

DAG Volumes: No.1 (2012)



SUSAN SHANTZ: CREATURES IN TRANSLATION

Shantz's Who's Who
by Carle Steel

Since the beginning of time, human beings have transformed animals into their art and culture. Sometimes this act is representational, like cave drawings or monster myths or ritual dances. Sometimes, our transformations are unhappily direct for the animals involved, like bearskin rugs, alligator purses or lucky rabbits' feet. True to our nature, for the most part, we don't consider the difference as anything meaningful. We are human. As far as evolution goes, we won, and to the victor go the spoils. Animals are ours to consume in whichever way pleases us in the moment. Butterfly collections, tiger bile, whale songs, it's pretty much all the same to us.

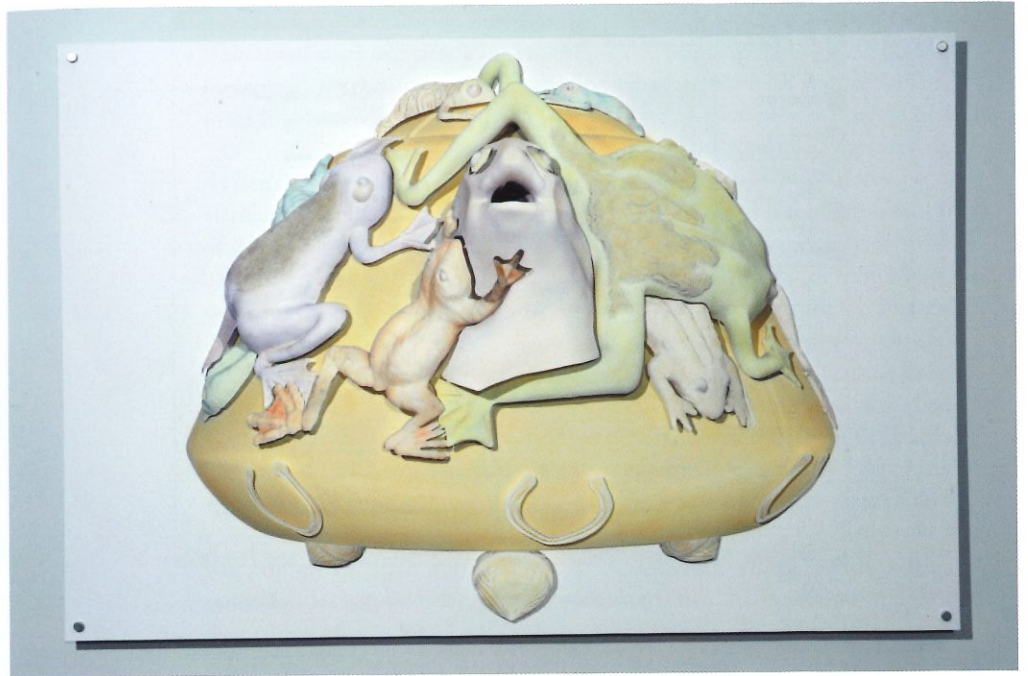
13. Susan Shantz
AGGY Website
3D prints
(full scale pots with
lids) (frog pot detail)
2009-2012



14. Susan Shantz, *AGGV Website 3D prints (full scale pots with lids) (frog pot)*, 2009-2012



009-2012



15. Susan Shantz, *AGGV Website 3D rendering (Frog teapot)*, 2011-2012


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Banko Ware
Teapot in the Shape of a Badger
2004.013.042 a,b

period
early 20th century

object name
teapot

material
stoneware; overglaze
enamels

height
10.5 cm

width
0 cm

length
18 cm

culture
Japanese

subject
tea badger

credit
Gift of the American
Friends of Canada
through the generosity
of Carol Potter
Peckham

Description
Teapot in the shape of a badger; head with open mouth forms the spout and the tail loops into a handle. There is a small red badger on lid for the knob.

d. "Banko Ware: Tea Pot in the Shape of a Badger" Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Collection online database, 2012

Banko Ware
in the Shape of a
Teapot
AG.013.042 a,b

20th century

name

teapot

material
ceramic; overglaze
decorations

height

width

depth

inspiration

Japanese

teapot

badger

part of the American
collection of Canada
through the generosity
of David Potter
of Cham

teapot and the tail loops into a

of Greater Victoria

Susan Shantz's exhibition *creatures in translation* takes our penchant for the metaphorical consumption of animals to its high-tech conclusion.

