



F L O A T

NEW WORK BY MARIA LUX





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FOREWORD

By Kristen Evangelista

Cross-disciplinary artist Maria Lux mines evolutionary biology, history, literature, film, anthropology, and other fields to investigate our complex and often contradictory relationship to animals, which is increasingly mediated by technology in the 21st century. In her newest works on view at the University Galleries, Lux specifically responds to cultural and theoretical discussions about animals in the writings of John Berger, Philip K. Dick, Ursula K. Heise, and Akira Mizuta Lippit. Lux is fascinated by our need for a connection to animals that co-exists with a desire to differentiate ourselves from animals. She ponders insights by Lippit, such as: “The effort to define the human being has usually required a preliminary gesture of exclusion: a rhetorical animal sacrifice.” Exhibition catalogue contributor Ron Broglio sheds light on long-standing animal rituals and their relevance to Lux’s work in the subsequent pages of this publication.

During her WP Artist-in-Residency, Lux used digital processes and CNC-milling to create a life-size parade float of two humongous sheep clad in bright orange life vests. In contrast to her previous work, this project represents Lux’s first engagement with technology as an integral part of the artwork rather than solely a tool of expression. She explains that this endeavor was “influenced by the constructs of the digital processes and mechanical production.”² The artist envisions somewhat absurd sheep apparel, as a heroic means to prevent sheep from drowning under the weight of their own selectively-bred wool during perilous journeys on small vessels. She draws our attention to how technology is a double-edged sword: while it protects animals, many of the problems it seeks to solve are the results of technological advancement. In addition, Lux engages technology to simulate and supplant nature. Her machine-made sheep are composed of Styrofoam and adorned with plastic flowers. They are synthetic, eternal, and indestructible, becoming the ultimate solution to avoid the loss of animal life.

In her accompanying stop-motion animation, Lux envisions the 2068 Tournament of Roses Parade starring her own sheep parade float. Originally founded in 1890 in Pasadena, California, this procession celebrates the first day of the New Year and is known for its highly detailed floats made entirely of natural flowers and plants. In Lux’s animation voice-over, we learn that, in the future, artificial flowers have replaced living ones. Other highlights of the

parade include a vintage 1993 Ford Explorer from the Hollywood film, *Jurassic Park*, which chronicles the after effects of cloning dinosaurs — one of the most pondered mass extinctions of a group of animals. Here, Lux reflects on Ursula K. Heise’s analysis of this film. In her essay, “Extinction to Electronics: Dead Frogs, Live Dinosaurs, and Electric Sheep,” Heise comments that technology facilitates the resurrection of the dinosaur only for the dinosaurs to then destroy cars, computers, and other technology. According to Lux, “the car is a touchstone for technological advancement — the car chassis replaced horse-drawn floats in the parade, and cars are dismantled by the resurgence of nature in *Jurassic Park*.”³ Heise posits that the emergence of cyborg or artificial animals is not merely evidence of nature succumbing to technology. Rather, she asserts that the “the animal cyborg also points to the possibility of a different relationship between species: one that no longer privileges the rights of humans....but that recognizes the value and rights of nonhuman species along with those of humans.”⁴

In a similar vein, Lux investigates simulated nature in the animation’s concluding scene that showcases a troupe of entirely artificial marching sheep. Lux is inspired by Philip K. Dick, whose sci-fi novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, foresees a planet where electric sheep “graze” on roof pastures; real animals — almost all of which were destroyed by nuclear war — are scarce and highly coveted. Occurring one hundred years after the publication of Dick’s novel, Lux’s parade validates how machine-made animals can be endearing as well as fully programmed to meet human’s needs.

Through her site-specific installation and related animation, Lux inhabits and embraces our conflicting relationships to animals and considers technology as both an empowering and a limiting device. In her own words, she explains “We see animals today through these messy good-and-bad technologies — where animals and machines, digital and analog, virtual and embodied, become confused. What, then, of our impulse to build and imagine false animals, never-dying animals, eternal animals, repositories against ourselves?”⁵ With a subtle sense of humor, Lux seizes these impulses and shows that the artificial can breed new understandings of the natural world. •

² Maria Lux, email message to author, January 14, 2015.

³ Maria Lux, email message to author, January 15, 2015.

⁴ Ursula K. Heise, “From Extinction to Electronics: Dead Frogs, Live Dinosaurs, and Electric Sheep,” in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 77.

⁵ Maria Lux, Artist statement, 2014.



