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PhD Application
9/2/11

Writing Sample 1:
Fulbright Statement of Grant Purpose
Interdisciplinary Research and Installation Art
Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, Germany

New Evolutions: The Theatre of Identity

I propose an interdisciplinary and collaborative installation art project in conjunction with the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin. The investigation will include research across the history of hybrid plants and animals, as well as the hands-on study of comparative anatomy between human beings and the pigs that are currently being developed for organ xenotransplantation into human bodies. The research and skills acquired through my collaboration with the resources and professionals of the museum will be instrumental in the production of a large format, two-part installation art project to be exhibited within the galleries of host institution itself.

In 1860, only one year after *The Origin of Species* was published, Christian Erich Hermann von Meyer unearthed a feather in Germany that would serve as the first tangible evidence that Darwin's theory of evolution was correct. The feather and other Archaeopteryx specimens found in the region were taken as proof that birds had evolved from dinosaurs. Today the finest and most complete Archaeopteryx specimen in the world resides in the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, along with that first feather.

150 million years after the emergence of the hybrid bird-dinosaur, other types of hybrid animal questions are being raised in genetic laboratories around the world. Beyond the fantastical allegories of the *Physiologus*, humankind is moving into an uncanny realm of interaction with what we describe as the animal kingdom. In 2003 researchers successfully fused human cells with rabbit eggs. Pigs have been created with our blood in their veins. Mice have been given liver transplants that are 95% human. Most scientists in the field will inform you that it will be no more than five to ten years before we will see entire heart transplants from pigs into people.

We were already standing in a moral quandary with respect to basically all other forms of life on this earth. We spend time with animals we deem our pets and treat them like old friends. Another animal arrives on a plate for dinner. Medication and beauty products are developed through the laboratory torture of a third animal, while a picture of a fourth rides on our license plates, showing our support for its protection in the wild. Another, perhaps less charismatic animal, is forgotten in such discussions while its natural habitat is annihilated to satisfy other needs or wants. Soon, the thousands of people who die yearly for lack of a suitable organ transplant will find themselves having entirely new ideas and maybe even feelings about the pigs whose hearts might be able to replace their own.

I have no interest in wagging a moral finger concerning these questions or any other. Nor am I interested in trying to indoctrinate anyone with my opinion or perspective through my art. My aim simply is to take those ideas that engage me, the ideas that I find most difficult to grapple with, and to try to work with them in such a way that opens them up. If these issues could be important for other people, perhaps we might be able to find something in what I'm doing that helps to shape our thought about what is really at stake here, so that we can see it with more clarity.

That said, if granted the blessing of the Fulbright Commission, within Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, I will construct an installation that aspires towards the integration of a Gesamtkunstwerk. The antechamber will be generously lit and feature of all of the museum's Archaeopteryx specimens mounted onto a large central island in the room round which one will be able to read their story from discovery near Solnhofen, Germany, through the earthquake of effects that their existence created in the broader world. The walls that define the chamber around the island will describe a timeline of the history of hybrid animals as well as plants, including both those created by our hands and those created by whatever hands made us.

Entering the relative darkness of the main installation room, the viewer will recognize a much larger and darker space in which she might make out a circuit of dark boxes surrounding a ring of eight huge and bizarrely-shaped neon lamps which enclose a lone figure that would appear to be a somewhat disfigured, naked man. Representing the notion of organ xenotransplantation turned inside out, the "man" in the center of the room will actually be a pig, which through taxidermy I will transform in such a way so that it will appear to be human.

The "Pig-Man" will stand in a ring formed by eight giant and uniquely shaped neon lamps. The spacing and dimensions of this octagonal ring will mimic the design of the "Octagon" cage as used by the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship). The viewer may realize that the lamps are actually neon-filled glass casts of the leg bones of the Brachiosaurus Brancai, the largest mounted dinosaur in the world, which they will have already seen in the Museum für Naturkunde's central hall. Representing the fight for life, the "Pig-Man" will be illuminated by a ring of lights that imply his own eventual extinction. This light will be the only light in the room.

Around the Octagon ring of dinosaur bone-lamps will be a circuit of 10 black pedestals of varying heights and dimensions. Upon the pedestals the viewer will find wet collections of human and pig organs. The alternating organs will remain unlabeled. Visitors may therefore try to determine for themselves which organs are which: human or pig.

Of course as specific and complete as this exhibition proposal may sound at this point, there is a long road of research and work ahead of me, and I fully expect that that process will also serve to further shape and change my final installation. To me, this aspect of the process is perhaps the most interesting part, and it is only fine and natural that my ideas and goals will shift as I gain in both experience and knowledge.

I must at this time offer my thanks and appreciation to the Museum für Naturkunde for making the decision to open their vast library of specimens to me and for making their expertise available as I proceed with my work. Using this project as the springboard, the museum envisions this as the beginning of a new and permanent resident artist program. Please know that this Fulbright grant would not only help this project idea become a reality, but it could also help to provide the ground from which many such collaborations could take shape in the future between this museum and the artists of the world.

Thank you for your time. Sincerely,

Tra Bouscaren