

Behavioural Enrichment
An Exhibition of Painting

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Behavioural Enrichment is a series of paintings of fictional zoo exhibits; the body of work as a whole creates a silent zoo. The paintings merge imagery and draw comparisons between the stage-like sets of mid-century interior design photographs and Western zoos exhibits. The paintings present curious new worlds that comment upon the artificiality that is in both zoos and the ideal home. The contained curious new worlds that comment upon the artificiality that is in both zoos and the painted environments are complete with props of still-lives, behavioural enrichment devices from zoos, and animal actors. These strange worlds of artifice are constructed with images within images: odd compositions and disintegrating spaces that balance between an illusion of depth and an abstract flatness. The work provides a space for the imagination to contemplate many possible metaphors.

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I am very grateful for the support of my family, friends and my partner Michael Noonan.

Dedication

Dedicated to my parents, Jon and Suzann Partridge, who inspired my love of art and nature.

In memory of Elijah David Tupling.

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Behavioural Enrichment is a thesis exhibition of paintings that merges two artificial environments: domestic interior design photographs and zoo exhibits. The domestic interiors in the paintings contain visual imagery drawn from zoo enclosures, and natural history dioramas. Each painting presents a fictional exhibit, the exhibition as a whole creates a silent zoo.

Behavioural Enrichment acts as a response to my experience of the curious worlds presented at the zoo and in interior design images. Most zoo exhibits are created for their entertainment value, and are often framed like theatrical sets constructed with their potential affect in mind. This presentation is reminiscent of the staged organization of idealized human dwellings, commonly understood through the glamourized practice of interior design photography. My paintings combine references to zoo exhibits and interior design images to emphasize the dramatically staged artifice of both environments. As a result, the manipulated compositions found in my paintings all include theatrical elements: props, lighting, backdrop, performer and an audience.

The paintings create a complex environment that draws the viewer in with its spectacle of colour and decoration, and then alerts them of something amiss through a signifier; the miniature zoo animal. Empathy is created for the animals by presenting them as domesticated, motionless and foreign in these theatrical rooms that give the combined impression of displacement and dislocation. These environments create a new and unsettling space for the imagination to contemplate the artificiality of zoos and our homes and question the way we present our selves and wild animals.

The work draws from my experience of visiting zoos in North America and Western Europe as well as research on the history of Western zoo exhibits and how they

construct the ‘zoological gaze.’¹ A zoo exhibit can tell a story about how a society perceives the captive animal at that particular point in time of the exhibit’s construction. The dilemma surrounding the contemporary zoo is how to educate and encourage an increasingly fast paced and technological savvy public to care about nature conservation. Though it is a noble goal there has been very little research to suggest that zoos are successful in their aims in education and conservation. One frequently used argument by zoos is that living animals have the ability to affect the public and therefore by creating access to wildlife, zoos will motivate people to care. Yet the animals in the exhibits are no longer wild, nor are they domestic; they are zoo hybrids. Unable to carry out a normal existence as subjects of nature - the animals have become objects to be viewed.² The audience is then encouraged to project human thoughts and emotions onto the objectified zoo animals, causing them to be anthropomorphized and further removed from nature. Recent zoo exhibits, naturalistic in design, attempt to focus the public’s attention on the importance of the animal’s habitat, but in fact the exhibits are an artificial wilderness constructed by humans. A zoo animal surviving in an artificial environment does not demonstrate the significance of protecting its quickly vanishing habitat.

Wild animals would not need to be collected, confined, and displayed in hopes to teach conservation and appreciation of nature if we were not responsible for the destruction of their habitats to begin with. “Zoos, from the most awful to the world’s best, expose a perpetual dichotomy, which is the reverence that humans hold for Nature

¹ This term, as used in my research paper Visual Interpretation and the Evolving Zoo Exhibit: The Pursuit of the Spectacle, is the way the audience presents and views the representation of an animal as defined by culture at that point in time. Adrian Franklin first used the term in his book Animals and Modern Cultures: A Sociology of Human-Animal Relations in Modernity. (London: Sage Publications, 1999): 62.

² Shannon Partridge. Visual Interpretation and the Evolving Zoo Exhibit: The Pursuit of the Spectacle, (Unpublished Manuscript, 2009), p. 1.

while simultaneously seeking to dominate it and smother its very wildness. They reveal both the best and the worst of human nature.”³ In *Behavioural Enrichment*, I use the formal language of representational painting such as colour, pattern, the simultaneous construction and flattening of space, images within images, as well as the odd scale of the animals in the paintings to describe and emphasize inconsistencies and contradictions. By painting zoo animals, passive as decorations, into the controlled and contained environment of fictitious domestic interiors I depict the simultaneous human desire to be close to and humanize wild animals consequently removing the wildlife from their wilderness. The absurd, surreal quality of the fictional exhibits in my paintings is intended as a reference to the zoo’s strange paradox, in order to encourage the questioning of human intentions and responsibility in regard to zoos.

