

ece nada  
engin arer  
havva zorlu  
irem yksekbilgili

jan engelhardt  
kbra ateş sarı  
melisa kılıç  
zlem gk

sara ko  
shannon johnstone  
volkan parlak

# animal gaze

on-XR

curator: ece nada  
dev/tech artist: engin arer



## ABOUT *ANIMAL GAZE*

Ece Nada

*Animal Gaze* is a digital and VR-friendly speculative archive exhibition based on the original narrative of the physical exhibition of the same name held in Istanbul (Türkiye) in 2023. It features multimedia artworks (some digitized from physical art, and others created digitally) by eleven participating artists from Türkiye, Canada and Germany. This collaboration between the Animal Gaze Project (AGP) and on-XR follows the same background story and conceptual limitations that shaped the initial project.

The concept for the exhibition emerged from the imagined proceedings of a trial titled “Crimes Against Animals.” This trial envisions a speculative future where non-human animals are no longer treated as “natural resources” at the service of human beings, whether for clothing, food, entertainment, or medicine. In this future, the history of animal exploitation has become a relic of the past. The setting of this exhibition is a former slaughterhouse repurposed as a permanent exhibition space; the goal is to curate an archival record specifically for the animals of the future. Meanwhile, the human audience of today participates indirectly in this confrontation, looking at what these future animals have come to see and witnessing the history their ancestors endured. Each artist has contributed at least one piece intended to serve as a record for this future archive, creating an “exhibition within an exhibition.”

This speculative encounter finds its inspiration in Jacques Derrida’s reflections in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. In his famous encounter with a cat, Derrida recognizes that the animal looks at him as much as he looks at her, prompting a consideration of the “animal gaze”—an aspect largely ignored in the history of Western philosophy. Realizing that animals possess an outward gaze that we cannot fully know leads to a crucial shift in thought: animals are no longer objects to be looked at, but subjects with their own gaze and a subjectively entangled *Umwelt*\*. This recognition is perhaps the most vital step toward the liberation of animals; it stands in direct contrast to the traditional treatment of living beings as a “heap” or a “flock,” defined only by their utility or categorized as “livestock.” Within this context, *Animal Gaze* asks: What if animals looked at their own history of exploitation in a future where they were finally liberated? What would happen if we confronted these animals as they reflect on their own past, and what would it mean to look at ourselves through their eyes?

The interweaving of the present and the future through this shifting temporality raises urgent questions regarding the persistence of violence. Is this exploitation truly a thing of the past, or is it still occurring the moment we step out the exhibition space? Are we carrying animal parts on our bodies right now, or attempting to digest them in our stomachs?

**This is where all gazes, human and nonhuman, meet.**

The “animal gaze” of this exhibition as well as the Animal Gaze Project (AGP) is a provocation. While the phrase typically suggests the perspective of the nonhuman other, we use it to problematize the human-animal dichotomy and the very act of looking. By challenging the traditional, human-centric vision that separates “us” from “them,” we created a space where human animals of today and the nonhuman animals of the future witness the same archival exhibition. It is an invitation for us, humans of today, to imagine the weight of looking at an archive of one’s own ancestors, a history of objectification and exploitation.

The spatial journey of the exhibition is a deliberate curatorial choice designed to foster a post-anthropocentric way of relating to fellow creatures, standing in direct opposition to human exceptionalism. In the first room, there are no artworks where an animal looks back at the visitor. This absence is an invitation to move beyond the traditionally humanist logic of the gaze; while we have been looking at animals since our first encounter with them, the issue is not merely whether our eyes meet, but rather how we look. Each artwork functions as an archival fragment, telling a story that asks us to reconsider what we have long taken for granted, assumed, and accepted. From here, a tunnel-like passage\*\* leads us to the second room. It is only here that we finally meet the gazes of nonhuman animals. Because most of us are accustomed to “seeing” animals as objects or symbols, it requires a significant shift in perspective to “see” the individual “Other” who has their own way of living that is no less meaningful or valuable than our own. Can we imaginatively step into their paws, hooves, or feet, and question which animals we recognize as individuals in contrast to those we categorize only as numbers or body parts? Can we try to feel *with* them as fellow creatures? There is no way out of this second room. We cannot use the door, but we can take a look; it is where the body parts were once kept, now empty. Where are we now? Are we the same people who entered through that door, or has something started to shift? That shift is the ultimate aim of this exhibition.

