ANDREA HORNICK AND TIMOTHY INGOLD: DESIGNS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE

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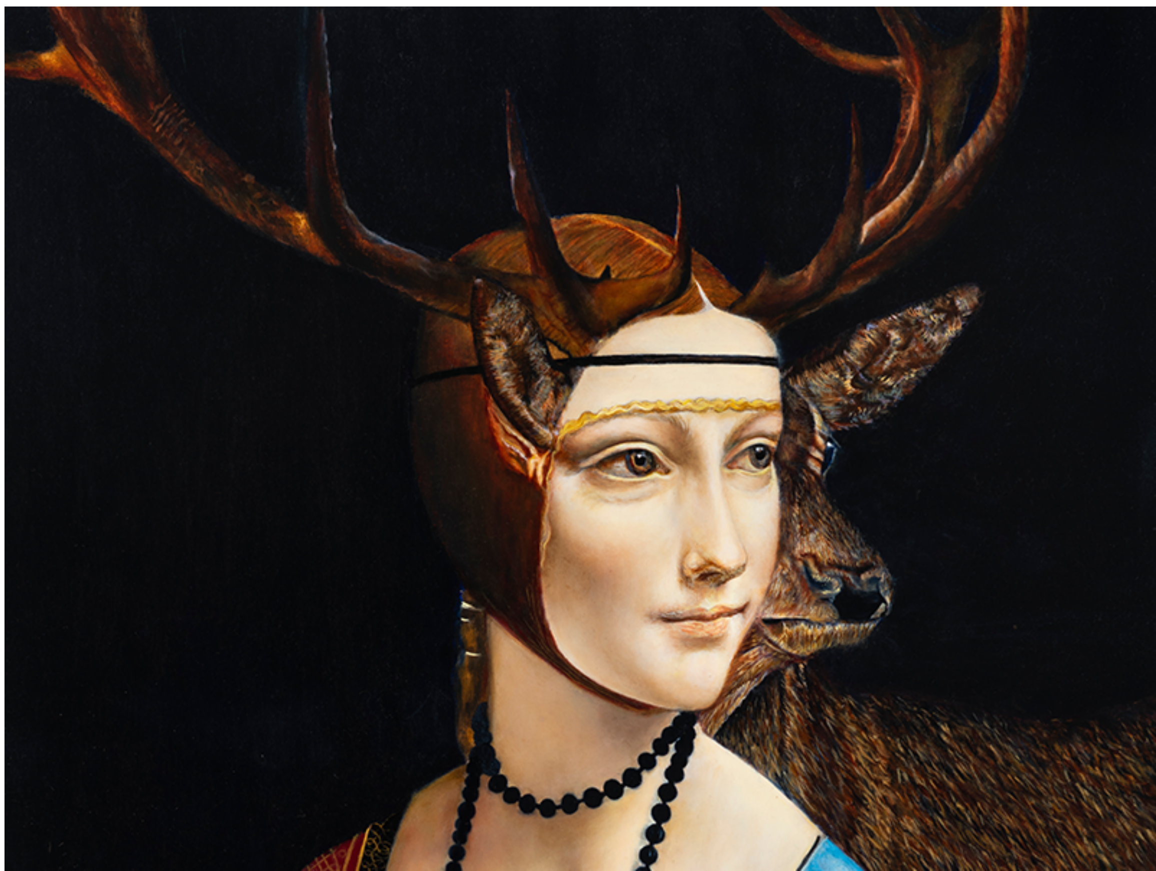
ANTHROPOLOGY & RELIGION | ART | SYSTEMS AND FUTURES



Featured Image: *Stag Backs Cecilia Gallerani while she Pretends Duke's Ermine is Her Own Idea*, Andrea Hornick (detail). Oil on panel, 15 x 21 inches, 2020. Image is held in a private collection and is courtesy of the Artist and Sears-Peyton Gallery.

BY ANDREA HORNICK & TIMOTHY INGOLD

A thing caught my eye—it was a swan and a white woman's arm in the shining silver depths of a most professional photograph—and I thought: *I wish it wasn't always women with animals.* It was this grumpy thought that led me toward an investigation; in time, it was also what led me to the painter Andrea Hornick, and, ultimately, this conversation.

Hornick's women and animals are so tightly bound that, sometimes, the creature seems like clothing to the woman, other times, the woman more like setting (than person) to the animal: as an analog to a stump, for example, she becomes a thing a bear might rest its head upon. Hornick's paintings are gorgeous and silly, or, perhaps more kindly said, they are deliberately humorous. Hornick also has a take on how a woman and an animal fit to each other, a way of thinking that renders the woman infinitely particular and the animal exactly the opposite, a kind of force or perhaps a capacious gust of capacities. She says it all better than this in the interview below, which is *not* a conversation with me, not at all.