The furnishings of the painted interiors include objects that reference behavioural enrichment devices used in zoo exhibits. The term behavioural enrichment, also known as environmental or animal enrichment, is an animal husbandry principle, “that seeks to enhance the quality of captive animal care by identifying and providing the environmental stimuli necessary for optimal psychological and physiological wellbeing.”⁴ To further put into question the purpose of the object, the room, and the animal, the enrichment devices are placed with the wrong species and are camouflaged within the room. For example, in *Untitled (camel)*, [Fig. 1], what may look like a lamp in the room with a camel, is in fact a string of upside down pails, which was used as a primate enrichment device at the Antwerp Zoo. In *Untitled (elephant/giraffe)*, [Fig. 2],

³ David Hancocks. *A Different Nature : The Paradoxical World of Zoos and their Uncertain Future.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 6.

⁴ David J. Shepherdson, Jill D. Mellen, and Michael Hutchins. *Second Nature : Environmental Enrichment for Captive Animals.* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), p. 1.

positioned in the back corner of the elephant's room, covered with a Japanese pattern, is a metal pole structure simulating a tree. This object references an environmental enrichment device intended for primates to climb, also in use at the Antwerp Zoo. In the giraffe's room, on the right side of the painting, an ultramarine blue sculptural tree takes the central focus on top of the ottoman. This too is based on a primate enrichment device, a grayish brown concrete tree that has foliage attached to its limbs, which is part of a monkey island exhibit at Paris's Jardin des Plantes. Not all the paintings include actual zoo behavioural enrichment devices. Some of the rooms have furniture that resembles a device; for example the red patterned ottoman in *Untitled (rhinoceros)*, [Fig. 3] bears a resemblance to a training platform used to check the health of elephants' feet.

Behavioural enrichment is a relatively new concept and although the devices may improve the captive animal's wellbeing, they usually take away from the attempted naturalistic look of the zoo exhibit environment. Various enrichment devices have been used, such as pumpkins, barrels, concrete termite mounds, balls, sounds, scents and spices, other specie's dung, plastic children's toys, feeding puzzles, and even papier-mâché piñatas in the form of prey. Some of the ideas for these devices, for example a wrapped present at Christmas or a birthday cake, raise the question if this type of enrichment is intended for the animals, or are they solely for human entertainment?

Throughout history animals have frequently been used in storytelling as a human substitute in fables, fairytales, and animations. Animals provide a way to comment indirectly on the human condition; Walton Ford a contemporary painter utilizes animals in this way. He is not interested in simply portraying the physicality of the animals but uses them to represent fictions about humans with themes of violence, power, extinction,

and colonialism. Likewise, my paintings are not about the animals as individuals but the way in which we present them in zoos. *Behavioural Enrichment* is about humanity and questions the promise of modernity and its intended progress, in terms of everyday life, as well as the human treatment of and responsibility towards wildlife.

There are parallel qualities seen in our paintings in their labour, care, and the way in which our works possess an illustrative quality. His intricate paintings are created in the stylistic tradition of natural history illustration, though grand in scale, maintain a sense of intimacy and fragility through his choice of working on paper in watercolour. My paintings are delicate due to their relatively small, un-monumental, scale and the way in which they are constructed using oil on Mylar and collaged Japanese papers. These combined features create a sense of intimacy and intrigue that encourages a closer look.

The imaginary environments in which I place identifiable zoo animals are created with references to the stage-like sets of photographs from modern 1960's and 1970's interior design books. Both the zoo exhibit and modern interior design images incorporate the exotic in highly controlled environments. The source images that I use as reference materials are taken from budget and do-it-yourself interior design books such as; *Interior Decoration A to Z*, *The World of Budget Decorating*, *Better Homes and Gardens: Decorating Book*, and *Decorating Ideas under \$100*, all of which offer a form of modern design for the masses.

In the American Museum of Modern Art's publication, "*Introductions to Modern Design*," Edgar Kaufmann states that, "modern interior design is planning and making rooms suited to our way of life, our abilities, our ideals."⁵ The rooms in one's home can

⁵ Edgar Kaufmann and Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.). Introductions to Modern Design : What is Modern Design? What is Modern Interior Design?. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 7.

act like an exhibit to display both style and social status. Through home decorating and interior design decisions humans exhibit their lifestyles that often reflect society's values and ideals.

