

stir^{world}

Singh, Asmita, “Why Look at Animals?’ consider art, ethics & ecosystems beyond the Anthropocene,”
Stir World, May 23, 2025

This monumental exhibition at EMET in Greece reaffirms the experience of non-human animals as sentient beings.

“The pervasive belief in human superiority – speciesism – has justified the violent commodification of animals and nature,” writes art historian and exhibition curator Katerina Gregos, artistic director, National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMET), in her curatorial note for the exhibition *Why Look at Animals? A Case for the Rights of Non-Human Lives in Athens, Greece*. Inspired by John Berger’s eponymous 1980 essay, the exhibition, on view from May 16, 2025 –February 15, 2026, sparks critical engagement on the ethical and political realities that shape human-animal relationships. Featuring 60 multidisciplinary artists, it considers the social and systemic invisibility of animals and their subsequent marginalisation. *Why Look at Animals?* challenges us to see non-human animals as conscious, responsive beings and not merely as the ‘Other’.



The Infinity Engine, detail, multimedia installation, 2024, Lynn Hershman Leeson

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Lynn Hershman Leeson and Altman Siegel, San Francisco and Bridget Donabue, New York

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(Front to back) Installation view, *Homo stupidus stupidus*, 2008, Maarten Vanden Eynde, private collection, Slovenia; *Celebrities/Ovine Condition*, 2014, Nabil Boutros

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Maarten Vanden Eynde and Nabil Boutros

“This exhibition and its wider programme explore – among other things – the various connections between the interconnected issues of colonialism, industrialisation and the marginalisation of animals,” Gregos said to STIR. “So one can see how animals [...] thus [disappeared] from everyday sight, become commodified products for human consumption and entertainment.” Why Look at Animals? encompasses smaller exhibitions, solo installations and events over nine months. The works on display across the lower ground floor of the museum show that the rise of advanced technology marked the beginning of large-scale habitat loss. Other exhibits highlight the significant barriers animals encounter in urban environments and the crucial role of animal justice initiatives in addressing these issues. The exhibition seeks to imagine a more equitable future through ecofeminism, animism and animal advocacy, among other notions.

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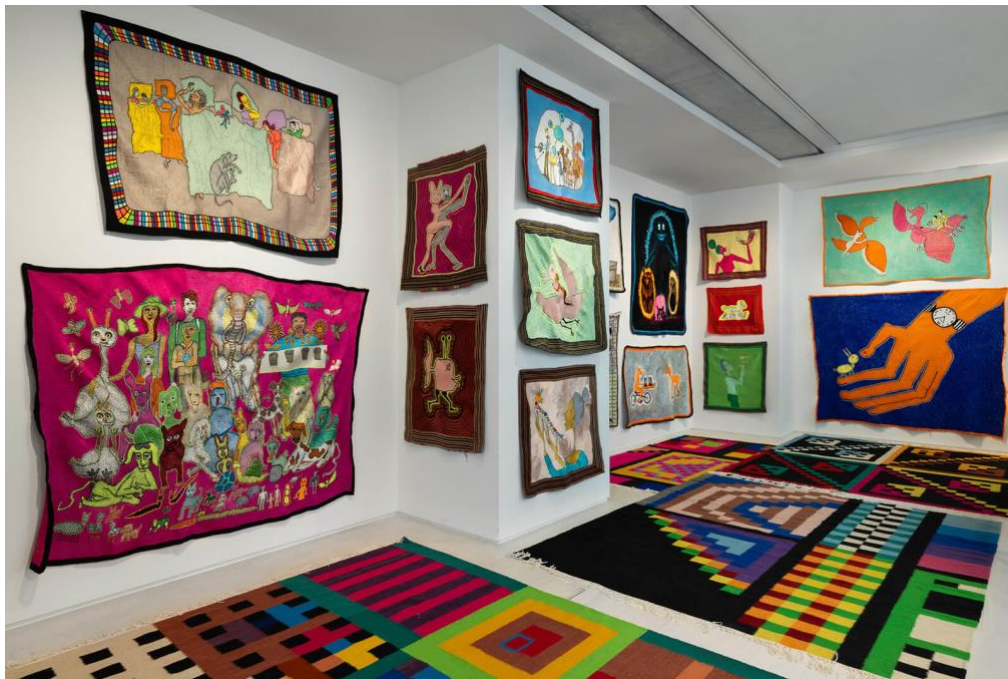
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(L-R) Installation view, *Men and Game*, 1998, Mark Dion; Clara, 2016, Rossella Biscotti; L'Alalie, 2010, Art Orienté Objet

