

DIE KONFERENZ DER TIERE “An exhibition for children and connoisseurs”

Villanovan culture, Antoine-Louis Barye, J.J. Grandville,
Jean-Jacques Feuchère, Camille Saint-Saëns, Roger Godchaux, Sergei Prokofiev,
Walt Disney, Lynn Chadwick, Michel de Yougoslavie, Tracey Emin,
Akim Monet, Dhafer Al Shehri, Indian Folklore

In this exhibition, the 10th at Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet GmbH, we showcase artists who use animals as a vehicle for their artistic intent. Pre-Christian, 19th C., Modern and Contemporary bronze sculpture; music; photography and works on paper—all depict animals through the artist’s eye, serving the artist’s aim to provoke, teach, or simply to delight.

OPENING: Friday, September 19, 2014 – 6 to 9 p.m.

EXHIBITION RUN: September 19 to December 13, 2014

LOCATION: Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Potsdamerstraße 81b, Berlin

One hundred years ago this month, the Great War was raging: brutal trench warfare on the Western Front; horrific artillery battles on the Eastern. That war ended in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where the Treaty of Versailles was signed and the League of Nations was created. But the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 brought no lasting peace.

Thirty years later, World War II, the “war to end all wars,” engulfed four continents. That war ended in the Paris Peace Conferences of 1947, where the Paris Peace Treaties were signed and the seeds of the European Union were sowed. But the Paris Peace Conferences of 1947 brought no lasting peace.

Even as you read this, there are currently 64 countries at war, either with each other or internally, involving 564 militias, guerrilla forces, and separatist groups.

One might ask the rhetorical question, “What, if anything, have we learned?” And “What in the world does art with an animal theme have to do with any of this?”

Representations of animals have always been teaching tools, even as they have been artistic expressions in their own right. Indeed, animals have figured in art for as long as man has existed to create it. Whether it be the human voice or a musical instrument imitating an animal’s cries, or the human hand sculpting or drawing an animal’s pose, the connection between man’s creativity and the animal form is profound and enduring.

Animal representations have often served didactic purposes. Think of the Old Testament story of Noah's Ark, Aesop's Fables, Mother Goose, or Walt Disney cartoons. They have served religious purposes, too, embodying abstract concepts: the dove as the Holy Ghost, the elephant as Ganesh, the serpent as evil. They have served political purposes through heraldry, symbolizing might and power: the eagle as Deutschland or the United States of America, the rampant lion as Great Britain. And they have also served as symbols of human traits, both good and bad: the sly fox, the slow but steady tortoise, the obsequious toad, the prudent ant, the busy bee....

Die Konferenz der Tiere ("The Animals' Conference"), as its name suggests, uses animals to develop its story. It was written in 1949 by Emil Erich Kästner (1899-1974), shortly after the end of World War II. In this children's book -also written for adults, Kästner delivers a pacifist message through the world's animals, who unite to successfully force humans to disarm and make peace. The message was an intensely personal one for Kästner, who was 15 years old when World War I broke out. He would later write "this brought an end to my childhood." He was drafted in 1917 and was stationed with a heavy artillery company. The brutality of his military training and the slaughter of the war made him a life-long pacifist.

It is to honor those who gave their lives for peace and those who still strive for it today, that we offer this exhibition as a meditation on the creative, positive force of art as a counterbalance to the destructive, negative force of war. We invite you to contemplate the beauty here as a respite from the conflict in the world beyond. Take a moment to decompress, admire, enjoy, and dream.

Welcome to the Animals' Conference!