LIVING WITHOUT THE ROSES

Essay by Ron Broglio

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

Excerpt from
JOHN KEATS

“Ode on a Grecian Urn”¹

FOR CENTURIES, EVEN MILLENNIA, animals have been clothed in flowers and led along a parade. It is an ancient practice that establishes a way of dwelling for a people. In Keats's poem the heifer plays an important role. Through the animal, the people participate in a ritual economy of sacrifice that connects them with the earth and its harvest, and the sky and its gods. In this exhibition, Maria Lux brings to our attention the current ritual of The Tournament of the Roses parade, which reveals a different habit of dwelling, and then she projects this way of being in a world approximately fifty years into the future, America 2068. The parade puts on display not simply the floats but also a whole worldview, which we witness as exhibition visitors, but also as fictional TV viewers.

The parade displays a world removed from animal lives and the bucolic world that connects people to the earth and sky. Instead we see artificial flowers and Styrofoam sheep. It is a world based on petroleum that forms simulated nature. While full of color and spectacle, the parade world is without vitality. In Keats's poem the animation and vitality of lived relationships includes recognition of plant and animal death as part of maintaining human life. In contrast, Lux shows us a world of televised animatronics. The artificial flowers and fake sheep will never die, but only because they have never lived. Lux's stop-motion animation shoots the “animal,” repositions it, and shoots it again and again, creating still images that when ordered and rendered bring the forms to animated video life. The lives and deaths of actual animals take place off screen, unrecognized and far from the colorful event of the parade.

¹John Keats “Ode on a Grecian Urn”
<http://www.bartleby.com/101/625.html>

In this festival, technology becomes a way of distancing ourselves from death, the loss of vitality we share with all animals. The technological future has a cold cheerfulness and artificiality of a world without friction, effort, or mortality. Parade floats glide and follow the command of the “white suiter” who shepherds them, and the marching sheep that all stay in step. This is a TechnoSphere where life rolls on without the friction of living beings (but sometimes with the staccato motion revealing its machine life). Horsepower without horses and sheep without wool. There are no animals eating nor defecating nor wandering astray. There are no black sheep nor lost sheep. There is no animal interiority—nothing but the form of an animal or the form of an idealized animal without its animal nature. It is all Tamagotchi© and no wooly beasts. These artificial sheep will not throw themselves overboard and drown in the weight of their wool like the sheep of yore reported in the video. And if they did fall into water, their petrochemical composition would keep them afloat. In this parade of the future — that is all too eerily like our present — the only sign of nature itself is the impending storm where nature literally threatens to rain upon the artificial parade. In this roseless Rose Bowl, there is no sign of California’s devastating long drought. While today rain would be welcomed, in the parade world, nature is meant to be a backdrop of perfect skies without recognition of ecosystems and lifecycles.

Lux’s parade world is not far from our own. When is the last time you saw sheep and felt their wooly fur? Even in clothing, technologically-produced synthetic materials have overtaken sheep’s wool. These small, everyday incidents are a window onto the larger concern about how we dwell on earth. The twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger once cleverly noted that we dwell before we build.² We build things based on our current habits of dwelling. Moreover, how we dwell and what we build reveals something deeply seated about how we think. As cultural critic Ursula K. Heise explains, “What underlies the imaginative exploration of artificial life, then, is the question of how much nature we can do without, to what extent simulations of nature can replace the ‘natural,’ and what role animals, both natural and artificial, play in our self-definition as humans.”³ In *Float: New Work by Maria Lux*, the parade is a celebration of our technological way of living, one that uses technology to supersede nature and reconfigure what it means to be human.

² Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993)

³ Ursula K. Heise, “From Extinction to Electronics: Dead Frogs, Live Dinosaurs, and Electric Sheep,” in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 60.





In this machine world, we adopt a technological mindset where order and efficiency takes precedence and are celebrated in a parade. Animals are not efficient. With minds of their own and bodily needs, they remind us too much of our own bodies. The unpredictability and complexity of animal life are deemed unnecessary for the progress of culture. One wonders when humans will become obsolete or how much we have given over our own lives to technological ordering and efficiency by which we redefine what it means to be human so as to comply with our technological way of being. As Lux points out, we have traded the friction of fur for the jolt of machines and flash of digital technologies. This accords with cultural theorist Donna Haraway, who points out that from specially crafted clothing to cell phones and wireless communication, we are already cyborg.⁴

Being human means being part of culture, and culture is fundamentally that which is not nature, that which is different from nature. Often we use technology as a means of distancing ourselves from nature and marking boundaries. So, for example, a farm grows plants just as nature does, except that it does so in ordered rows and with a lot of technological supplements. Human food is cooked with heat and served on plates. We do not touch it with our hands, but rather use the distancing tools of forks and knives and spoons. Clock time replaces solar time and artificial lighting creates our cultural rhythm of light and dark. Beyond these basic technologies, we scaffold culture with more and bigger technologies until we find ourselves further from nature.

