



Shelley Reed, *Animal Instinct* at the Columbia Museum of Art

On view from May 16 – September 14, 2014

The CMA is the first museum to present a career retrospective of American artist Shelley Reed. This exhibition is an impressive selection of 37 large-scale black and white paintings of animals, including a wall-length mural. These oils on canvas are based on Old Master paintings where animals often stand in for people and are used to create visual parables about the strengths and failings of human nature. Animals in lush, gorgeous paintings communicate with each other, flirt with each other, and consume each other. Reed is an unexpected painter because she does not use color in her current work, although she started out as a colorist. Her palette shrank as she became less interested in exploiting color and more interested in exploring the meaning of Old Master paintings.

Reed not only makes Old Master paintings feel contemporary by making them large and dismissing color, but she focuses on the contrasting mixture of wildness, as represented by tigers, lions, birds, and other animals, with high culture. She is fascinated with how human beings tend to understand the world in terms of themselves, yet wild animals have their own natures. She explores this complexity in both complicated narratives and simple animal portraits. The result is that we readily identify animals that boast, strut, threaten, or attract other animals, and at the same time realize that despite being the subjects of fine art, wild animals resist civilization. It is not their nature. The art says they fit in, and so Reed has a built-in tension to her narratives. The grandest narrative in the show is a 47-foot-long mural entitled *In Dubious Battle*, where a panorama of fighting, playing, and posing unfolds. The mural, with its cast of characters and dynamic action, feels like a silent movie where we get to invent the story along with the animals and the artist.

Reed is represented by represented by Danese/Corey and the Sears-Peyton Gallery, both in New York. She has had solo shows in New York, Toronto, and Boston and has participated in many group shows around the country. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston has awarded her the 2005 Maud Morgan Award and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston gave her a Traveling Fellowship in 2013. Reed's work can be found in public and private collections including: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Lila Acheson Wallace Collection, Bank of Boston, Rose Art Museum, Danforth Museum, and the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park. The artist is based in Boston.

This exhibition is sponsored by Joyce and George Hill with support provided by Dr. Suzan D. Boyd and Mr. M. Edward Sellers, Susan Thorpe and John Baynes and Ginny Newell and Bob Wilkins.

All works courtesy of Danese/Corey Gallery and Sears-Peyton Gallery.