### Ethical Responsibility & Accessibility

Because this is an exhibition designed for nonhuman animals, human language is avoided within the artworks and the space as a whole. In a commitment to ethical responsibility and respect, the archive avoids graphic imagery; it is a matter of dignity not to show a fellow creature the details of how their ancestors suffered (and were killed). Instead, the artists tried to imagine how an alternative, non-objectifying archive and artistic storytelling might work, and how a cow, a sheep, a pig or a turkey might be feeling as they endure this violent reality of today. Finally, the curation accounts for varying physicalities, ensuring that the height and placement of works allow for diverse species to see and experience the art. *Animal Gaze* remains a place of encounter and confrontation—a site where the marginalized, objectified, and mythologized arrive from different dimensions of time to meet.

Notes:

\*Directly translated from German as “environment,” biologist Uexküll’s *Umwelt* refers not to an external container nor to an internal projection, but to a structurally meaningful world shaped by the organism’s embodied and affective capacities. (Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into The Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.)

\*\*This “tunnel” was designed based on the curved ramp model that Temple Grandin created, which is part of this archive. Because of the curve, animals moving toward the slaughter area cannot see what is coming, which simplifies the “operation.”

# ARTISTS

## Ece Nada



### Bio

Ece Nada is a visual artist, academic researcher, and curator from Istanbul, Türkiye. She holds a BA *cum laude* in English Language and Literature from Istanbul University and an MA in Comparative Literature from Koç University. Following her undergraduate studies, she received formal art education in Florence (Italy) and London (UK), and presented her first solo installation exhibition, *The Other Wall*, in 2018.

During her MA, her artistic and research practice shifted toward nonhuman animals. As part of her MA thesis, she curated the multimedia group exhibition *Animal Gaze* (2023) in Istanbul and participated in the exhibition with her *Encounter* installation series. Her artistic work engages with critical posthumanism to explore post-anthropocentric ontologies and visual narratives. She is currently based in Canada as a PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Humanities, while producing digital artworks and continuing to collaborate with artists to curate new exhibitions through the art platform Animal Gaze Project (AGP) she founded.

[www.ecenada.com](http://www.ecenada.com)  
IG: @ecenada

### Artwork

*On Tenderness* is a meditation on the concept of “tenderness” that emerges from the artist's doctoral research. Inspired by William Kentridge’s words, “When I am dead and need tenderness,” this concept draws on Anat Pick’s notion of “creaturely” vulnerability, shared by sentient beings whose flesh-and-blood, material bodies are exposed to both pain and care, as well as Lori Gruen’s concept of “entangled empathy.” It gestures toward the singular preciousness of each life that requires sustained, relational attention and care.

The movement of the ambiguously shaped and shifting body reflects an imagined creature’s attempt to escape confinement and insistence on vitality. The hollowed-out form in soil marks the absence of bodies, representing the singular creatures whose lives were taken and whose capacity to live freely was foreclosed.

This installation reflects on lives taken from nonhuman animal individuals who were denied the possibility of living lives capable not only of suffering, but also of love, friendship, and joy. *On Tenderness* is both a solemn celebration of life and an invitation to mourn each individual who needed, and was owed, tenderness.



***On Tenderness***  
2025, digital multimedia installation with animated loop video

## Engin Arer



Engin Arer is a multimedia audio-visual artist from Türkiye, currently based in Canada. Having studied engineering and worked in IT with a technical background, he focuses on arts in digital mediums, such as computer-aided music and interactive video art/game design.

He is particularly drawn to the relativity of perception and how it can be manipulated. He creates parallel dystopian worlds that speculate about the future of earth with all its agents.