Instead of a one-sided interrogation of Qs with As, I looked for a sensibility that matched Hornick's, a pairing, a correspondence. I found that in the eminent anthropologist and cultural theorist Timothy Ingold, who also has an intense care for how creatures and grasses and music and winds blow and muds flow, how things move with and against one another, and how affinities are made.

I put to Hornick and Ingold a task: to read each other's work, to consider what the other has made with words, paint, and sound over their careers, and then to interview each other. This is the result, edited for length and clarity; it gives you an eye into what interests me: the starting point of woman and animal in art. Yet it provides far more than that, as each leads you into their own often playful, more often intensely contemplative, practices of creating corrections to the world as it is. Each gives immense strength to others through their art. Indeed, you'll get a hint of that here: lives of creativity wrought of equal parts fortitude and curiosity.

In truth, both Hornick and Ingold are visionaries, though, perhaps, without much care for systems or futures. A remarkable feat. Enjoy.

—Gretchen Bakke, Systems and Futures section editor

Madame Bonier de la Moson Luxuriates in the Protective Embodiment of Sun Bear; his Hibernation-Harnessed Fortitude Lends Her a Lack of Poise Needed to Play Diana the Huntress, Andrea Hornick. Oil on linen, 17 x 20 inches, 2015. Image is held in a private collection and is courtesy of the Artist and Sears-Peyton Gallery.

Timothy Ingold (TI): There is a deliberate asymmetry in your portraits between the woman and the animal. The woman is indeed an embodied character, with her costume and everything in place, but the animal is not embodied. It is bodying forth, it is animate. What I find really interesting is this imbalance between animacy on the one hand and embodiment on the other.

Andrea Hornick (AH): Yes, I am reproducing a historical portrait of an actual historical figure, who was very much embodied when the original, source painting was painted. The animal is her spirit guide. It is

represented in a body: as a stag, lizard, a “posse” of fireflies. It appears, for example, as a specific bear—to me as I encounter it in my intuitive process, or to the viewer in the painting—but this is only so that we, and the woman it is guiding, can relate to it. It is actually not “a” bear, but “bear” in general, bear spirit.

Part of my purpose, ironically, is to guide the woman toward a more “embodied” existence, where she can reclaim aspects of herself that she has had to omit in order to put forth her idealized image. Even though she is no longer embodied, her soul can still grieve and reclaim, and shepherd this courage for us, today.

In today’s world, we live with images, as much as we do with people or animals in the flesh. And we live with images of paintings more than with actual works of art. We have increasingly complicated relationships to nature, to aura, to living creatures, and to art. By bringing the animal and the woman together, I’m altering both. The animal casts its shadow on the woman, and the woman casts a palette of colors on the animal.

That’s why my portraits have a clear cut-and-paste construction: the woman and the animal inhabit different realms, but are also in the same space—framed together. I’m happy with a bit of clunkiness, with letting the seams of the collage show. But at the same time, we have an incredible ability to use our imaginations, as much in viewing as in making. We bring our own creativity into what we see—the seams get filled in, smoothed over, by our looking.

When I add layer upon layer of paint, does this create a hard boundary between the woman and the animal, or between the spirit realm and the past? For me, the animals sit in the middle, and mediate between the sitter and the viewer. In my process, they are the most viscerally tangible to me as they mediate between my query and the perceived response. I am asking what transformation is needed, and how does it relate to me and our present culture? The issues are age-old human struggles. The answers unfold like a hyper-focused narrative dream. I am made privy to aspects that relate to my personal experience and to our contemporary world. I do a bit of reading about the history of the sitter in the portrait—that’s how I know her in the painting, not as the actual person. She’s a historical figure. But my sense of the animal is more visceral than that of the woman. I know the animal primarily in that I feel its presence.

TI: So you have a sense of her, but that sense is different from your sense of the animal. Because you know the animal quite directly.

AH: Yes, one can sense the heat emanating from its “body” or the wind generated by its wings.

TI: So the animal is not *sitting*. It is not having its portrait taken.

AH: Exactly. It is a spirit. It can enlarge, it can get smaller, it can be part of the woman, it can be part of me.

