

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TOMMY MISHIMA**  
**Animal Rites**

February 11 - March 18, 2017  
Opening Reception:  
February 11, 2017, 7-9pm

(Chicago - January 11, 2017)

Stuart & Co. Gallery is pleased to announce *Animal Rites*, an exhibition of new works by Tommy Mishima. Through exploration of the symbolic use of animals throughout art history and their relevance in Posthumanist literature as the “Other,” Mishima uncovers how these two approaches play a vital role in ritualistic channels for self-identification. Paying homage to movements such as New Objectivism, Magical Realism, and Symbolism, Mishima touches on themes of technology, popular culture, social media, and the occult thereby allowing him “to imbue the work with overlapping characteristics, even when dealing with seemingly disparate narratives.” Likewise, Mishima’s contemporary take on genre painting exposes the subliminal hidden within rituals of relative normalcy where characters appear to be sure of themselves but are shrouded in a sense of unsettlement.

The Derridean show title references a book of the same name by Cary Wolfe while simultaneously alluding to ethical “rights.” Just as Wolfe provides a discourse on the interaction of race, sexuality, colonialism, and animality in twentieth-century American culture, Mishima prods us to consider how beasts have been used throughout history to imagine, describe, transform, or amplify human traits. He takes us one step further by connecting this quest for self-cognition to our ritualistic tendencies. As Mishima states, “Any actions that we adapt into a set of repetitions can become ritualistic. It is something we do as humans to retain order or familiarity in our lives. In the past I think rituals had a more spiritual significance, they targeted the psyche and hence it was about creating psychological balance. Today rituals aim to engage with us emotionally. Our entire lifestyles become rituals that aim to make us feel good about ourselves. The problem with that I feel is that we open the door to hedonism and solipsism. Instead of using ritual as a metaphor or tool for something, the ritual itself becomes the real world, and we lose perspective of what is real or not, since we are acting from a purely emotional basis.”

Perhaps the clearest example of the importance placed on ritual can be seen in *Camping*, a work chock-full of mythical references, shrines, and symbols of magic and alchemy. Two figures are central to the composition, a woman dressed as what appears to be an ancient Egyptian priestess holding an antennae or transmitter powering a computer tablet and a young girl with two Minnie Mouse-like buns seated in an oversized beast-like chair. In the surrounding woods, the viewer finds patches of magic mushrooms, rock-pile shrines, skulls of humans, animals, and aliens, and what the viewer can only imagine to be either an ivory tusk or unicorn horn. An empty, pyramid-shaped tent waits in the distance.

Works such as *Spa*, where the viewer glimpses clients enjoying a massage oblivious to the serpents that entwine them, further illustrate this notion. The figures are bathed in the glow of neon lights and surrounded by American flag iconography adding to the sexual tension and cheap pleasure that reverberates throughout the work. Similarly, *Christmas Eve* depicts an attractive woman in an overtly seductive pose surrounded by the makings of a festive holiday and a pile of disrobed clothing. Upon closer examination, the throne style chair upon which she sits has talons for feet and is emblazoned with symbols including arrows, gavels, daggers, and coffins. The woman's sinister smile sits below a mustache hidden in shadow as if she is mutating into a creature or succubus before our eyes.

Similar esoteric iconography can be found in *Crib*, a painting that depicts an infant comfortably sleeping in a cradle with a vase of flowers and seemingly innocuous mobile. Upon further reflection, there are strange crab-legged shadows beyond the spinning mobile, a snake eating its own tail on the child's blanket, and a shooting star front and center with Hebrew written on its tail. *Partners* also presents the viewer with a variety of symbols as well as technology integrations that act as icons marking the actualization of a modern ritual and the virtual engagement with the world. In this work, two men holding hands gaze at an iPad powered by an orbed Apple product sitting on an American-flag patterned table. One of the men has a robot device on his arm that is drawing amalgamations or magical designs on the tablet while the other is holding a scepter. A serpent slithers between the two men stalking a mouse dangled from the hand of a cherub figure in the background. An owl knowingly presides over the scene.

Mishima's injection of technology, popular culture, social media, animality, and the occult into his narratives portray characters in a state of cognitive dissonance, motivated by the prospect of ideological, progressive, or intellectual mobility even if such motivation contradicts empirical data. In truth, on the background of most people's assumptions one finds a plethora of logical fallacies that have erected a version of reality that has nothing to do with what is factual. Technology itself presents such paradoxes as it can be the remedy or the poison of our mental ailments, and in many cases this excessive dependence on technology ends up severing our connection with ourselves, the real world, and our own senses. *Animal Rites* hurls us into this uncanny straddling of virtual and real worlds, a world where the lines between ancient and modern, beast and man, truth and fiction, grow fainter everyday - a world not that dissimilar from ours.

Mishima attended Parsons School of Design, where he earned his BFA in Fine Arts, and it was during these four years that he decided to concentrate his technique and effort exclusively to painting. After college, Mishima worked in the Command Center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for six years. Soon after leaving the Met, Mishima

attended Rhode Island School of Design, where he received his MFA in Painting. Mishima has shown in numerous galleries in Providence and New York, including Nancy Margolis Gallery, Projekt 722 and 1st Dibs. He also attended the Vermont Studio Center and is the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner fellowship.

Maintaining a contemporary vision, Stuart & Co. Gallery strives to represent emerging and mid-career artists at the forefront of expression. Since its inception in 2012, Stuart & Co. Gallery has been home to innovative, pioneering exhibitions across a multitude of media and genres. The gallery embraces multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-genre art forms in addition to traditional practices.

Please join Stuart & Co. Gallery for the opening reception of *Animal Rites* on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, from 7-9pm.

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