His art mediums include interactive (auditory & other sensory) and reactive 2D/3D, real-time experiences & experiments, animations/videos, and installations.

[www.enginarer.com](http://www.enginarer.com)

IG: @enginarer

### Artwork

Animals kept in zoos, or in other forms of captivity, often develop "Zoochosis," which is a state of repetitive, compulsive behaviors like pacing, swaying, head-bobbing, rocking, feather plucking, over-grooming, bar biting and even self-mutilation. Even when returned to the wild, these repetitive and/or self-harming behaviours often persist; the cage remains within long after the physical bars are gone.

Loop explores the haunting persistence of Zoochosis. A metal ball with all the wear and tear endured under human exploitation, goes into an infinite loop in a vast natural landscape. Though no longer confined, it remains trapped in this mechanical circuit. As seasons shift and years pass, the ball continues its relentless, circular path: a haunting portrait of trauma that outlives its architecture.



*Loop*  
2025, Looping Animation

## Havva Zorlu



Havva Zorlu is a photographer from Türkiye. She began engaging with photography in middle school, pursued journalism during high school, and later graduated from the Photography Department at Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Fine Arts.

During her university years, she embraced visual storytelling as a tool for activism, aiming to make visible the exploitation of animals. Since 2021, she has been documenting the lives of animals who are kept in captivity by humans. In 2022, through her photographic projects carried out in dairy farms and slaughterhouses, she joined the contributor team of the animal photojournalism agency We Animals Media; in the same year, she held an exhibition titled “SÜT” as part of her undergraduate thesis and documented the use of animals in religious rituals during Eid al-Adha. In 2023, she carried out a six-month photography project documenting prominent forms of exploitation across various regions of Turkey, with the aim of revealing the relationship between animal use and culture in the country.

Today, she continues to produce documentary projects advocating for the freedom of all species and shares her experience through exhibitions, talks, and interviews.

IG: @havvazorlu

### Artwork

Video collage made with the recordings of the faces of non-human animals, who are reduced to the status of resources for human consumption.

In this work, the gazes of animals living in captivity in the animal exploitation system, framed by the norms of the dominant culture, are focused on. The purpose of the video, which includes real images, is to bring the gazes of real nonhuman animals together with the gazes of human animals, which is abstained purposefully in the first section of the exhibition, and thus bring the human visitors from the speculative future of Animal Gaze to the animals of today. It offers an opportunity to encounter various forms of exploitation in food, cosmetics, textile, and entertainment, revealing the close relationship between humans and animals, which goes unnoticed in our daily routines. Look Again aims to bring the gazes of human animals and nonhuman animals who are individuals and not objects uttered with numbers or consumed as food.



*Look Again (Tekrar Bak)*  
Video, 2023

## İrem Yüksekbilgili



### Bio

İrem Yüksekbilgili is a visual artist based in Ankara, Türkiye. She holds a BFA in Painting from Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University. Alongside her artistic practice, she has been involved in the coordination of national and international art events within the Istanbul Intercultural Art Dialogues Association (İKASD) since 2022.

Her artistic practice focuses on the question of animals, drawing attention to the forms of destruction caused by humans. Engaging with concepts such as domination, speciesism, and commodification, her work is largely shaped by personal experiences and by close interactions with animals through voluntary involvement in animal rescue initiatives within civil society organizations.

She lives and works in Ankara.

IG: @iremyuksekbilgili

### Artwork

*Witness (Tank)* is a sculpture produced from paper waste accumulated over the course of a year, alongside discarded egg cartons left over from everyday practices of consumption. The work draws attention to the afterlives of materials that are habitually used, exhausted, and disposed of without reflection. Recycling here is not approached as a purely aesthetic strategy, but as a critical gesture that asks the viewer to confront the ethical dimensions embedded in acts of consumption.

Within economies of animal-based consumption, such objects tend to fade into the background of daily life; in *Witness*, they re-emerge as material traces of what has been overlooked. As Finn Arne Jørgensen notes, “recycling lies at the intersection of the material and the ideological.” By making this neglected “afterlife” visible, *Witness* invites the viewer to assume responsibility.

