

BESTIARY: animals, allegories, environments



Filemón Santiago Avendaño

Mexico, b.1958

Untitled (c. 1979)

Watercolor

18 x 24 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

Animals were privileged and miraculous beings in ancient Oaxaca, the region in southwestern Mexico where Santiago Avendaño lives. Many of his works celebrate the rituals and mythologies of this indigenous world, exploring the metaphor of the animal body as a site of desire, redemption, and violence. Levitating in space, the animals in this watercolor defy gravity and nature: they seize and collide with each other, their bodies joining in an endless circle of life.

QUESTION

Can you name any specific animals within the piece?
Are any familiar to you?

How are the animals in the painting interacting with one another? What activities are they doing?

How does the artist create a sense of movement?

The animals seem to be floating in space. Would that feeling change if the background were rendered differently?

CREATE

Find images of several different animals in magazines or online and print them out. Cut the shapes out and paste different parts of several animals together to create a few hybrid animals. Paste your hybrid animals onto heavy weight paper and, after the glue dries, cut the animals out to create stencils.

On a large piece of white paper, trace the stencils you created, arranging the animals in different directions to create interesting movement. Color or paint the animals how you wish. How does the mood of your artwork compare to Santiago's?



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Ruth Bess

Brazil, b.1935

Tapir Hereditariiedade [Tapir-Inheritance], 1968

Etching with embossing a/p

22 1/2 x 16 1/2 in.

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Educated in Germany and in Paris, Bess worked as a magazine illustrator in Venezuela before settling in Brazil. Many of her engravings illustrate animals and their biological functions, often endowing them with a sense of humanity. In this work, the pregnant tapirs represent the reproduction of the species. Tapirs, plant-eating mammals that live in South and Central America, as well as Southeast Asia, are becoming endangered species. Distinguished by their nose and upper lip, which function like a small elephant trunk, tapirs can live to twenty years and grow to eight feet in length. Bess's tapirs are connected to one another by pregnancy or the act of touch.

QUESTION

What story do you think the artist was trying to tell when creating this artwork?

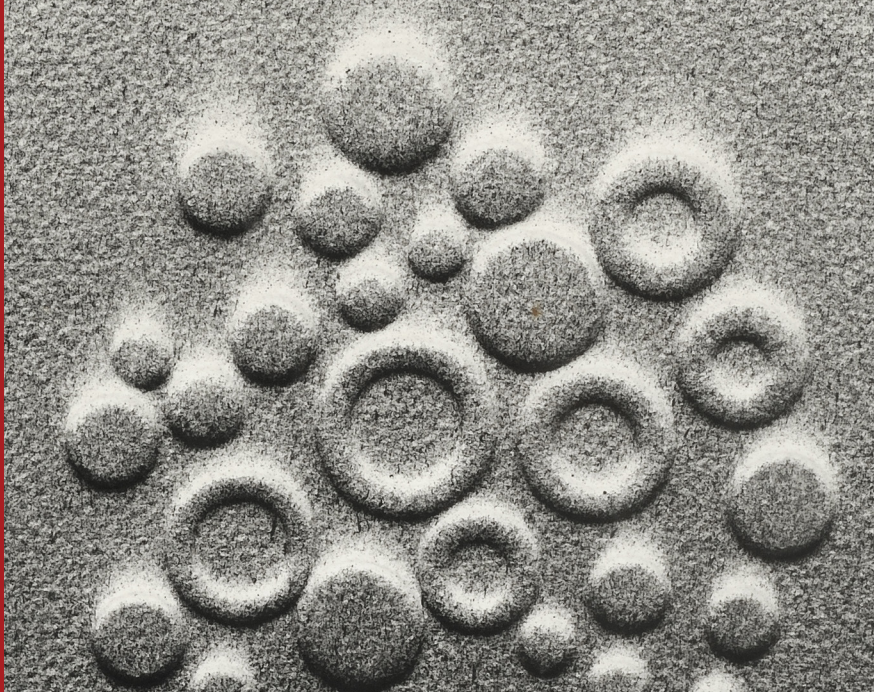
How are the animals related to one another?

How does the artist use patterns in this artwork?

