



Cowboy & Other Animals

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Abstract

This paper is an investigation of an illustrated fact book about animals and their mental abilities. I discuss the relationship between animals and humans and the effect it has on our shared planet. This project aims to question the norms of our contemporary society from a personal perspective using an alter-ego Cowboy character to evoke compassion and interest. I examine how my methods of storytelling and illustration allows the facts and political agenda to be approached through an imaginative and entertaining experience.



Key words: Illustration, book, queer perspective, animal rights, cowboy, storytelling, alter ego, animals feelings, imagination, craft.

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Introduction

Intentions

This project is an exploration of a picture book that teaches about animals feelings in an enjoyable way. Both illustration and text are used to communicate facts about animals, focusing on their mental abilities, social life, feelings and interests. In addition to this, the fictional storytelling of a contemporary cowboy character works as a way to comment on the human/animal/earth relationship today.

There is plenty of scientific evidence that animals have feelings, creativity, consciousness, empathy, love and intelligence. I believe that through increased knowledge and understanding, we can more easily respect animals as sentient, thinking individuals and reflect on our way of life. The intention is to create something both entertaining to read and to explore visually to deepen our understanding, to find compassion, and simply because its fun to learn about animals.

Research question

By using methods of illustration, text and storytelling formats, how can I present both facts and emotion in a way to awaken a curiosity and compassion for animals and our relationship with them?



Image 1: Johanna Welinder, Work in progress, Cowboy & other animals, 2019.