The physical sculpture has been 3D scanned for this exhibition.



## Jan Engelhardt



Jan is a German photographer, specializing in animal rights. With his images, he draws attention to the very own character and appearance of each animal.

His work aims to create empathy and awareness for those animals who are suppressed by humans.

[www.jan-vgn.de](http://www.jan-vgn.de)

IG: @jan\_vgn

### Artwork

#### Black & white series:

These cows were captured in the Austrian Alps at over 1,900 metres. It was very impressive to see these elegant giants walking through the mountains, merging with the landscape. For a short moment it seemed as if they were free, but they weren't. It is still exploitation hiding behind the illusion of freedom.

#### Portraits:

Most people only know these animals as part of an anonymous mass exploited for food production. A mass in which they have no chance to develop their characters and pursue their individual needs. Fortunately, Wilma, Zacke, Heidi and Jule were rescued from captivity and brought to a place of safety. With my portraits of them, I have tried to capture their personality as I perceived them at the moment of our encounter. There is so much to read in their faces, each of it has their own story to tell.



*Illusion of freedom*  
2025, black&white, digital photo series

Portraits  
2023-2025, digital photo series

## Kübra Ateş Sari



Kübra Ateş Sari is a multidisciplinary artist from Türkiye. She graduated from the Department of Stage Design, Costume and Puppet Design at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 2014. She worked for a period in theatre and film productions, focusing on acting, costume, makeup, and set design. In 2018, she completed her Master's degree in Plastic Arts at Yeditepe University. Between 2014 and 2024, she worked at Vakko as a Visual Merchandising Manager and display design specialist. Since 2024, she has been working as a Creative Manager for Nickelodeon at The Land of Legends, designing and producing themed decorations and visual display projects. She continues to create works in painting, photography, sculpture, digital art, and model-making, exploring themes related to urban life, architecture, psychology, individuals in the city, and animal rights.

IG: @kubra.atess

### Artwork

This series aims to evoke a sense of dislocation in the viewer by confronting the violence obscured by anthropocentric (human-centric) consumption practices. It does so by reconnecting the lifeless bodies of sea creatures with the environment to which they rightfully belong.

These two works serve as a record of the fractured relationship between the natural environment and living beings. They are positioned as documents of a rupture and a contradiction on ecological, ethical, and existential planes.



*Decontextualized Bodies*  
2025, AI-assisted digital creation; digital collage in Procreate

## Melisa Kılıç



### Bio

Melisa Kılıç is an artist working across painting, installation and wall-based practices.

Her research centers on the planet and its many life forms, examined through a micro–macro lens and articulated with anti-speciesist approaches, often brought into the public sphere. Focusing on cities, nature and endemic species, she incorporates both organic and inorganic materials, as well as sound and scent, to explore overlooked ecological values. Her practice follows a sustainable logic in material use and in subject matter.

