



# STATE OF CERAMICS *.edu edition*

## Animal Collaborations a discussion guide by Kitty Ross

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### Topic

Animals' senses pick up on different things (a survival tactic), different animals in the same ecosystem actually live in very different worlds (their Umwelt). Everything about a person or animal shapes the world it inhabits. Animals see detail, humans see generalities. Animals don't need us, but we need them. If we present an animal with an object, they will make sense of it according to their instincts and survival tactics. If we present them with a material like clay, perhaps they will use it. Whatever they do with it, we, the artists, learn from the perceptions and behaviors of the other animal. Artists have collaborated with insects, wild and domestic animals in performance, video and sculpture for the purpose and possibility of understanding our relationship to objects, materials, and other species. In this State of Ceramics conversation, we will consider how the approach of 'animal collaborations' has already expanded the ceramic field and how this approach itself is continuing to expand today.

### Perception

Some animals make objects/homes/nests and/or use tools. Animals have their own relationship with their environment—their Umwelt, or "The self-centered world". Their perception, cognition and instincts determine their safety and survival. Different species have evolved very different physical perception abilities. Their perception is not like human perception. They are curious - this is essential for survival for it allows them to learn if what is in their environment is safe or not. They also play. Do not make the assumption that we share the same perceptual processes with the non-human animal. All species accept reality as it is presented to them but each species has a different reality.

### Questions

In the contemporary urban world we have made a break from nature. The post human condition is of the machine, the animate and inanimate world. Are we now more machine and animals more human?

Humans are a kind of animal but can we define human as merely another animal or something different?

Why use/engage with animals? Are you being empathetic and sympathetic in your collaboration or is it about fear of the "other" or something else?

Humans are most commonly engaged with animals as food. Are you an environmentalist, vegetarian, vegan? What are your boundaries between human and animal? What do you think about speciesism- bias based on species?

Does art and culture define the boundary between the human and the animal?

## Examples

[Loren Kronemyer](#) is a transdisciplinary artist working with insects as a means to bridge the language gap between humans and other life forms. She received the first Masters of Biological Arts Degree from SymbioticA Lab at the University of Western Australia.

*“My work has called for me to interact with varied and diverse living systems. With every interaction, I try to keep consent and compatibility as my top priorities. I try to work with creatures in a context that is compatible with their needs and lifestyle. I try to achieve the outcomes I want through listening and conversing with a species’ behaviour, always remaining open to surprises. I avoid deprivation as a way to achieve results. I stay away from for the word collaboration unless a project is truly collaborative. Provoking insects in a box or manipulating cells or training plants isn’t collaborative – those creatures aren’t there by choice. It isn’t a collaboration. As a human, I wouldn’t consider being entrapped into a situation as collaborative. I try to keep these values in mind with the human systems I work with as well.”*

[Hubert Duprat](#) is a French sculptor interested in the architecture of insects. He works with caddisfly larvae, or Trichoptera, which can be found near streams and ponds. These aquatic larvae spin protective sheaths out of a wide-variety of organic material in order to protect their developing bodies. These sheaths are generally assembled from plant material, fish bones, twigs and grains of sand. Duprat interrupts this system by transporting Trichoptera to temporary environments in which only gold spangles, precious and semi-precious stones are available. The highly adaptable larvae then build rare and exquisite sheaths fit for royalty. A commentary upon the collision of materials valued by nature and mankind.

