snakes for hair, stretching towards the heavens through an opening in the maze above its head. A god of both earth and cosmos, in tune with the ebb and flow of the stars and the harvest, a duality of the limited earth and the vastness of space.





*“Killer Whale”*, Nazca, c. 1 CE to 800 CE, Ceramic.

Striking and bold, this ceramic sculpture of a whale-like creature is adorned in bright reds, deep blacks, and illustrated sides culminate into a complex, possibly narrative, piece. While its true function is unknown, there is no doubt of its spiritual connections. *“Killer Whale”* is a composite creature, with the legs and arms of a human, this animal may be a manifestation of the edge between worlds, with the literal combination of the earth and sea, and implications of life and death, the spirit and the physical.



Rufino Tamayo, *Animals*, 1941, Oil on Canvas.

Tamayo depicts two dogs, defensive and dangerous, in a cornered composition giving an air of tension with the claustrophobic use of space. Expressive of his Zapotec and Mexican heritage, Tamayo often used pre-Columbian ceramics as inspiration. In this case, he draws from funerary terracotta sculptures of dogs, as they serve as guides to the underworld in Aztec and Mayan beliefs.

By extension, the dogs in this painting act as omens of death, surrounded by the vibrant blue bones of an unknown origin and under an unknown threat. As this was painted on the eve of the United States entering WWII, the death caused by WWII and the death caused by colonialism are joined by this image.

Meant as a receptacle for the blood and hearts torn from offerings of human sacrifice, this large sculpture resembles a stylized jaguar poised to pounce on its prey. Receptacles such as this are commonly found in Aztec temples and usually paired with an Eagle Cuauhxcalli to represent complimentary elements such as the cyclical day and night, earth and sky, eras of light and dark.

The bowl divot in the back of the jaguar is decorated with depictions of the gods Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli. Tezcatlipoca being the central Aztec deity for night, spiritual acts, and often represented by jaguars. Huitzilopochtli being the central Aztec deity for the sun, war, and often represented by eagles or hummingbirds. This further supports the shift and balance of opposites, a balance that requires death.

*Ocelotl Cuauhxcalli*, Aztec, c. 1250 – 1500, Volcanic Rock Sculpture.





*Serrania de la Lindosa Cave Paintings, c. 1180 – 1260 BCE, Cave Paintings.*

In 2017 and 2018, excavations of the Cerro Azul Rock Shelter in the Columbian Amazon unearthed the “Serrania de la Lindosa Cave Paintings”, one of the largest sprawls of rock art in Latin America. Pigments derived from scraped ochre stain the walls of the cave with images of handprints, hunting scenes, geometric shapes, humanoid figures, and animals, including Ice Age megafauna.

Viewing art from pre-history is a conversation of the ephemeral in and of itself, an exchange of ancestor and descendent. Megafaunas exist only in their remains and in depiction, their climate transformed, and their descendants evolved.

The earth has the final claim, and the narrative of ancient life scrawled on her geologic records endure for a new eye to behold.



I would like to thank NEHMA for hosting this virtual exhibit, it's been a unique opportunity and experience to research and present this exhibit.

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This virtual exhibition is sponsored by the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art and Utah State University's Art and Design department.



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