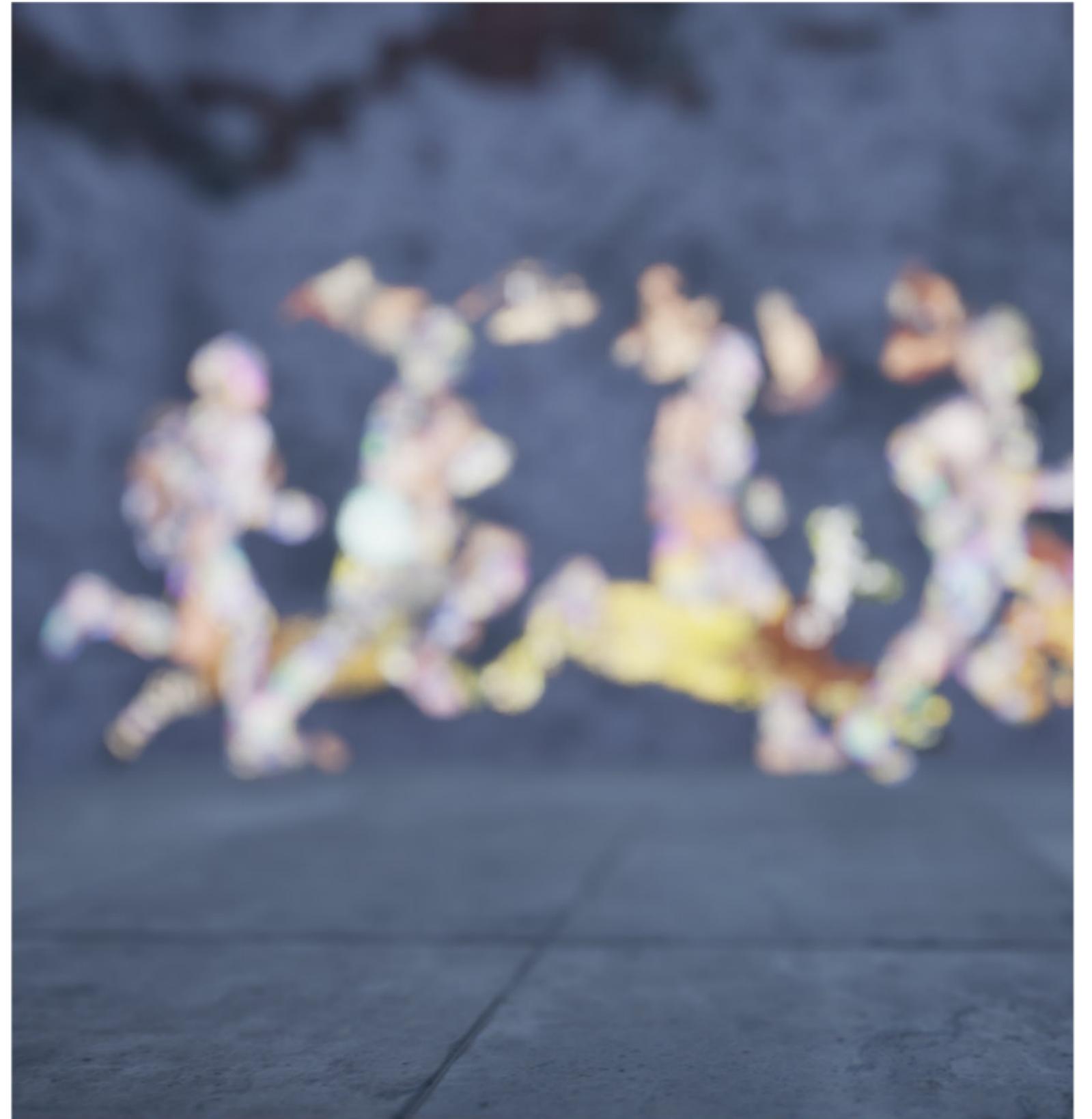
She has participated in numerous group and competition exhibitions. She is currently completing her PhD in Plastic Arts at Yeditepe University with a thesis titled “Artistic Production from an Ecological Ethics Perspective: An Analysis on the Five Warnings Project.”

IG: @melart.co

### Artwork

Human, deer, bird. Each bound within the same cycle.  
Skins shift, shells transform, bodies and feathers mutate...  
Yet the slingshot remains, the net remains, the rifle remains.  
Exploitation seeps not only into flesh, but into roots, leaves, and breath.  
Every layer becomes an echo of a species.

In this work, invisible connections are restructured through digital layers.  
Chains, nets, and rifles emerging behind the running figures symbolize the evolutionary continuity of violence directed toward both nature and the body.  
Skin tones, dermal textures, and tree barks dissolve the boundaries between species, constructing a shared anatomy of pain.  
The virtual experience invites the viewer to become both a witness and a participant in this ongoing violence.