Background & Influences

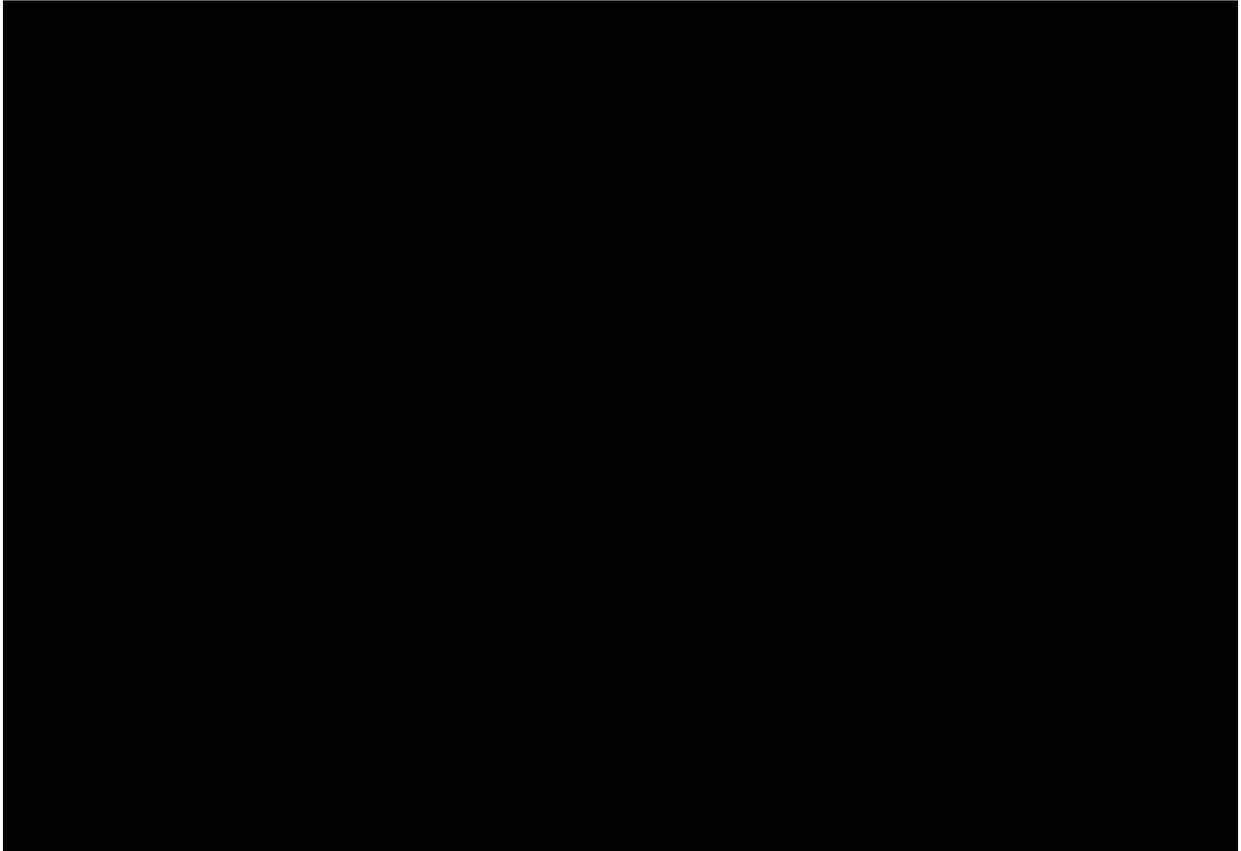


Image 2: Spreads from the book Hur gick det sen? – by Tove Jansson.

A big inspiration is Tove Janssons book: Hur gick det sen?¹ I remember how both me and my mom loved this book when I was a child. Even though Tove Jansson obviously was a great storyteller, it's not so much the story that was special but rather how the hole that continues throughout the book and story gives a glimpse of the next page, made it fun to read and evoke my curiosity. Every spread is like entering a new world as it has a new set of rich colours and a dramatic scenario with interesting details. I aim to create a similar imaginative experience, both entertaining to read and to explore visually. I will further investigate this, perhaps by adding an element to physically engage with, something that add a tactile experience, could be as simple as a shiny sticker. In previous projects during my master studies, I've explored making stickers from my drawn figures.

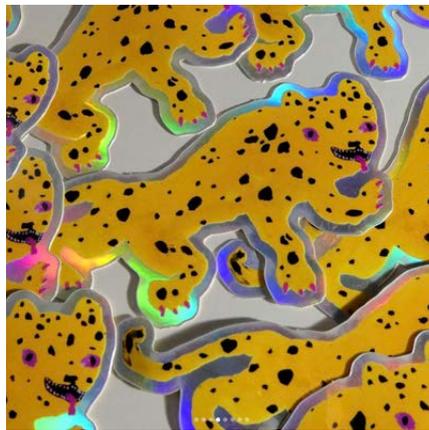


Image 3-5: Johanna Welinder, regular and holographic stickers, sticker set, 2018.

¹ Jansson, Tove, Hur gick det sen? : Boken om Mymlan, Mumintrollet och lilla My, Rabén Sjögren, 1952.

Jansson often writes about apocalypse and melancholy, but keeps a very humorous tone.² My choice of topic derives from climate change anxiety etc. but I have no intention to make a sad story. The Moomindale and its population is completely fictional yet very familiar. I find it interesting how a very distant fantasy world can almost be more reminiscent of our own than if it was exactly the same and realistic. I think that all parts of a story do not need to convey the message in themselves, like in *Vad händer sen?* Where the story follows Moomin on an adventurous journey as he's bringing the milk to his mum, when they finally arrive the milk has gone bad. It feels important for me to leave room for irrational nonsense in order to make it entertaining and relatable.