TI: So it is a soul, or a spirit. Whereas what is presented in the portrait, quite clearly, is the woman’s body. There she is, with her costume and everything, but that’s it. Whereas if you pointed to the animal, you would say, “No, this isn’t the animal’s *body*, this is the animal *itself*.” And that’s a different thing altogether because the animal is *alive*.

AH: Yes, in the way the animals are painted, their edges are less defined and they merge into the backgrounds or bodies of the women by assuming their colors and tones. They cast shadows, showing them to be sharing in the same space.

Hortensia del Prado Lifted out of Name Sake Hydrangea Garden in Speeding Posse of Lightning Bugs, Andrea Hornick. Oil on panel, 26.7 x 20.4, 2021. Image courtesy of the Artist and Sears-Peyton Gallery.

TI: Can you explain why you choose in an early presentation of this work to speak in what sounds like a deliberately robotic voice from a clearly prepared text? I can see that this is a parody of the authoritative art historical voice you hear in the exhibit's audio guide, but it also makes me wonder, whose voice is this? And how do you manage to reconcile the preparedness of the text that you are reading with the attempt at spontaneity, which I felt is also there in the words you are actually reading?

AH: I enjoy contradiction because that's real. The text is clearly written and prepared; I am asking the viewer to be more spontaneous in their viewing—to come up with their own stories by association, to let go of what they are being told by the authority of the museum or the historical canon and to tune into their own emotional or imaginative response. The preposterousness of my seriously delivered, clearly planned-out narrative belies my intention to give a nudge toward playfulness. The monotone of the voice is meant to induce a semi-hypnotic state in the listener. You are not meant to catch every word, you can zone out of the words and into the artwork and your own associations, and come back in. It's a structure to come and go from, not a drama that needs your attention.

Until recently, the art historical voice of authority was always performative and included an almost spiritual reverence: dramatic, not monotone. The monotone is to introduce the trance-inducing steady drumbeat of the ritual that I use to generate an alternative narrative to that of the art authority, and to make the authority sound silly by comparison.

A performance actually inspired this entire body of work. Before I made the paintings, back in the late 1990s, I had adopted the performative persona of an art historian who lectured about a fictional artist from the Renaissance. The images I showed were clearly cut-and-paste collages, not actual paintings. I gave lectures where I was announced as an art historian, not a performance artist. Most of the audience were confused as to whether it was truth or fiction because the artifice was believable, even though the images and titles were preposterous. This confusion

was intentional. It is a place from which to expand creativity. The audience would ask questions for my persona from this place, which would then be added to my narrative; we were cocreating the story. Eventually, I was asked by a gallerist to paint the paintings and I thought it would be interesting to see if they and their titles could stand on their own and carry some of this content in their presence.

TI: So are you trying to show what could be done, while parodying art historical authority? Maybe I misinterpreted the purpose of the monotone, because I thought the point of it is to banish any kind of affectivity, any hint of feeling. It sounds like the machine reader on your computer.

But what you are saying is that actually the point about the monotone is that it is like a shaman's drum, always beating with the same pitch and timbre, so there can be no distraction. And that is precisely the opposite of super-mechanical.

AH: Quite so.

TI: I've been thinking about a slightly similar thing in relation to music. You could, for example, interpret classical musical notation in two different ways. You could see the notation as a kind of exploded diagram that carries no affective force at all. Or you can see every dot, marking a crotchet or a quaver, as a concentration of vital force that is about to explode.

