

Fierce, fabulous and fantastic

A new exhibition traces the history of animal painting in Europe from the anatomically inaccurate to the highly sentimental.

The first picture you see in the exhibition **Fierce Friends: Artists and Animals 1750-1900** is of a giraffe – sort of. Painted in about 1785, the creature in it has the neck of a giraffe, but its back is too long, its haunches too developed, and its legs are out of proportion to its body. Like most Europeans in the 18th century, the anonymous French artist who painted it had never seen a real giraffe. He relied on eyewitness descriptions, and on the skin of a giraffe the scientist and adventurer François Levallard had recently brought back from South Africa.

Exotic animals shipped back to Europe at this time usually died soon after arrival, even supposing they survived the voyage. Until about 1900, taxidermy consisted of stuffing the carcass with straw, so the results fell apart after a few years. This meant that ordinary men and women had very few opportunities to see exotic animals at first hand until the establishment of the first zoos – in Paris in 1793, in London in 1818. For an accurate depiction of a giraffe, Europeans had to wait until 1827 and the arrival of the first living specimen, when the Swiss artist Jacques-Laurent Agasse painted his lovely study of the Nubian giraffe sent to King George IV by the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt.

For most people in the 18th century, animals meant farm animals, carriage horses, and food for the table. But the Enlightenment was an age both of

exploration and of discovery, as more and more species of animals, birds, fish and insects were identified and brought back from the South Seas, Africa and India. In 1740, almost 600 species of animals were known to science. One hundred years later, the number had risen to 2,400, including many that are familiar to most children today as a matter of course – ostrich, rhino, orang-utan and buffalo.

Kings and princes, to be sure, had their own menageries, and wealthy collectors added rare birds, fish and mammals (shown side-by-side with two-headed calves and fake dragons) to their cabinets of curiosities. In this way, the forerunners of modern zoos and museums developed along parallel lines. On special occasions, an entrepreneur might exhibit a wild beast to the paying public, as was the case when the Venetian artist Pietro Longhi painted bored masqueraders at carnival time gawping at a pathetic rhinoceros. Out of such displays came another invention of the 19th century, the circus.

Wider knowledge of the animal kingdom came with the publication of George-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon's multi-volume *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-88). Based on specimens studied in the royal menageries, this remarkable book is still treasured – not for its scientific accuracy, but for its glorious hand-coloured engravings. Far too expensive for most people to buy, it at least helped to make men and women aware of the beauty of certain animals, as we can see in a service of Sèvres porcelain created in 1793, where the decorative motifs are taken from the birds drawn by de Buffon.

Gradually, humans began to notice that dumb creatures have feelings. Man cannot afford to feel pity for an animal bred for food. When that wonderful artist Jean-Baptiste Oudry shows a display of dead game in the 1740s, he is simply painting a luxury – fresh meat – available only to the well-off. Peasants ate bread. His lavish paintings were considered suitable for the dining rooms of the nobility because no one then expressed the slightest ethical or moral hesitation about hunting and killing the rabbit, deer and boar for the table, or about slaughtering such vermin as foxes and wolves.

Domestic animals were a different story. When Oudry depicts a hound with her newborn puppies, the simple picture has revolutionary undertones. The pretty white bitch, noticing that two of her pups have fallen asleep and are not getting the nourishment they need, is full of maternal solicitude. At a time when French noblewomen still sent their babies out to wet-nurses, even an animal is shown to display true maternal feeling. And in 1824, the year Delacroix shows two horses killed in battle, there is a new element in man's attitude towards the wanton slaughter of beautiful creatures: compassion. Delacroix's little masterpiece pierces the heart, whereas the grotesque memorial to animals killed in war unveiled in London recently leaves the viewer cold. But the moral impulse behind the creation of both works is exactly the same.

Once animals can be loved for their innocence or good nature, it becomes more difficult to treat them cruelly. Almost 15 years before Jean-Baptiste Greuze painted a picture of a young girl mourning her pet sparrow (1765), William Hogarth published his series of prints, the *Stages of Cruelty*, showing how the mistreatment of animals leads inexorably to the devaluing of all forms of life, including human. In this show, it is almost impossible to look at Emile Edouard

Mouchy's horrifying depiction of the vivisection of a dog (1832) without wincing. Though such experiments represent a necessary evil, our very squeamishness represents another rung upward in the moral evolution of mankind.

This process started in the early 19th century when men began to see in the animal kingdom a mirror image of their own feelings. In his portrayal of a horse frightened by lightning, Gericault lets us see the animal's tensed body, foam-flecked mouth and brow furrowed in anxiety. In *The Jealous Lioness* of about 1880, the German artist Paul Meyerheim shows a caged lioness enraged at the attention her mate is paying to a beautiful lion tamer.

Gradually, artists began to blur the distinctions between animal and human. When Edwin Landseer in *High Life and Low Life* contrasts a mongrel guard dog with a deerhound, the animals are surrogates for their absent masters, a butcher and a nobleman. All these artists emphasised the physical and emotional resemblances between animals and human beings.

Article: 'Fierce, fabulous and fantastic' - The Daily Telegraph 2005

Questions 27 – 31

Choose the correct letter A, B, C or D

Write the correct letter in boxes 1 - 5 on your answer sheet.

27. The point the writer is making about the picture of a giraffe is that:

- A. the artist knew it was inaccurate.**
- B. it might seem ridiculous today.**
- C. its inaccuracies are understandable.**
- D. it is not totally unlike a real giraffe.**

28. In the second paragraph, the writer explains why:

- A. there were no accurate paintings of giraffes in Europe until 1827.**
- B. people in Europe were so keen to see exotic animals.**
- C. people in Europe preferred paintings of animals to stuffed animals.**
- D. the establishment of zoos had an effect on the painting of animals.**

29. The writer's main topic in the third paragraph is

- A. which animal species became popular in Europe in the 18th century.**
- B. why the identification of species became an important issue in the 18th century.**

C. the extent to which knowledge of animals increased in the 18th century.

D. the way in which attitudes to animals changed in the 18th century.

30. Which of these is the writer doing in the fourth paragraph?

A. contrasting the development of zoos with that of museums.

B. criticising the commercial exploitation of creatures.

C. describing a change in the portrayal of animals in paintings.

D. explaining the origins of the use of creatures for public entertainment.

31. The writer mentions the porcelain created in 1793 as an example of:

A. improvements in the artistic portrayal of creatures.

B. the influence of Buffon's Histoire Naturelle.

C. one of the disadvantages of de Buffon's Histoire Naturelle.

D. the popularity of pictures of creatures with the wealthy.

Questions 32 – 35

Complete each sentence with the correct ending, A-F below.

Write the correct letter, A-F in boxes 32-35 on your answer sheet.

32. Delacroix's 1824 painting...

33. Greuze's 1765 painting...

34. Hogarth's series of prints...

35. Landseer's pair of paintings High Life and Low Life...

A: makes a moral point about human behaviour.

B: contrasts animal behaviour with human behaviour.

C: shows a human's feeling for a creature.

D: has an identical purpose to that of another work of art.

E: depicts similarities between creatures and people.

F: portrays the feelings creatures can have towards humans.

Questions 36 – 40

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in the Reading Passage?

In boxes 36 - 40 on your answer sheet, write

YES if the statement agrees with the views of the writer

NO if the statement contradicts the views of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

36. It is understandable that people feel no emotion towards certain animals.

37. Some of Oudry's paintings are more impressive than others.

38. Some people claim to love animals but treat them badly.

39. Mouchy's painting shows something that should never happen.

40. Early 19th-century art reveals a change in people's attitudes towards animals.