CREATE

Fold a piece of colored construction paper in half. Using a pencil, draw an animal, making sure that its legs touch the bottom of the folded part of the paper. Carefully cut out your animal, leaving the legs connected at the fold. When you unfold the page, you will have created a mirror image of your animal. Using a white crayon or oil pastel, draw patterns on your animals.





Omar Rayo

Colombia, b.1928, d.2010

Aspecto Lunar, 1960

Cut zinc with ink

7 7/8 x 7 7/8 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

Gift of W.E. Gathright

“The trace of an object—that degree of sublime purity of that which is there without being present—nearly a tactile discovery fashioned by the gaze, is the miracle that Omar Rayo reveals to us.”

–Luis Felipe Noé

A self-taught artist, Rayo established himself as a leading printmaker in the 1960s while working in Mexico and New York. Although characteristically geometric and abstract, his prints frequently reference everyday objects from popular culture: safety pins, shoes, plates, and bicycles. In this work, Rayo invites us to imagine the surface of the moon four years before the U.S. spacecraft, Ranger 7, took the first photographs of its craters.

QUESTION

Why do you think the artist represented the moon this way? Does the moon look like this to you?

Would you think this was an artwork depicting the moon if not for the title *Aspecto Lunar* (Lunar Aspect)? If not, what would you see?

Americans landed on the moon nine years after this work was made. Do you think the artist would have shown the moon differently if he made it after the moon landing?

CREATE

Create a texture rubbing using objects from around the house. Glue found objects (like buttons or bottle caps) onto a cardboard circle to create a variety of textures. Once dry, place a piece of paper over the objects and use the flat side of a crayon to create a texture rubbing.

OR Glue buttons of different sizes onto a cardboard circle. Then cover the circle with a sheet of aluminum foil and press around the buttons to create the texture of the moon. How does your work compare to the artist's?





Carlos Alfonzo

Cuba, b.1950, d.1991

Fire, 1981

Mixed media on paper

48 x 32 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

Gift of Elena and William Kimberley

Alfonzo arrived in Miami in 1980 through the Mariel boatlifts, a program that allowed thousands of Cubans to enter the United States. He struggled to find work and to paint in his first years in Miami, and *Fire* is one of very few works that date from this period. Explosive and cathartic, the painting expresses the vital energy of fire itself, described by swirling lines and abstract shapes that recall the human body. Many of his paintings were partly autobiographical, adapting a neo-expressionist style to reference symbols of Santería, an Afro-Cuban religion influenced by Catholicism, and his experience of living with AIDS.

QUESTION

Do you think the title of this artwork, *Fire*, is appropriate? Why or why not?

Do you see any objects in this artwork? If so, what? Do you see a fire or the remnants of a fire?

What story could the artist be telling through this painting?

What mood do you think the artist was trying to convey with this painting? Why do you think that? How did the artist use his paintbrush to create the mood you see?

CREATE

Listen to several types of music (fast, slow, loud, soft, Rock and Roll, Classical, R&B, Pop, etc.). As you listen to the words and the beat of the music, think of the mood the musical artist wanted to convey and the mood that you feel while listening. Use oil pastels, colored pencils, or crayons to draw the mood of the music using only lines and shapes (no images of faces, animals, or specific objects). Once you have completed several artworks, title each work based on the mood you conveyed.



BODIES IN EXILE: migration, heritage, absence



Eloisa Castellanos

Cuba, b.1938

Untitled, 1975

Pen and ink on paper

22 x 30 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

Born in Cuba, Eloisa Castellanos studied drama and painting before moving permanently to the United States in the 1970s. In this drawing, she creates a fantastical landscape, populated by creatures, both human and divine, that take pleasure in the bounty and wonder of the natural world. With eyes wide open, the central figure stares outward, its body simultaneously pulled to pieces and deeply rooted in the ground. In the work, mind, body, and earth merge into one.

QUESTION

What sorts of animals do you see?

What might the flock of birds represent?

What activities are the people performing?

What stands out to you about the face? How would you describe it?

What does the bottom of the neck remind you of?
What do you think that represents?

Do the smaller images come together to make up a larger story? If so, what would that story be?

