

Brent Godfrey Acts Natural in 'A' Gallery Exhibit

BY [REBECCA PYLE](#) ON [SEPTEMBER 25, 2023](#) • ([1 COMMENT](#))

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An art gallery which contains a courtyard with water and fish (as 'A' Gallery does) can run a show called You Animal and succeed in a way those without a "water feature" cannot. Consider the magic and necessary pull of water, whether in drought conditions, or not: settlements/towns/cities of any success have almost always formed around water. Egyptian royalty could never have happened without the Nile. Goods anywhere, upon a time, couldn't be brought in without terrible or arduous difficulties, without water; people could barely exist without water—in large quantities. A watering hole, for animals, for humans, meant survival. Life.

In You Animal Brent Godfrey's chickens, wolves, horses, humans, rabbits, turkeys, cranes, and cattle settle securely and naturally in this gallery, in oils and acrylics on canvas. According to the artist himself, in his artist statement, "fur", "feathers," and "flesh" are equally and "democratically represented" in his show.

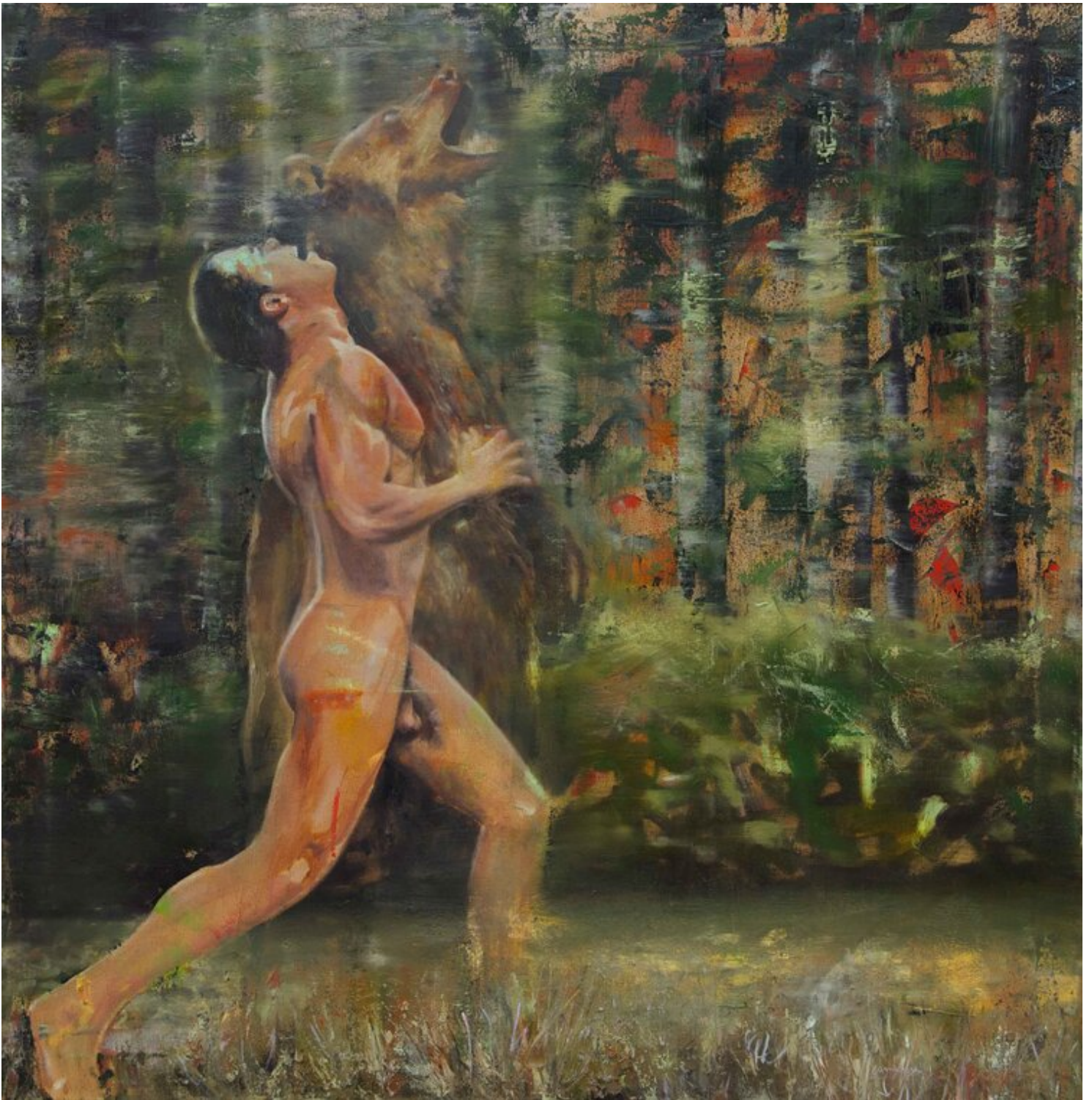
"Turkeys 2," an oil painting, is the richest painting here: unexpectedly, the turkeys' plumes/feathers are a frothy, velvety, compression of September light; shadowed by frosty, yet warm, blue, all of the colors have the richness of colors in wool carpets, as the birds turn to each other and soak up remaining summery bits of light.