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Mark Dion and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, Los Angeles, and Rossella Biscotti and Art Orienté



We We, installation view, 2011-2024, Jakup Ferri

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Jakup Ferri and Städtische Galerie, Nordhorn and Ferda Art Platform, Istanbul

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The Fuzzy Gaze, detail, 2025, Kasper Bosmans, produced by EMΣT

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Kasper Bosmans

The two solo showcases within the exhibition, by the Congo-born and Brussels-based photographer Sammy Baloji, *Echoes of History, Shadows of Progress* and Greek artist Janis Rafa's *We betrayed the horses*, present multimedia artworks and site-specific installations. These interventions strive to counter conventional representations of human-animal interaction, which indubitably prescribe more agency to humans than their counterparts. Rafa's visual compositions consider the dynamics of control and betrayal between humans and horses, revealing the absence of consent in their relationship. She presents a new series of works including sculpture, immersive installations and video art exploring "the desire for, and domination of, the animal body", Gregos notes. Belgium-based interdisciplinary artist Kasper Bosmans presents *The Fuzzy Gaze*, a 30-metre mural which examines the roles humans assign to animals as instruments of utility, spectacle or convenience. The installation references the animal gaze in artificially crafted contexts like the zoo or a circus. Gregos contends that such works highlight "our estrangement from animals as well as how we so easily recognise them, not in their natural habitats but in those we created in order to exploit them as product, entertainment or spectacle".

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Aquare. The Future that Never Was, video still, single channel video, 2023, Sammy Baloji

Image: Courtesy of Sammy Baloji and Imane Farès, Paris



Installation view of *Sammy Baloji. Echoes of History, Shadows of Progress*, 2025

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Sammy Baloji and Imane Farès, Paris

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Installation view of *Sammy Baloji. Echoes of History, Shadows of Progress*, 2025

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Sammy Baloji and Imane Farès, Paris

British artist Emma Talbot's newly commissioned textile installation *Human/Nature* (2025) features surreal imagery, mythological and cosmic motifs, chimaeras and embodies ways of conveying layered cultural and political stories across contemporary settings. Rooted in feminist discourse, Talbot's installation is accompanied by an animated film, *You Are Not the Centre (Inside the Animal mind)*, co-commissioned and co-produced by EMΣT and Copenhagen Contemporary, Denmark. It features a female protagonist who departs from an anthropocentric viewpoint to probe alternate and non-human ways of perceiving and experiencing reality, living through the experiences of a dog, spider, deer and a captive bird.

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Human/Nature, acrylic on silk, 2025, Emma Talbot, produced by EMΣT

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Emma Talbot and Galerie Onrust