*Anatomy of Pain*  
2025, Digital Collage

## Özlem Gök



### Bio

Özlem Gök is a vegan activist artist and academic. She completed her undergraduate studies in Art Education at Gazi University Faculty of Education, her master's degree in the Painting Department of the Institute of Social Sciences at Hacettepe University, and her proficiency in art (PhD equivalent) in the Painting Department of the Institute of Fine Arts at Marmara University. Her artistic practice focuses on ecological sensitivity, critiques of anthropocentrism, and representations of animals. She has participated in numerous national and international solo and group exhibitions, and in her academic research she engages with ecological art, ecocriticism, and vegan art approaches. She currently serves as an Associate Professor in the Painting Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Erciyes University.

IG: @ozlemgok

### Artwork

*Speciesist Interior* was conceived as a series that focuses on making visible the entrenched speciesist gaze embedded within institutional interior spaces where animals are exploited. In these works, violence is not concealed; practices of cutting, suspension, and bodily intervention are distinctly felt within the spatial order. However, the animal's dead body is deliberately withdrawn. This choice positions itself as a stance against the aestheticization and visual presentation of the dead animal body. The absence of the animal does not function as a reduction that softens violence; on the contrary, it produces a void that renders the continuity and ordinariness of violence more forcefully perceptible. The black-and-white charcoal technique, by consciously excluding color, establishes a documentary sensibility that alludes to photography, creating a heavy, dark, and unsettling atmosphere. The series exposes the normalized speciesist gaze within interior spaces.



*Speciesist Interior series*  
2019, Charcoal on Paper

## Sara Ko



### Bio

Sara Ko is an animation director, 3D visual artist, and art educator based in Canada. Her work explores the intersections of art, science, and technology, often through experimental films and video installations. Rooted in a deep respect for the natural world, she creates detailed digital landscapes that reflect on ecological loss, animal presence, and the shifting relationship between humans and the nonhuman.

With a background in both art and environmental science, Sara blends technical precision with poetic storytelling. Her immersive animations invite viewers into unfamiliar ecosystems that prompt reflection and emotional connection.

Her animated short films have received international recognition, screening at film festivals in Vancouver and Los Angeles. Recently, her work has been shown at AMC Theaters, The Grove in Los Angeles, and featured in exhibitions across Canada, the USA, and the UK.

[www.artistsara.com](http://www.artistsara.com)

*Fractured Fauna* traces the web of interconnection that binds all living beings, revealing a world where presence is shared, influence is mutual, and nothing exists in isolation. The work holds space for the sacredness of animal life while tracing how existence is diminished, abstracted, or turned into ornament within human systems.

Through light and form, it gestures toward a world where once-connected beings remain bound by threads, reaching across distances carved by culture, ownership, and desire. The luminous structures pulse between body and memory, suggesting a time before separation.

Both elegy and offering, it remembers what has been reduced to image yet refuses to let that be the final state. It invites slower seeing, where attention becomes a gesture of care, and listens for the echo of coexistence that persists when language, ownership, and hierarchy fall away. What remains is an offering to presence itself, quiet, enduring, and unclaimed.



*Fractured Fauna* with *Before the Separation*  
2023–2025, 3D animation with sound and digital sculpture installation.

## Shannon Johnstone



### Bio

Shannon Johnstone is a photographic artist. She has had solo shows in Chicago, Rochester, New Orleans, Raleigh, and Durham. Her photography has been featured in group exhibitions nationally and internationally. She is a six time Photolucida Critical Mass Finalist (2017, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2010, 2009), and the recipient of three Creativity Grants from the Culture & Animals Foundation (2023, 2019, 2014). Johnstone's newest work "Roadside Zoo" won Honorable Mentions in the International Photography Awards (2025 and 2021), and a Finalist in the 2023 BigPicture Natural World Photography Competition. This work is the foundation for her dissertation, earning a PhD in Human-Animal Studies from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand (2025).

Johnstone is an Associate with the New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies, a Fellow with the Oxford Centre of Animal Ethics (UK), and a We Animals Media photography contributor. She is a tenured professor at Meredith College in Raleigh, NC.