The mid-century North American interior reflects the post WWII rise of the middle class, the significant growth of both the leisure entertainment industry and consumerist culture. It is also during this time we see the first general awareness of humanity's impact on natural ecosystems, due in large part to the impact of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*.⁶ By situating my paintings in this time frame, the combination of imagery from interior design photographs and zoo exhibits act as commentaries on consumerism, the entertainment industry and environmental awareness.

Modernist interiors are appropriate settings for my fictional zoo because the Western zoo is a modern construction. Marine biologist Stephen Spotte claims in his essay *Zoos in Postmodernism* that contemporary zoos remain fixed in modernism, because for them to become postmodern they would require simulations and this in turn would render the live animals useless. Spotte states, "I argue that postmodern zoos—zoological parks, wild animal parks, menageries, and public aquariums—do not exist because such things are presently impossible. To create one would involve forcing it into a configuration similar to film, narrative fiction, or art, and were that to happen captive animals might then become expendable, replaced by images or simulacrums. The genre being what it is, there can only be modernist zoos in postmodern times, making cultural anachronisms of animal collections as we now know them."⁷ The paintings in

⁶ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).

⁷ Stephen Spotte, *Zoos in Postmodernism : Signs and Simulations*, (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickison Press, 2006), p. 13.

Behavioural Enrichment incorporate modern constructs, the mid century interior and zoo exhibits, to display a postmodern simulacrum of a wild animal – a zoo animal.

The process in which I create each painting begins by first choosing a photograph of a domestic room, a living or dining room for entertaining guests. I look for architectural elements in the interior that have the potential to incorporate zoo imagery. This could be a wallpapered alcove that has a backdrop landscape mural, or cantilevered stairs that resemble platforms in big cat enclosures, or blinds that suggest a cage wall. Interior design images, frontal in nature, already include the visual of a three-walled room with one opening to the viewer, physically framed in the same way as a diorama, zoo exhibit, stage set, or representational painting. There is one painting in which I took a different approach. *Untitled (tapir)*, [Fig. 4], started with a zoo exhibit interior of an aquarium for hermit crabs seen at Paris's Jardin des Plantes. This exhibit was a perfect setting for my painting due to its tropical wallpaper mural of palm trees and a ceiling reminiscent of beams commonly found in modern architectural design.

After I have established the initial layout of the space in the painting, by using the room's basic architecture and furniture, I then assume the role of an interior decorator. I redecorate by editing out and adding accessories from other references, many of which are patterned with Japanese paper. Altering the room's original colour palette, textiles, and ornamentation changes the style and aesthetic of the room; it is no longer a sleek monochromatic modern interior design with a few bold geometric patterns. The combinations used in the interior of high and low design furniture, clashing colours and multiple patterns indicate a sense of design gone wrong. The rooms have lost their clean minimal high design qualities and have become overly decorated. By intentionally

creating modernist interiors that do not succeed and revealing the illusion of the painted environment, I make a connection with the zoo exhibit that attempts to be something it is not.

After deciding on the interior setting, a zoo animal is then chosen for the painting. The species depends on my knowledge of their typical zoo holding and the room I have chosen. The aesthetics of the animal's form and the interior compositions inform the choice of placement and integration into the environment. In each painting the asymmetrical composition creates a sense of awkwardness that emphasizes the artificial.

In constructing my compositions I take a similar approach to that of contemporary photographers Jeff Wall and Gregory Crewdson. Both artists stage their narrative images using conventions of painting and photography to portray fleeting moments with a quality similar to cinematic stills. Their photographs and my paintings employ a mixture of American modernist references in believable yet impossible tableaux in which familiar settings include something strange or abnormal. Our works contain indicators that something is wrong through elements, such as the miniature animals or behavioural enrichment devices in my paintings, which do not belong depicted in an interior. A significant difference between our works is that Wall and Crewdson, through their use of the photographic medium, are able to create a more heightened suspension of disbelief than is possible in a painting. However, the photograph is inherently a plastic surface whereas painting, through brushwork, affirms human presence. Although, a painting is clearly constructed; this human presence introduces a poignancy in my work.

Each interior I construct contains props of leisure such as books, magazines, board games, fresh flowers and bowls of fruit in order to suggest a sense of time and the

potential for narrative. The still-life objects add a note of ephemerality to the image a moment frozen in time. The lighting, in the found photographs that I use as references, is an important element to expand on in the paintings to increase the artificiality of the interiors. The various odd shadows created in the source photographs indicate many different lighting sources, which likely include photofloods and flashes. I further alter the effect of lighting in the rooms by removing shadows or adding invented ones to create a more unreal and artificial environment. The shadows are further rendered surreal by being created with transparent glazes of phthalo blue and raw umber. In some of the painted interiors one may see an indicator of a lighting source, for example a lamp or candle, but it does not contribute light to the room. Some objects in the rooms have numerous cast shadows, for example the ottoman or animal training pedestal in *Untitled (rhinoceros)*, [Fig. 3]. Other items in this same room have shadows such as the dining table, built in couch and stairs, but the two chairs in the foreground have no shadows and seem to float in space.