Human/Nature, installation view, 2025, Emma Talbot, produced by EMΣT

Image: Paris Tavitian; Courtesy of Emma Talbot and Galerie Onrust

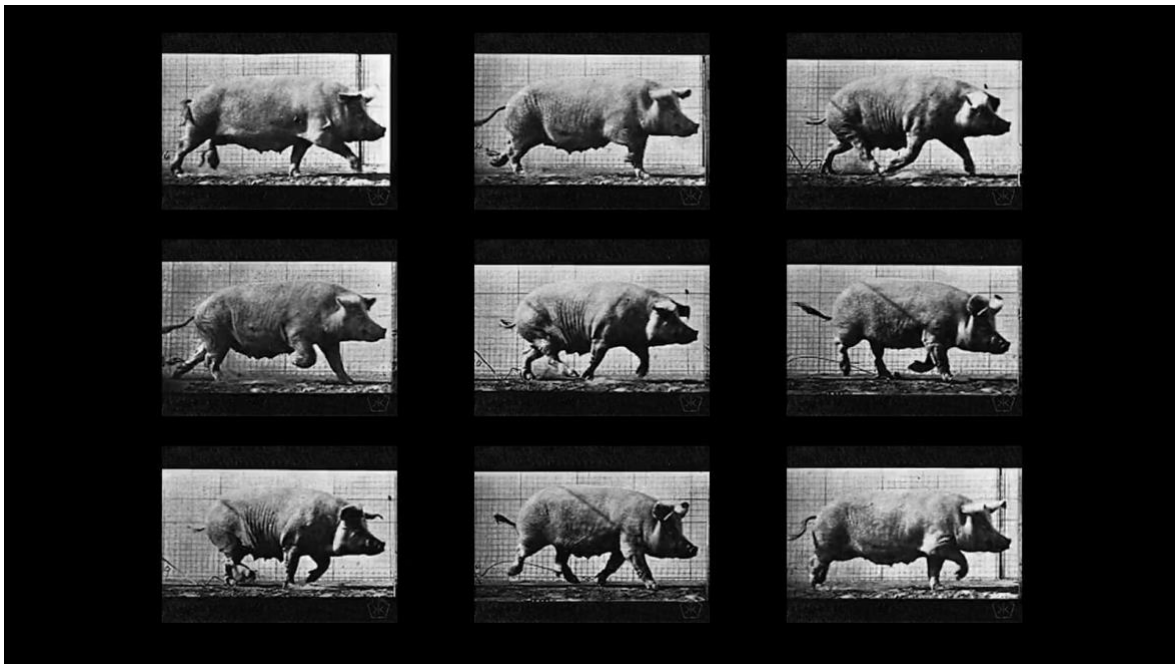
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The exhibition also draws parallels between the dehumanisation of animals and the treatment of marginalised human populations, stressing in the curatorial note that both are framed as “inferior, reinforcing systems of oppression and violence”. Greek artist Paris Petridis’ *Bethlehem* (2012) is an inkjet print on archival paper, suggesting a focus on contested spaces and the aftermath of human conflict. Singaporean artist and educator Ang Siew Ching’s multidisciplinary practice spans moving image, installation art and photography. Ching’s *High-Rise Pigs* (2025) is an 18-minute single-channel video that looks at the origins of pork consumption. The film highlights the physical structures of modern pig farming and critiques the systemic objectification of animals, drawing parallels between industrial practices and broader societal issues.



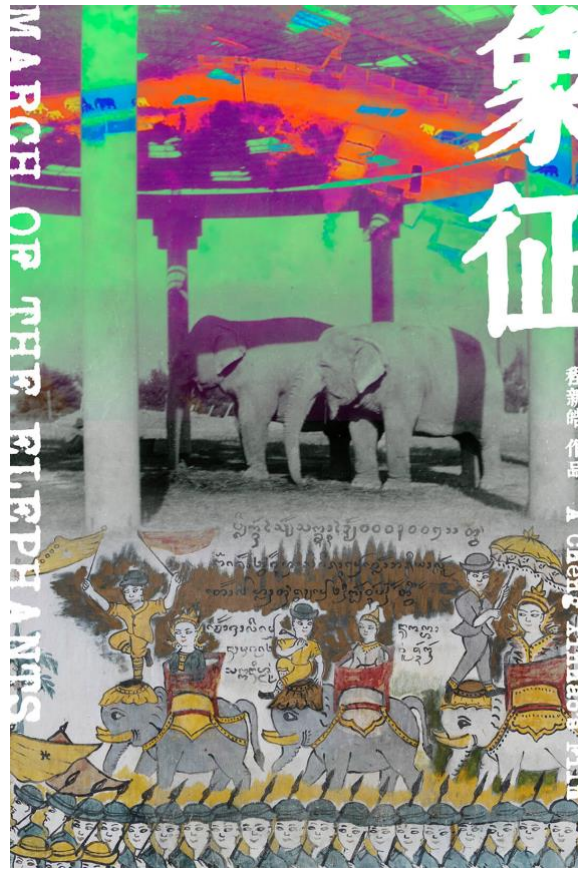
High-Rise Pigs, video still, single channel video, 2025, Ang Siew Ching
Image: Courtesy of Ang Siew Ching