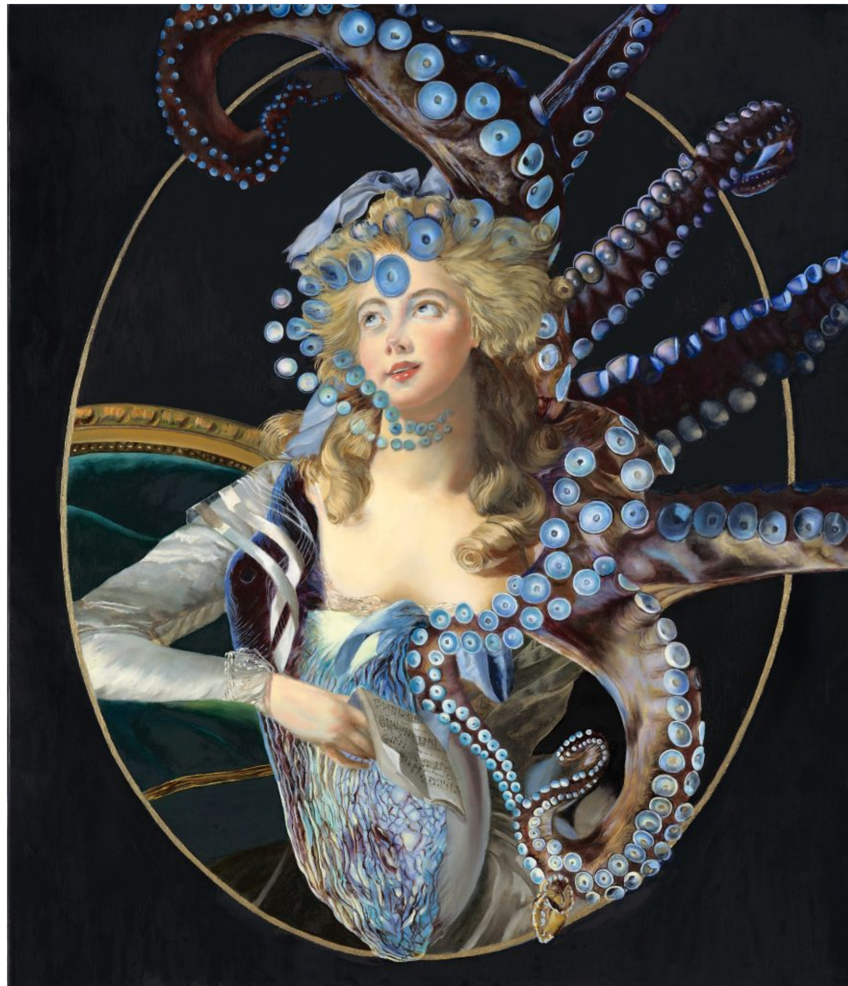
I wondered whether it is the same with your voice. You could either say it is purely mechanical, devoid of any kind of affectivity, or you could say it is very powerful precisely because it is so monotonous, with none of the distraction of ordinary speech. It actually drills a hole in things.

Your discussion of the art historian's performance reminds me that one of the things I really like in your work is the humor, especially in the captions. Can we combine that humor, which is almost lighthearted, with a serious critical sensibility?

AH: Absolutely. After all, the wisest leaders in nature-based intuitive practices I know are some of the silliest people I've ever met. For them, everything is a joke, everything is funny. That's also how I grew up. It's so important to be able to poke holes in your perception.

TI: Yes. But you can poke fun in a way that doesn't belittle things. In that way, we can value these portraits, and think deeply about what they tell us, and yet still laugh at the odd juxtapositions of life.

AH: And laugh at ourselves. We can bring laughter to the lives of the women in the portraits that, sadly, they could not themselves have enjoyed back then, in their time. But we are laughing not at them but with them. Indeed, if there wasn't humor in what I was doing, I just couldn't do it.



Madame Grand in Skin-Sucker Reverie with Bag Pipe Third Eye Octopus, Andrea Hornick. Oil on linen, 27 x 23 inches, 2022. Image courtesy of the Artist and Sears-Peyton Gallery.

TI: I find the same thing in my writing. I am an academic; I'm no good at anything else. But sometimes I write things for fun. Or I might put

something in just because it seems delightful. It is amazing, the censorious reactions this provokes. You are not supposed to make jokes in academic writing, it is against the rules! Maybe this is a leftover from the idea of academic authority. It reminds me again of the official audio guides we were talking about earlier. Maybe an artist has painted a picture that is meant to be funny. It's hilarious, and you are laughing away. But then you listen to the audio guide and hear this deadpan analysis of what the artist intended and how he made a joke. There is no humor in it at all.

AH: Quite. I love writing fictions that bypass the linear, analytic mode, with made-up stories of how the animals came about and what the women were up to. It would be interesting to talk about some of your writing, now that we're talking about humor, because it felt to me that your practices and experiences are very much *in* the writing.

TI: Yes, I hope so. I have been trying to find a way to write that is true to experience. It is difficult, however, because it goes against the grain of much of what one is taught. I want to write as I walk—to have the feeling of moving through a landscape, though really I am just holding a pen.

The place I love to write most, and where I have written or drafted quite a few books, is a cottage in the province of North Karelia, in Finland. It is a little old farmhouse in the midst of meadows and woods, and I have a particular spot outside with a wooden bench and table. I sit there, and I write. I hear the wind sighing through the trees, there are mosquitoes buzzing about, birds sing. All these sounds get inside me when I'm writing. Then I read out what I've written. It is very important that it should sound right. If it sounds wrong, if there is something amiss with the rhythm or the prosody when I read it, then I know something needs to be fixed.