The framing of the interiors is a very important aspect of the work to further establish a commonality between the interiors and zoo exhibits. The intention for *Untitled (elephant/giraffe)*, [Fig. 2], was to create an image of two interiors/exhibits side by side to echo the consecutive viewing style of collections at zoos, galleries and museums. The viewer's first glance reveals a highly detailed painting, with bright hues and various patterns, of two miniature rooms that are bridged by a divider of coloured bars. The room divider references a wooden screen as well as resembling bars from exhibit cages. The outer bars of the screen structure continue along the bottom of each room, angling out towards the bottom corners of the support, then vertically up the

outside edges of the picture plane. This frames the interiors individually, separating them from each other as well as the viewer. Many zoo enclosures use glass to create a non-obtrusive barrier between the public and exhibit. The use of a glass barrier is also shown in *Untitled (camel)*, [Fig. 1]. The borders of the windows work to frame the exhibit and the public's perspective. By framing the interiors in the paintings I create a separation between the rooms and the viewer, implying the interiors be viewed as exhibits.

The paintings reveal the slow process and care spent in the labour of painting detailed, intricate work. The time-consuming effort of creating the work establishes a sustained contemplative manner for viewing them. The act of painting in this focused way essentially slows down the transference of information. The record of the physical making of the work is communicated to the viewer through the layers of detail, texture, and patterning. This unhurried statement acts in opposition to the fast pace of contemporary society. Developed in sections, the overall composition is not planned but unfolds. The work also contains a sense of construction and compression of space through a combination of representational and abstracted depictions. The painted illusion of the domestic interior falls apart as the walls and outside edges of the picture plane dissipate and drip away. This unresolved quality reinforces the artifice of the painting. My interest lies in creating interiors that, similar to zoos, attempt to present a realistic habitat that inevitably fails revealing the artifice of the appearance.

In *Behavioural Enrichment* the application of paint consists of short smooth brushstrokes using small brushes. The paintings share some similarities with the work of artist Amy Cutler in terms of scale and illustrative style as well as a contemporary approach of appropriating myriad references into one visually cohesive image. Cutler's

artistic style uses a combination of drawing and painting with gouache on paper. My work also uses a combination of both drawing and painting in a similarly clear, careful manner while being more experimental in its exploration of the formal possibilities of paint. Cutler places her subjects- animals, women, and hybrids- in a large, vacant, undefined space of white paper with few details of an environment. My paintings employ areas of untouched white Mylar to heighten the sense of containment in the interior spaces. The process of the paintings' construction is revealed through showing traces of their construction and the Mylar support.

The interiors in my paintings engage a variety of methods including appropriation, collage, and differing depictions of spatial possibilities. The spaces I construct are to some extent reminiscent of the interiors of contemporary painters Dexter Dalwood and Matthias Weischer, who are similarly interested in heightening the painted environment's artificiality. Dexter Dalwood's painted interiors are created from models made of collages of a variety of images from books and magazines, ranging in subjects from art history to pop culture. Weischer's installation-like interiors, rooms created with the purpose to display various objects, are built up in a collage-like manner layering imagery from background to foreground. The paintings in *Behavioural Enrichment* use collage literally, in the application of Japanese paper to the painting's surface, and reference the process of collage through layering and amalgamating different image sources. Dalwood's and Weischer's works as well as mine explore the possibilities of paint through interiors that play with rendering depth in a variety of illusionistic and abstract forms.

Using a combination of representational depth and flat abstract space in the composition creates tension and reflects the construction and artifice of the paintings. It is through jarring disruptions in the depiction of space that I create an abnormal experience for the viewer. The paintings display a world that is recognizable but spatially impossible. For example, the colourful bars in *Untitled (elephant/giraffe)*, [Fig. 2], have no shading and can be read as flat sections of colour much like other two dimensional objects in the room such as the walls, and carpets. The sensation of the abnormal and unfamiliar created in the spaces of the rooms, through differing perspectives and perceptual plays, mirrors the sense of strangeness experienced in viewing the artificial environments at the zoo.