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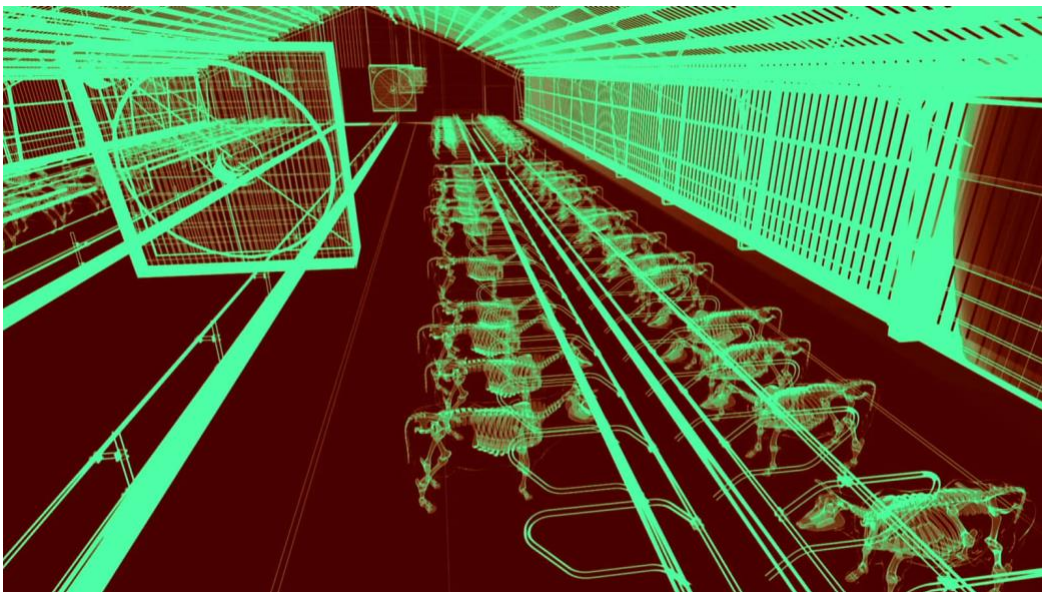
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March of the Elephants, single channel video, 2022, Cheng Xinhao

Image: Courtesy of Cheng Xinhao and Tabula Rasa Gallery, Beijing



Ingresso Animali Vivi, video still, single channel video, 2023, Igor Grubić

Image: Courtesy of Igor Grubić

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Bethlehem, inkjet print, 2012, Paris Petridis

Image: Courtesy of Paris Petridis

By platforming artists who eschew human exceptionalism, the exhibition and its curated programme deconstruct and reimagine our ideas of dependency and the historic oppression of non-human lives. This violence is ancient—feeding into contemporary industrial contexts like animal farming and testing, space exploration and genetic engineering. The exhibition reveals a cycle of damage, where violence against the natural world ultimately circles back to humans. “All this is unquestionably a result of greed, as well as a moral and ethical crisis, and of [our] irredeemable inability to learn how to cohabit on the earth, and to coexist with what is simply other than us,” Gregos tells STIR.

‘Why Look at Animals? A Case for the Rights of Non-Human Lives’ is on view from May 15, 2025 – January 7, 2026, at EMΣT, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece.