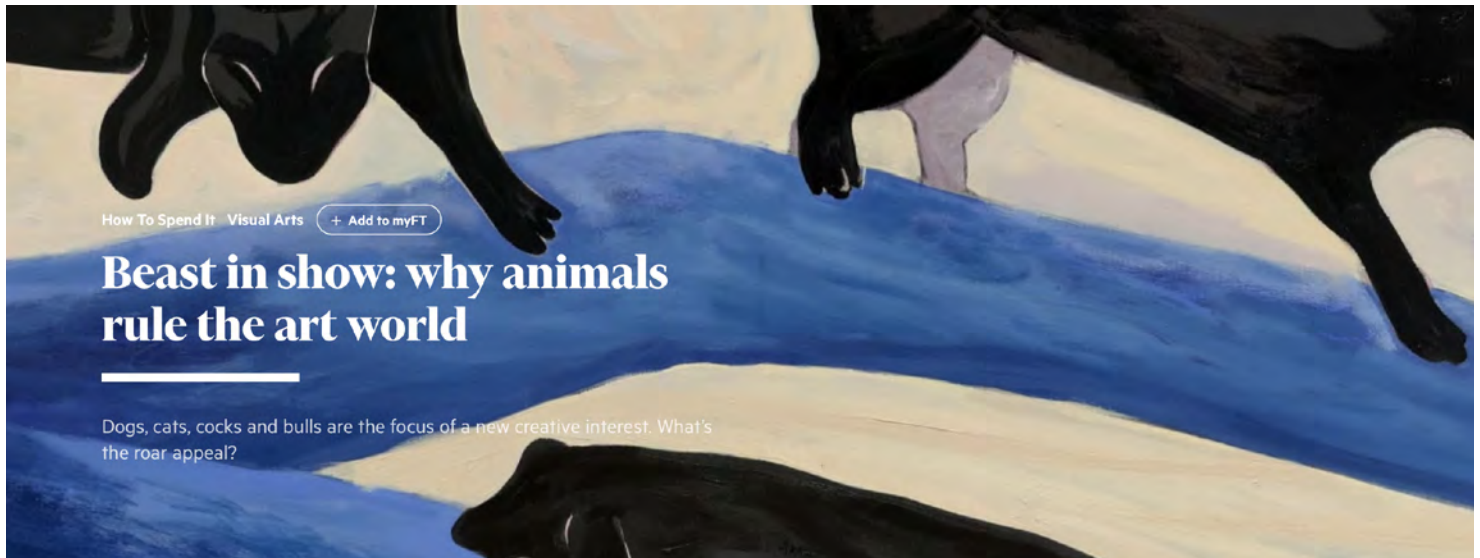


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Art began with animals – just look at Mayan jaguars, Egyptian cats and the painted bison in Lascaux. The particularly British love affair with the equestrian and canine is ingrained in its art history: see George Stubbs’ regal, romantic horses, Van Dyck’s painting of King Charles II as a child with his eponymous spaniel and Edwin Landseer’s portraits of Queen Victoria’s pets. Jacques Derrida wrote in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that “the gaze called ‘animal’ offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human”. Yet they can also be funny, satirical – cue the craze for images of dogs urinating in the corner of many 18th-century engravings.

Now creatures are taking centre stage once more, from Lydia Blakeley’s witty dogs to Allison Katz’s political cocks, passing by Dominique Knowles’ dreamy horses. Resisting kitsch, or playing with it, portrayals of animals have become a way of addressing ideas around dominance and oppression, environmental change or, simply, intimacy. And auction houses have noticed the increasing interest in painted, photographed and sculpted animals too. Sotheby’s in Paris held an animal art sale last weekend, featuring work by Peter Beard, Picasso and Francis Bacon (whose recent *Man and Beast* show at London’s Royal Academy also played into the theme).

“We thought it was a great opportunity to show the consistency and diversity of this iconography to our collectors,” Sotheby’s Pierre Mollfulleda explains. “From the poetic world of the Lalannes or César to the striking depictions of animals in Asian, Oceanic and African arts, to the importance of animal representations in classical art or the decorative arts of the 18th century, this sale pays tribute to the significance of animals in the global history of art.”

Wild animals are a recurring trope in the work of Peruvian artist Paolo Salvador, who has a solo booth with Peres Projects at Independent in New York this spring. His images offer a sense of utopian coexistence, with naked figures riding on white jaguars waving coloured banners, or white wolves howling alongside human singers. Having first studied animals’ anatomy, Salvador began making figurative work after his dog died – “the loss helped me to channel my grief into paintings”. Now his work explores his indigenous heritage. “Humans and animals have a long history of mutualism which I am always fascinated to learn more about,” he says, pointing out how ancient Peruvian cultures represented animals with anthropomorphic features. The creatures in his work reflect the deep biodiversity he grew up surrounded by – something that has become increasingly endangered.

– Francesca Gavin