In the *Behavioural Enrichment* paintings, the viewer may initially focus on the brightly coloured and decorated interior, but closer inspection reveals the single animal in each painting, somewhat camouflaged in the space. The scale of the animals makes them seem vulnerable, non-confrontational and domestic. They exude a sense of melancholy and strangeness in their alienation and disconnection from their environments. The animal's fragility and ephemerality is reflected in the choice of Mylar as support surface with its transparent, smooth, skin-like surface. The interiors and the animals are static except for a few drips of paint that mark both the process of the work and the artifice of the image. The paintings reflect the usually motionless tableaux of the zoo exhibit.

In *Untitled (zebra)*, [Fig. 5], a zebra is placed in a 1960's North American room with fresh flowers, a bowl of fruit and set dinner table. These objects heighten the theatrical quality of the untouched and unlived in room. The zebra, as with all the animals in *Behavioural Enrichment*, is positioned in the same impeccable manner as the

other objects in the room. There is no dirt surrounding its hooves, no traces of its living existence, the zebra does not even have a shadow. The animal then plays the role of a replica or an artifact, a decoration representing its wildness much like animals displayed in the zoo. The room contains other exotica, such as the Oriental chest, and high design modern furniture, which further heightens the strangeness of the animal.

Some of the interiors in *Behavioural Enrichment* contain pictures of whole or fragmented zoo exhibits. They are shown in the place of modern abstract paintings, oriental works of art, or traditional landscape paintings commonly displayed on the walls in modern interior design books. There are also windows in some of the rooms through which zoo imagery can be viewed, for example the windows and mirror in *Untitled (penguin)*, [Fig. 6]. As images within an image, these portals play with the depiction of space in the room. Are they windows or pictures, in front of the wall or behind it? The representations of zoo images act as didactic, absurd visual aids for the viewer.

In *Untitled (zebra)*, [Fig. 5], there are representations on the walls of other interiors as well as a brass clock reading 12 o'clock. Time is standing still and perhaps time has run out. The room's partitions have the type of mural painting that is commonly used in interior zoo exhibits. The back wall mural is loosely taken from Carl Akeley's 1889 muskrat diorama, which was the first habitat diorama. The image on the left wall does not maintain the same perspective, creating the effect of a glass wall that the viewer can look through into another space that reveals either a landscape mural or an exterior. The manner in which this space is described was inspired by my own experience of viewing three adjoining exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History. Each exhibit contained a taxidermy duck surrounded by three-dimensional props appropriate to

its habitat and a mural on the back wall. However, these exhibits were different from the other habitat dioramas because their side walls were glass. From a certain angle you could see a single duck in two different habitats. I recognize a connection between this display and the zoo exhibit in that both are created with the intended frontal perspective of the viewer and seen from a different angle the illusion inevitably fails. Zoo animals are usually shown in another country that has a completely different climate, within an exhibit that attempts to replicate their natural habitat. They have been displaced twice, or twice removed from their reality. In *Untitled (zebra)*, [Fig. 5], the murals act as a collision and a disruption of space. The interior in the painting dissolves upwards and stretches down out of the picture plane further heightening the process and artifice of the image.

Behavioural Enrichment is an exhibition of paintings of fictional zoo exhibits/modern home interiors. Created from a collision of imagery of Western zoos and mid-century modern interior design photographs, these curious new worlds comment on the artificiality that is in both zoos and the ideal home. The work, containing layers of research and paint, provides a space for the imagination to contemplate many possible metaphors. The animals, for example, can be viewed as substitutes for humans on display in their domestic environments, or they can be read as objects to be collected and consumed in the manner of other exotic interior decorations. The animals may also represent nature overshadowed by culture while at the same time reflecting one's love for nature and simultaneous desire or impulse to collect and control it.

The paintings draw comparisons between the stage-like sets of interior design photographs and zoo exhibits. The contained painted environments are complete with

props of still-lives and behavioural enrichment devices as well as an animal actor. These strange worlds of artifice are constructed with asymmetrical compositions disintegrating spaces and windows into other environments, balancing between illusion of depth and abstract flatness.

Through painting strange and abnormal environments I attempt to create for the viewer the same affect the zoo exhibit has on me which is an emotion felt in the body before the mind is conscious of it. The overwhelming affect the paintings seek to evoke is one of empathy. I create an atmosphere for the captive animal, one where its existence is vulnerable, dislocated, and objectified in a motionless tableau. It is my intention to sustain the viewer's interest through detailed and deliberate construction of the paintings while depicting a new space for contemplation. The paintings and their narratives may act as behavioural enrichment devices for humans through the possible stimulation of the mind and consequently through questioning human intention and responsibility in the absurd worlds found in the zoo and domestic interior design imagery.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

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