[www.shannonjohnstone.com](http://www.shannonjohnstone.com)

### Artwork

Roadside zoos are unaccredited zoos where animals live in squalor as spectacle. Although it might seem like a thing of the past, they exist in almost every Western country. To my eye, the cruelty is in plain sight. However, we are bombarded with banal zoo photos affirming zoos are good. These messages are ubiquitous and it is difficult to see anything different. In response, I created negative images illuminating the animals. These images are alien to our eyes, and force us to look and possibly see the opposite of what we have been seeing. Not only do these images depict animals in zoos as a negative, but the inversion highlights the individual animal's resistance by adding contrast and definition to the conditions of their confinement—elements that would not be necessary if animals were consenting to their situations. The literal inversion is a perfect visual metaphor.

*Roadside Zoo: Captive Glow series*  
2022-2025, manipulated digital photography



## Volkan Parlak



### Bio

Volkan Parlak is a visual artist based in Samsun, Türkiye. Drawing on a background in architectural technical drafting and cartography, he places drawing practice at the center of his artistic production. He completed his BFA in Painting at Marmara University Faculty of Fine Arts in 2018.

In order to examine concepts of space, memory, and property within a broader social framework, Parlak turned toward sociology, deepening the theoretical foundations of his work. Following his research within the discipline of painting, he continues his graduate studies in Philosophy, expanding the conceptual scope of his practice.

Using architectural plans, mapping methods, and the aesthetics of technical drawing as tools, his work interrogates interspecies hierarchies and practices of power exerted over living bodies.