Animals as technology (such as livestock sheep and horses) were once a bridge between nature and culture. Today, rather than livestock, we are amazed by artificial life. Our demand for artificial life is a nascent sign of wanting to engage with nonhumans — to meet something other than ourselves. Lux brings out this desire for other forms of life. The viewer feels a mourning or loss in the conspicuous absence of plants and animals in the parade. The world of the future signals their need for nonhuman life through the creation of artificial life, which was socially intended to mime nature but seems to have a mind of its own.

This exhibition is part of Lux's ongoing investigation into our machine-engineered simulations of nature — our need for nature, but on our own terms. Her work imagines how humans have become increasingly artificial by replacing animal nature with machines. Lux's parade festivities reveal the inhumanity of a world without hospitality to wool and fur and animal vitality. •

4 Hari Kunzru, "You Are Cyborg," *Wired* 5.02 (February 1997).
<http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/5.02/fharaway.html>



“Lux’s parade world is not far from our own. When is the last time you saw sheep and felt their woolly fur?”

Coverage of the 2068 Rose Parade

Stop-motion animation of 3D-printed model.

Announcer with big-band music:
A New Year’s Tradition: The greatest spectacle of them all... The Tournament of Roses Parade. Next!

Male Commentator:
It sure is, Marsha. Historically, the parade required that all surfaces of floats be decorated in natural materials derived from flowers and plants. This is the first ever, 100% artificial Rose Parade, and every surface is synthetic!

Female Commentator:
That is incredible.

Male Commentator:
It sure is, Marsha.



Male Commentator:
Welcome back to coverage of the 2068 Tournament of Roses Parade.

Female Commentator:
So great to be here! This is is really a special year for the Rose Parade.

Male Commentator:
Taking center stage now is a stately entry brought to you by the Van Ness Pet Hospital titled “Preserving the Future.” This spectacular float tells the story of the dangers of raising sheep in island communities off the North Atlantic. Sheep are often moved from island to island on small boats, and if a sheep goes overboard, their wool instantly takes on up to one and one-half times their weight in water. Sometimes shepherds have to let the sheep drown, because their added weight can take the whole boat under.

Female Commentator:

What a story. These charming sheep certainly won't drown—they're sporting life jackets made of artificial California zinnias and undying orange buttercups.



Male Commentator:

Let's hope it doesn't rain on this parade!

You know, they say the Tournament has a deal with God. They'll never hold the parade on a Sunday, and He'll never let it rain on the Rose Parade. [laughing]

Female Commentator:

Actually, Steve, according to the Tournament of Roses Association, the Never on a Sunday policy was started to prevent horses tied up next to churches from getting scared during the service!

Male Commentator:

You know, Marsha, speaking of getting wet, let's get a look at that sky. There have been threats of rain all week, and we are watching the weather.

Female Commentator:

Oooh! We don't like the look of that! When floats were still covered with living flowers, rain could be a real problem. Floats had to be engineered to support up to three times their weight in added water in the event of rain.

Male Commentator:

You know, when the parade began in 1890, all floats themselves were horse-drawn. Since the invention of the car, floats have been built on car chassis, just as the horse was replaced by the car.

Female Commentator:

Wow. How technology changes.

Female Commentator:

This next entry is a real treat—a beautiful vintage 1993 Ford Explorer from the classic film *Jurassic Park*. You may remember this famous scene where a T. rex that’s been brought back from extinction through “modern” science just destroys that car. I think we have a clip of that . . .

