



Tunnel of Anatomy Vic McEwan

In a quiet, dark part of the museum

You are the animal
You are the spark
You are the pollution
You are the sinking boat
You are the tear
You are the injustice
You are the celebration
You are the observation
You are the reaction
You are the doubt
You are the inaction
You are the fog
You are the specimen

Human and Non-Human Connectedness

Vic McEwan

Viewing the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection, thousands of specimens of Australian fauna, their body parts preserved in fluid, and boxes of bones is a somewhat ethereal experience, despite its practical scientific origin and purpose.

Items such as dismembered heads, spinal cord, brains, eyeballs, foetuses and more are easily recognisable. Then there are the more abstract slithers and slices; an echidna's oesophagus, a kangaroo's gall bladder that look like objects of fantasy, recalling images of opera singers, strange lands and ghost like creatures.

So what does it mean to look upon these specimens? What connection do we feel as humans? Australian environmental philosopher Val Plumwood suggests that our current environmental crises are the result of a western worldview that proclaims human beings as radically different from and separated from nature. So with that in mind, what is our relation to these specimens, preserved for so long in jars of toxic formaldehyde?

Animals equal food source, companionship, sport for hunting, subjects to study in documentaries. As specimens, their purpose was to benefit medical advancement through Comparative Anatomy; the

comparison of different tissue, bone, muscular systems of animals in order to learn and develop new treatments and advances in healing for human bodies.

In the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection, the most renowned of these advancements rose from the study of the koala shoulder specimen. Thought to be stronger than the human shoulder, the structure of the specimen became central to advancing healing techniques for shoulder injuries in humans.

So, how do we relate to animals in an every day sense? How do we connect to dismembered specimens in a jar? Where did the animal sit in the human hierarchy before they became the specimen? Where do they sit now? Identifiable object frozen in time, still able to share a glance, make a connection?

Tunnel of Anatomy, is an installation presented at the National Museum of Australia event, Night at the Museum, Friday 31 July 2015.



Vic McEwan is the National Museum of Australia Artist-in-Residence during 2015. Vic is the Arts NSW Regional Fellow and the Artistic Director of The Cad Factory.

www.vicmcewan.com

www.artsnswfellowship.com

www.cadfactory.com

<http://www.nma.gov.au/history/pate/artist-in-residence>