CREATE

Think about your family, those you consider family, and about your personal history. Where have they lived and where have you lived? What has made you who you are today? Draw a map, tree, or diagram that describes these places and the activities that they do or did. Make small drawings or doodles that describe who you are.



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BODIES IN EXILE: migration, heritage, absence



Juan Downey
Chile, b. 1940, d.1993
Untitled (left), 1965

Pencil on paper attached to cardboard
20 x 23 1/2 in.

and *18 Works of Art* (right), 1969
Collage with etchings and drawings
22 x 40 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

A pioneering video artist in the 1970s, Downey used drawings and prints to explore the nature of systems and the ways in which humans interact with machines. In these two works, muscular, robotic “supermen” anticipate the wired, technologically savvy generation of today. Networked inside and out, their bodies plug into the energy currents surrounding them, connecting to each other—by invisible wavelengths and mechanical apparatuses—in an infinite loop.

QUESTION

What do you first think of when viewing these two works? Why?

Downey was interested in advancing technologies. How do these artworks convey that interest?

In *Untitled*, where does the process begin and where does it end? Does it end? What narrative can you create while looking at the piece?

CREATE

Think of a moment in your life where an act of regeneration (e.g. being restored, renewed, or made better after a hardship) has taken place. This could have been a physical or emotional event. What caused the regeneration and what steps did it take you through? Illustrate this process through a story board. Take a sheet of paper and fold it several times to create equal sized squares. Draw the steps of your life event in each square.





Víctor Vázquez
Puerto Rico, b. 1950

Untitled, c. 1987

Photograph

11 3/4 x 17 1/4 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

“There is in my work the residue of the bruised and transfixed body, the body as an object, of memory as that which refuses to stop living and to stop being, of sacrifice, of fragmentation. . . . The body functions as a structure of the world, as a reflective mirror of the self and the other.”

--Víctor Vázquez

Vázquez meditates deeply on the body in this photograph, staging his anonymous subject on a classic “no man’s land”: an island within an island. A metaphor of isolation, the island alludes to Puerto Rico, a former Spanish colony that has chafed at times against its status, since 1952, as a commonwealth of the United States. Its body politic is here represented in the solitary form of a woman, stoic and strong as she holds her ground.

QUESTION

How do you think the woman feels (what does her face tell us)? Is this a positive or negative image?

Where do you think the woman is standing? Does this look like a tropical island?

Why did the photographer choose to depict a woman, not a man?

What do you know about the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States?

“No man is an island” – what does it mean to stand on an island?

Have you ever stood anywhere that had symbolic meaning to you?

CREATE

What do you consider your home to be? Think of what reminds you of home. Find objects that remind you of home throughout the house or your neighborhood. Look for things with different colors, textures, patterns, and shapes to add visual interest. Combine your objects using a hot glue gun or other strong glue to create a found object sculpture.



TOPOLOGIES: places, memories, histories



Antonio Henrique Amaral

Brazil, b. 1935

Banana, 1975

Oil on canvas

66 3/4 x 50 1/2 in.

Collection OAS AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

A popular and familiar fruit, the banana is transformed into a monumental subject in Amaral's painting. Painted in the green and yellow colors of the Brazilian flag, *Banana* may be seen as a metaphor for the artist's country and, in a more universal way, for much of Latin America. The banana's bruised, overripe skin suggests its vulnerability, a reference to the political instability of many South and Central American countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Sometimes referred to as "banana republics," these nations often depended on a single crop for economic survival. In Brazil, bananas have long symbolized the country's tropical culture as well, perhaps most enduringly in the persona of the actress and samba dancer Carmen Miranda and the commercial Chiquita Banana that she inspired.

QUESTION

Why would the artist choose to paint a banana?
Why not some other fruit?

How did the artist make this banana visually interesting?

A banana republic is a nation that is largely dependent on selling one crop or trade. How many items sold by a banana republic do you think are in your house at this time?

How can you relate to this artwork?

CREATE

Pick a common household fruit or food item. Research the origins of the food item and educate yourself on the history behind it. Where did it come from? Who farmed or made it? After your research, paint or draw the fruit/food using stylistic choices that you think reflect its history. Think of how the colors, quality of line, and way you depict the fruit can affect meaning.



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