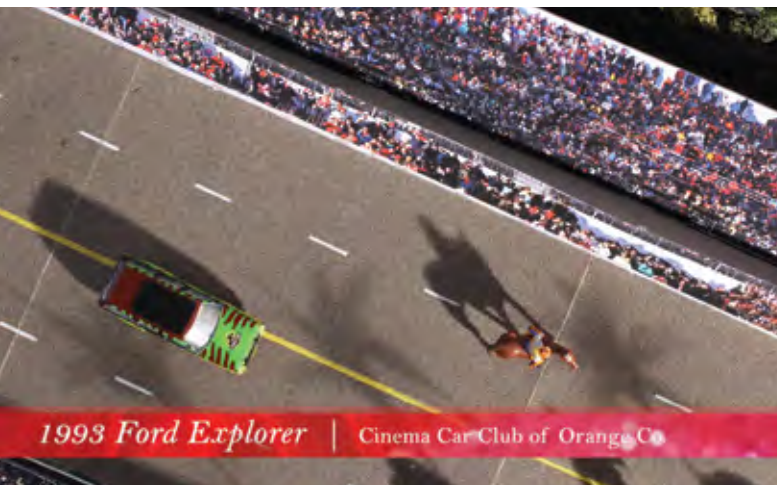
[Audio of T. rex flipping over the car from *Jurassic Park*]

Male Commentator:

That car looks like it’s in pretty good shape considering what it’s been through. Don’t you think?

Female Commentator:

It’s looking pretty good.



Male Commentator:

Up next, we have the Roslin Auxiliary Marching Sheep, sponsored by 6LLS Corporation! These beauties may look real, but they are totally artificial. This flock of sheep was created in homage to the famous science fiction book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* published over 100 years ago. It imagines a future not at all unlike today, where animals have been replaced by artificial ones.



FLOAT

NEW WORK BY MARIA LUX







WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Float, 2015

Digitally modeled, CNC-carved Styrofoam, artificial flowers (carnations, roses, baby's breath, zinnias, buttercups, hydrangeas, greenery, and rose petals)
12 x 6 x 9 feet

Coverage of the 2068 Rose Parade, 2015

Stop-motion animation of 3D-printed model
3:22 minutes
Stop-motion photography: Will Arnold
Voice actors: David Cox and Kristi Cox
(See page 14)

Miniature Float with White Suiter Volunteer, 2015

3D-printed model of parade float
1 5/8 x 1 1/8 x 2 1/4 inches
(See page 24)

Reference Materials:



Berger, John. *Why Look at Animals?* New York: Penguin Books, 2009.
“Why Look at Animals?” was originally published in *About Looking* by Bloomsbury UK in 1980.

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* New York: Ballantine Books, 2008. Originally published by Doubleday and Company, Inc. in 1968.

Heise, Ursula K. “From Extinction to Electronics: Dead Frogs, Live Dinosaurs, and Electric Sheep.” *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*. Ed. Cary Wolfe. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 59–81.

Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

MARIA LUX

EDUCATION

2012

M.F.A., Studio Art, University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign, IL

2006

B.F.A. with Honors and Distinction, Art & Design; B.F.A., Graphic Design, Iowa State University, Ames, IA

SOLO AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2014

Rat Party City, Visual Art Exchange, Cube Gallery, Raleigh, NC

Invisible Fences, Murphy Gallery, University of Illinois YMCA, Champaign, IL

2013

Animal/Artifact, with David Ross Harper, Dittmar Memorial Gallery, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL

2012

Made in Champaign: Work Produced during the Figure One Summer Residency, with Jason Patterson, Figure One Gallery, Champaign, IL

2011

Museum for a Shark, Indi Go Artist Co–op, Champaign, IL

2010

Ten to Watch, Figure One Gallery, Champaign, IL

From the Midwest: Drawings and Paintings, Arts on Grand, Spencer, IA

Drawings and Paintings, Memorial Union Gallery, Iowa State University, Ames, IA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2014

Hunter/Gatherer, University Art Gallery, Truman State University, Kirksville, MO (catalogue)

Ecovisions, McLean Arts Center, Bloomington, IL

Prairie Center of the Arts Artist in Residence Regional Alumni Invitational, Prairie Center of the Arts, Peoria, IL

2013

Love Less Violently, Illini Union Gallery, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL

There/Here: A Mobile Exhibit, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI

PostNatural, Isis Gallery, Notre Dame University, South Bend, IN

Lines, 3 Pillars Gallery, Benton Harbor, MI

Sightlines, South Bend Museum of Art, South Bend, IN

So Many Beasts of Burden, Illini Union Gallery, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL

Worked, Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, Athens, GA

Post–Conceptual Glitter, Lawton Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, WI