Brent Godfrey, "Turkeys 2," oil on linen, 36x24 in.

Deer in "Act Natural," "Stag," "Wilderness," and "Guardian" are so full-eared, so startled-looking, facing the painter/viewer, they make your own ears ache: what is a lifetime of super-listening like? Do deer ever hear complete quiet? (In some ways, a painter's goal always seems to be that perfect quiet.)

In "Witness" a single rabbit faces the fireworks of an electrical power station in the distance: you see the rabbit in profile. The rabbit's ears almost seem to glow red with fright. What good does a power station do a rabbit? You hear that question in your head, sense the rabbit's confusions as it sees/hears the power station's noise and sizzle, in once-quiet night.



Brent Godfrey, "Howl," 2014, oil on linen, 54x56 in.

Godfrey's work often includes the daringly sensual: here, nude men and their animal grace are on display in "Tiger" and "Howl I." Not many painters could find the similarity between a man roaring and a bear roaring, but Godfrey does: see his "Howl I" (a man and a bear running together through a forest) and "Howl II" (one bear roaring, in full snarl).

In "Perspective" one bear leans against an old, round-eyed car. The bear looks overwhelmingly human, and, weirdly, so does the car, in this vintage Yellowstone-esque scene. The metal car becomes an armored helmet protecting frail traveling humans from the hungry bear.



“Empowerment” — an oil painting featuring a young girl in a Red-Riding-Hood’s cloak who brandishes a small axe as she approaches an unaware wolf from behind — includes an unusual detail: her little eyes are covered by child-size dark-lensed sunglasses. Are the sunglasses to blot out the horror of the act she is about to commit? Or to protect us from the view of a child’s eyes as she contemplates such an act? In popular and current terms, this version of Little Red Riding Hood is females (women) arming themselves against predatory males. Stripped of gender, it’s humans versus animal, our continued rise to alpha superiority over creatures we once were regularly terrorized by — if we are on guard, are vigilant.

Or — could these sunglasses represent an artist’s special protection against a predatory world? Or an artist, in her/his private world, seeing through special lenses what the rest of the world cannot see? An exclusive exclusion, an exclusive inclusion?

More commonplace girls appear in this show, each holding stuffed animals, anonymous, unthreatening-looking lambs and monkeys, in “Little Lamb” and “Comfort.” Godfrey has also had some fun with “Family Portrait” — six monkeys with differing facial features and expressions are presented as a neatly arranged display of portraits with matching red frames.



The most peaceful paintings in the show are of fish: flame-colored carp, or goldfish, passing each other in “Submerged 3” and “Submerged 4.” Surely theirs is a simpler, sweeter, more silent life than any of the other creatures in this show could ever have. Here, at the art gallery, these fish are royal creatures, safe from predators and harm. All they must do is swim, go dormant in winter, and re-emerge in spring to glitter brilliant in the sun.

Brent Godfrey: You Animal, ‘A’ Gallery, Salt Lake City, through Oct. 28, 2023



Rebecca Pyle is a writer and an artist with work in dozens of art/ literary journals, in the United States and also in journals (in the English language) in Hong Kong and the U.K. and Northern Ireland, Belgium, India, France, and Germany. She graduated from the university the Wizard of Oz adored, the University of Kansas, where she studied art and lit. See rebeccapyleartist.com.