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CHÈVRES OU MOUTONS

KEVIN HORAN

TEXT BY ELENA PASSARELLO

When American photographer Kevin Horan moved from city to country, his new neighbours—sheep—greeted him in a chorus of such different voices that he imagined they were individuals. In-depth experience in making portraits of humans made him wonder if the process could be applied to these creatures as well.

Treated as customers of the local photo studio, they seem to have personalities. Perhaps they do, and the photograph allows us to see them. Or perhaps the language of the photo cues us to see them as non-human persons. We respond to gesture in such an elemental way. It's in our nervous system. It is what photography is so good at catching. It is what actors are good at producing. It is how we communicate with one another non-verbally.

This is a stunning work about portraiture: what it does and how it works. These pictures ask for engagement of our own feelings about the souls within other beings, human or otherwise, and how visible they are from out here.

The world around us is pulsing with life and intelligence, even if we don't know what to make of it or how to connect. While it is plain to anyone carefully observing that these farm animals do indeed have individual personalities, Horan asks himself: How can I be certain I've captured them? Can I bridge the cross-species gap? Who's in there? What is going on in that brain, inside the goat's mind? Every portrait is a work of fiction.

These farm species have lived alongside us—served us—from the earliest times. If we care enough to give our attention in a focused way, the result is beauty and homage. They are worthy of that. When we draw a hard line between humans and everything else, we make the world a smaller place—for us. A place where we spend all our efforts obsessed with our own tribe . . . a less interesting place.

Kevin Horan is an artist based in Langley, Washington, USA. He works on projects which look at animals as people, people as animals, and the planet as a very small place. His pictures are reality-based, and he enjoys finding the amazing revealed in the ordinary. His work from Chattel was selected for the Photolucida Critical Mass Top 50 in 2014. A recovering photojournalist, Horan has published his work in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Smithsonian*, *LIFE*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *National Geographic*, and numerous other magazines and books. Horan based himself in Chicago from 1976 to 2006 and then Whidbey Island beginning in 2006, with assignments ranging from presidential campaigns to small-town life in Russia to development issues in the Amazon to following a dollar bill for a week for *LIFE Magazine*. He was a presenter at Ampersand Live at Town Hall Seattle in November 2016; Artist in Residence, Glacier National Park, September, 2004; staff photographer for Chicago In The Year 2000; staff photographer for the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1977–1981. He earned a degree in journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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Elena Passarello is an actor, writer, and recipient of a 2015 Whiting Award. Her first collection, *Let Me Clear My Throat* (Sarabande, 2012), won the gold medal for nonfiction at the 2013 Independent Publisher Awards and was a finalist for the 2014 Oregon Book Award. Her essays on performance, pop culture, and the natural world have been published in *Oxford American*, *Slate*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and *The Iowa Review*, among other publications, as well as in the 2015 anthologies *Cat is Art Spelled Wrong* and *After Montaigne: Contemporary Essayists Cover the Essay*. Passarello has performed in several regional theatres in the East and Midwest, originating roles in the premieres of Christopher Durang's *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* and David Turkel's *Wild Signs* and *Holler*. In 2011, she became the first woman winner of the annual Stella Screaming Contest in New Orleans. She lives in Corvallis, Oregon and teaches at Oregon State University.