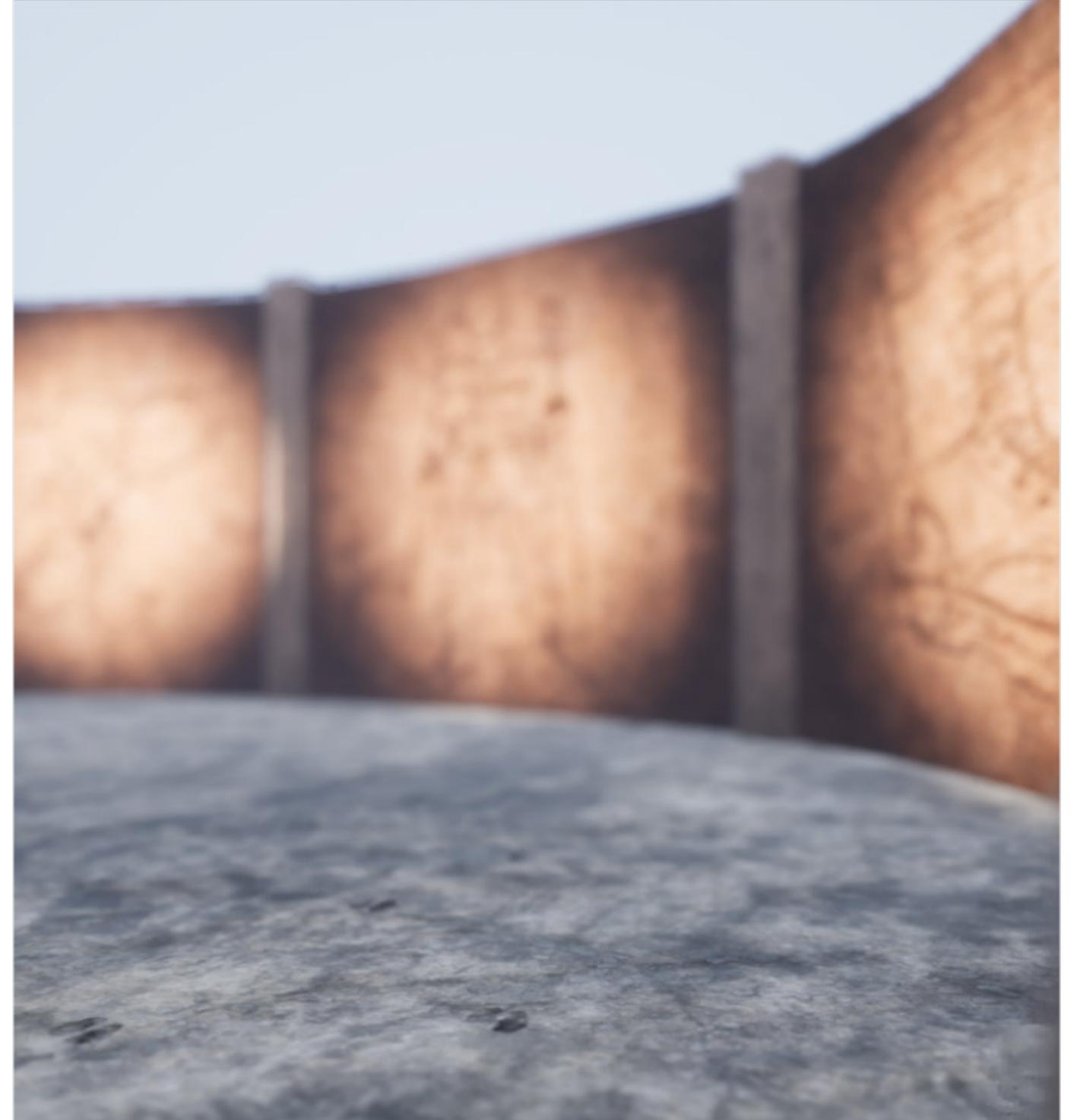
IG: @volkanparlakart

### Artwork

The military coup of 1980 marked a profound rupture in Türkiye's social memory, restructuring everyday life through militarized discipline. During this period, some slaughterhouses were repurposed as temporary detention and interrogation centers, shifting political violence onto an industrial plane. *Permanent Blow* takes this historical reality as its point of departure, reading political violence in parallel with the systematic logic of the slaughterhouse.

The work brings together objects drawn from the shared inventories of the coup and the slaughterhouse. Military caps, helmets, uniforms, aprons, boots, handcuffs, and hanging hooks are layered on tracing paper. Rendered through the precise, regulated lines of the rapido pen, these superimpositions evoke the historical and symbolic continuity of violence.

Tracing paper, with its semi-transparent surface, operates as an ambiguous plane of witnessing and a living archive: neither fully revealing nor concealing the image. Suspended between memory and forgetting, the work shifts focus from a specific site to a *condition*, questioning how bodies are reduced to anonymous technical objects and how mechanisms of violence are reproduced across species, both human and nonhuman. The intermingling traces across layers render visible a shared rupture to which living beings are subjected.



*Permanent Blow (Kalıcı Darbe)*  
2025, Rapido pen on tracing paper (digitized)

# EXHIBITION PLAN

Havva Zorlu  
*Look Again*  
(*Tekrar Bak*)  
Video, 2023

Jan Engelhardt  
*Illusion of  
Freedom &  
Portraits*  
2023-2025,  
digital photo  
series

Volkan Parlak  
*Permanent Blow (Kalıcı Darbe)*  
2025, Rapido pen on tracing paper  
(digitized)

Shannon Johnstone  
*Roadside Zoo:  
Captive Glow series*  
2022-2025,  
manipulated digital  
photography

Kübra Ateş Sarı  
*Decontextualized Bodies*  
2025, AI-assisted digital creation,  
digital collage in Procreate

İrem Yüksekbilgili  
*Witness (Tanık)*  
2025, Sculpture  
made with recycled  
paper (digitized),  
20 × 100 × 75 cm

Özlem Gök  
*Speciesist Interior series*  
2019, Charcoal on Paper  
(digitized)

Ece Nada  
*On Tenderness*  
2025, digital multimedia  
installation with  
animated loop video

Engin Arer  
*Loop*  
2025, Looping Video

Sara Ko  
*Fractured Fauna with  
Before the Separation*  
2023–2025, 3D animation  
with sound and digital

Melisa Kılıç  
*Anatomy of Pain*  
2025, Digital Collage



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