The literary scholar Rebecca Fredrickson talks about "weather writing": not writing *about* the weather, but the ways the weather gets into your writing, how you write *with* it. I feel that's what I'm doing.

I feel words are alive. If you are speaking, then they bubble up in the voice; if you are writing, they emerge in the gestures of the hand. For me the word is not so much porous as wiggly. It wiggles and wants to go this way or that, particularly if one is writing by hand on the page—then it really *does* wriggle. So, words are hard to pin down. Actually, you don't want to pin them down too much, you don't want to skewer them; you want to get them down while keeping the life that's in them. They are like sparkling jewels in your hand. They radiate in all directions. But

then you don't want to use too many of them or the writing becomes merely ostentatious.

AH: It sounds as though the words are porous.

TI: Porous, I'm not so sure. The page is maybe porous, but the words themselves—no, they are animate.

AH: One of the reasons I'm asking is because you talk about your writing in terms of surface textures. And I'm wondering about your own practice. You ask many questions. The points you make are often posed as questions. That is probably the way you think. It is nice to be able to experience something as a question, which you feel has been chewed and digested before being presented. But, as part of your process, do you engage in practices that might help you answer these questions? I know that one thing you do is play the cello.

TI: And indeed, the cello does help me answer them. I like posing things as questions because then you can try to answer. If you are able to spell out what the question is, you are already a long way toward sorting the problem out. It is a matter of finding it: What is the right question to be asking here? And of getting rid of all the wrong ones that take you off on a fool's errand.

But then you can see if you can find an answer. And the answer invariably takes you beyond the question. Answers are not contained inside questions; you have to go beyond the questions to find them. Answering a question is a way of being able to carry on and to move forward, rather than always being stuck in one place.

This is not connecting in a mechanical way; it is more like going for a walk. You go from place to place: each place is a question from which you head off in search of an answer only to arrive at another place-question, and so on. It's a dialogue that is going on in your head, you are writing and imagining at the same time. Often, I imagine I'm with another person; while you are having this conversation with yourself, it could just as well be with somebody else. As I'm walking along in my imagination, the words come tumbling out. I always have a notebook to hand and so I can scribble them down quickly before they disappear.

AH: Like your writing practices in Finland, I enact daily practices that I've been taught with an understanding that I am connected to all of life for purposes of healing and transformation, for myself, others, and the

planet. You might say, from the position you are taking, that my painting uses these practices somewhat frivolously. But art is not separate from life, and there is inherent value in creating objects of power in the cultures we are discussing. It is like how you describe cultures whose connection to nature has always remained, to varying degrees, including aspects of my own Jewish culture. Not to essentialize, but rather to identify our own experience—there is no such thing as "nature" because humans are nature. We (me, you, the trees…) are all connected. We are not in disagreement there. All cultures stem from this belief, as you know; it's just a matter of how far down the road of disconnection from our surroundings we have come. In mainstream culture, we don't see it this way, for if we did, we wouldn't go on destroying the earth. The mind frame I am referring to requires us to obliterate the separation we perceive from our surroundings. I engage in nature-based ritual practices while still living in the culture I was born into, because I feel that profound pain of disconnection.

Art connects people because it expresses things that are universal. Even without invoking any specific cultural or art historical values, the objects we make are imbued with their own intrinsic power. Ritual objects of power connect us to other living beings, and not just other people.

TI: I can't argue with that. But the problem of reconnection is one we have to some extent created for ourselves, by getting ourselves disconnected in the first place. Put yourself into the shoes of Indigenous people living from the land; they would wonder what on earth this has to do with their way of life. They still have existential problems of one sort or another, but they are posed differently from the ways we pose them. For example, they know that certain kinds of wild animals can be very dangerous, and that certain kinds of weather phenomena can also be a threat to life and limb. And they know they are living in an environment that can be quite unsafe and insecure, creating a lot of anxiety.

This is something we're not accustomed to. For example, we have completely forgotten how it was normal, not so long ago in history, for maybe more than half of one's children to die in infancy. And this was when life expectancy averaged about 40, compared to 70 or 80 for people in more affluent societies today. Lethal diseases like tuberculosis were endemic.

When we talk about restoring ecological sensibility, connection with nature, and so on, do we actually want to have our cake and eat it? We want to live in harmony with the natural world, but, thank you very much, we would like to keep all the benefits of having done just the

opposite—from having treated nature as a resource to be mined to support our own high-consumption, high-tech lifestyles.

AH: It's a profound question. I think we need to embrace some discomfort. After all, we have a climate crisis because we have ceased listening to the world.

This article was commissioned by Gretchen Bakke.