As her starting point, Shantz takes the virtual catalogue images of four pieces of Banko Ware from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria's (AGGV) collection and renders them into different forms using three-dimensional computer modeling software.

The pieces are quaint and whimsical, examples of a form of brightly coloured Japanese earthenware that was popular in Japan in the seventeenth century. Shantz chose four teapots from the AGGV collection. The pots she works with are a later variety of Banko Ware, kitschy and mass produced. The animals they represent are lowly, frogs and other disparate bottom- and forest-dwellers, twisted into positions of discomfort and forced companionship: a badger with a squirrel on its head, sea creatures wound together, a mess of frogs, a cicada on an endless ride on the back of a sparrow.

Shantz never sees this work in person; her only guide is a jpeg image and description on a website. With sophisticated computer software and

a haptic tool that mimics the feeling of sculpting clay, Shantz pulls the Banko pots back into real-life sculptural forms. Recreated in digital form, the sculptures can be printed as three-dimensional objects, or disassembled into component parts. Shantz derives so many forms from these simple images that it becomes almost obsessive: digital images printed on photographic stock, flattened copies of teapots in full colour are juxtaposed with their own portraits in watercolour, dozens of computer-generated 3-D prints, and large-scale works in paper tole.

In iteration after iteration, the creatures are expressed in different forms, with different degrees of human intervention and mutation in the process. Some come through Shantz's rendering process in a form that is striking in its return to the tactile and organic. Some three-dimensional printed pots could pass for bone; others have ridged surfaces as delicate and individual as fingertips.

On the opposite end of the spectrum between natural selection and human creation are the two largest pieces, a play on paper tole. They capture both the Victorian sensibility for fantasy animals—one of the reasons Banko Ware was so popular in the early 20th



16. *Susan Shantz: creatures in translation, 2012*





17. Susan Shantz, *AGGV Website 3D rendering (Badger teapot) (detail)*, 2011-2012

Susan Shantz received an MFA in Sculpture and Interdisciplinary Art from York University. She currently resides in Saskatoon where she teaches sculpture and mixed media at the University of Saskatchewan and maintains an active art practice. Her oeuvre consists of mixed-media installations, often sculptural in form, that explore embodied ways of knowing. These conceptual and aesthetic investigations often arise from autobiographical material and lived experience. Interested in the ways that art arises from ritual and gesture, her works can be read through a performative lens. Shantz has exhibited at public and artist-run galleries across Canada.



century—and the womanly art of paper collage. In this bygone craft, multiple copies of commercially available illustrations are carefully cut out and layered to create a bas-relief of elements of the image, an early and low-tech attempt at 3-D imagery.

Like the original pots, the paper tole works are machine made, but tinted and finished by hand. One work, in the gallery's front window, depicts the frog pot with the frogs cut out, set in low relief. The frogs look unhappy, pinioned in place by mere paper. The other is a ten-foot high, three-paneled representation of the badger pot. It is fierce, joyful, with its tiny squirrel rider, gleefully bearing down on the rest of the exhibition. Its grin shows up our foolishness at attempting to represent animals in any meaningful way.

The paper tole work is a wry comment on the representation and consumption of nature in the

domestic realm, an imaginary little-girl world where badgers casually come to serve tea with their squirrel companions.

The work also plays with the limitations of the new virtual availability of art media that purports to be accessible to anyone, from anywhere in the world. Shantz's collected interpretations beg the question: were these pieces on the AGGV website ever really "accessible" in any real sense of the word? The implicit answer is no; it is only her transformation back into the physical world that makes these pieces material again.

Are Shantz's translated pots faithful to their original inspiration, or are they something else entirely? The space between them is as wide as the one between humans and our animal subjects, as enigmatic as a paper badger's smile.