2012

2012 Residency Exhibition, Prairie Center of the Arts, Peoria, IL

Canis Familiaris, Amara, Urbana, IL

OMG! Kittens Kittens Kittens, Figure One Gallery, Champaign, IL

Animalier: The Animal in Contemporary Art, Graceful Arts Gallery and Studios, Alva, OK

Borders and Boundaries, Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM

Small Works, K12/TEJAS Gallery, Dayton, OH

MFA 2012, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign, IL

You I You See, Co–Prosperity Sphere, Chicago, IL

Where We Are: Tectonic Shifts and the Dissolution of Boundaries, DeLuce Gallery, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO

2011

Engage! Art + Design Graduate Student Exhibition, Link Gallery, Champaign, IL

More is More, Lexington Art League, Lexington, KY

A Live Animal, Root Division, San Francisco, CA (catalogue)

Pink, Studio 659, Whiting, IN

Artsplosia!, Co–Prosperity Sphere, Chicago, IL

National Wet Paint Exhibition 2011, Zhou B. Art Center, Chicago, IL

2010

All Together Now: Art + Design Graduate Student Exhibition, Link Gallery, Champaign, IL

Emerging Illinois Artists, McLean County Arts Center, Bloomington, IL

2009

30 and Beyond: College of Design Alumni Exhibition, Gallery 181, College of Design, Iowa State University, Ames, IA

41st National Clay, Fiber, Paper, Glass, Metal, Wood Exhibit, Octagon Center for the Arts, Ames, IA

2007

Des Moines Arts Festival: *Emerging Artist Division*,
Des Moines, IA

Social (In)Justice Through the Arts, Gallery 181B,
College of Design, Iowa State University, Ames, IA

RESIDENCIES

2014

Pop-up Artist Studio two-week public residency,
[Co][lab], Urbana, IL

2012

Prairie Center of the Arts, Peoria, IL

Summer Residency, Figure One Gallery, Champaign, IL

SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS

2014

City of Urbana Arts Grant: Envision 365

2013

Illinois Arts Council Artist Project Grant

2011

Creative and Performing Arts Materials Fellowship

Helen E. Platt Blake M.F.A. Materials Grant

2009

Iowa Arts Council Mini Grant

2007

Janice Peterson Area Award in Integrated Studio Arts,
Department of Art and Design, Iowa State University

2004

FOCUS Grant, Iowa State University

WRITING PROJECTS

2015

“Burger King,” *The Art of the Animal: 14 Women Artists Explore
the Sexual Politics of Meat*. Brooklyn: Lantern Books.
(Forthcoming May 2015)

2012

“Strung Together” *PIECRUST* Magazine, Kansas City, MO

“Deke Weaver Interviewed by Maria Lux – the Unreliable
Bestiary,” *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*,
Animal Influence II, Issue 22 (2012): 31–40.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS / ARTIST TALKS

2014

Maria Lux, “Dogs, Robots, and Border Wars: Toward
Intersections Rather than Boundaries” (presentation given at
Animacies, the Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference,
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI, February 2014).

2013

Maria Lux, “Arts Talk” (presentation given at Postnatural, the
Society for Literature Science and the Arts annual conference,
University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, February 2013).

Maria Lux, “Seeing Animals: Art that Looks at Animal/Human
Vision” (presentation given at Animal Representation Conference
2013, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, February 2013).

2012

Maria Lux, (presentation given at the Taking Animals Apart
Conference, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, May 2012).

Artist lecture, UIUC M.F.A. Exhibition Programming, Krannert
Art Museum, Champaign, IL, April 2012.



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This exhibition and publication culminates our 2014 Artist-in-Residency Program and the second collaboration of the Center for New Art and the University Galleries. It has been extremely rewarding to experience the growing interest and funding for the Program, especially as there is remarkable potential for further innovation and experimentation in our future endeavors. Professor Michael Rees, Director of the Center for New Art, is to be commended for his stewardship and infectious enthusiasm that significantly define and advance this Program.

I am immensely grateful to Lux for her abundant creativity and dedication to this residency. She has demonstrated an exceptional openness and willingness to adopt and experiment with the different technologies available in the Digital Fabrication Laboratory at the Center for New Art. Moreover, her cross-disciplinary practice excels as a result of her unique ability to nurture collaboration and dialogue among students, faculty, staff, and peers.

We are also fortunate for guest writer Ron Broglio’s contributions to this publication. Drawing upon his extensive scholarship in this field including *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art*, he insightfully contextualizes Lux’s artwork and articulates its connection to technology, and the nexus between culture and nature.

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