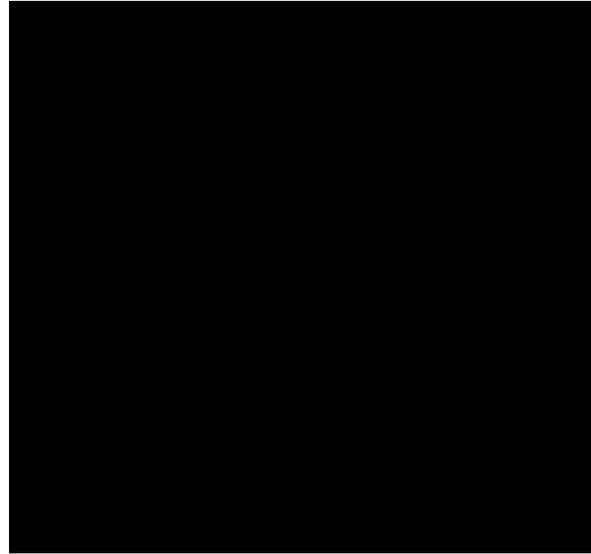


Image 6: Johanna Welinder, Pattern from previous project pattern book, 2018. Image 7: Pattern "Hawai" by Josef Frank.

The tradition from the history of arts and crafts to surround yourself with beautiful things is reflected through my illustrative methodology of depicting beauty through pattern and colours in nature, animals, textiles and clothing.³ A reoccurring influence are textile patterns by Josef Frank. I like how Svenskt Tenn fills an entire room with the extravagant lushness and contrasting playfulness. I often use digital printing techniques that preserves hues and brushstrokes. The aesthetic of my illustration is largely based on the expression of a visible trace of the hand, displaying the work of the craftsman. In my textile investigations during last semester I made a book of fabrics with repeat patterns. Some of these patterns are reinterpreted in interior scenes and on Cowboy's clothes.

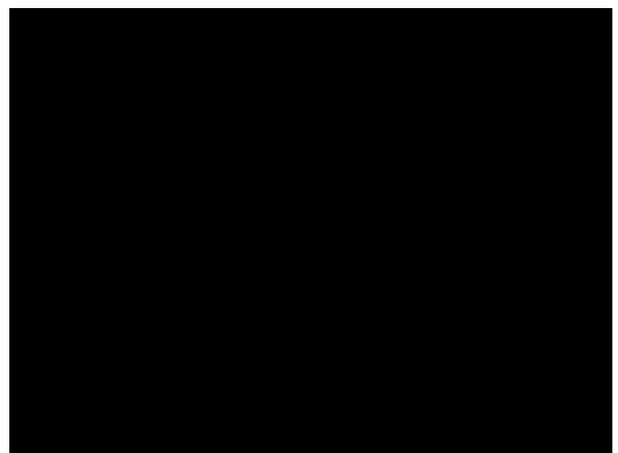


Image 8: Johanna Welinder, work in progress Cowboy & other animals, 2019. Image 9: Svenskt Tenn interior design.

² Jansson, Tove, Pappan och havet, Rabén Sjögren, 1965.
³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arts_and_Crafts_movement

I aspire for my illustrations to be rich in detail, imagination, colour, recognition, humour and playfulness. I use already established methods such as making lists, mind maps, rough sketches and manifests to organize all my thoughts, and to be able to make a plan for working intuitively with illustration. I paint with gouache and pens, usually drawing from my mind and working on multiple papers at the same time. Sometimes it gives me better flow to start on them all allowing my mind a break from thinking too much about achievements. I don't have to know exactly what the final illustration will look like, rather I let it grow from intuition. The drawing is then scanned and finalised in Photoshop and sometimes reworked through digital collage.



Image 10 - 15: Johanna Welinder, work in progress Cowboy & other animals, 2019.

In this project I aim to develop my illustrative methods by creating series or multiple drawings of one scenario, and by working with perspective and spatiality in the image, telling multiple stories in one illustration. Like in these ones by illustrator Laura Callaghan where all the junk in the room leaves traces of what might have been going on there and tell a story about the life of the woman in the picture.



Image 16 Laura Callaghan.

Animal vs human



Image 17: Johanna Welinder, work in progress *Cowboy & other animals*, *Cowboy tickles a rat*, 2019.

The book is a collection of facts and thoughts, selected from what I personally find most interesting, hoping the content creates an emotional response for others too. This project targets anyone who enjoys exploring through text and imagery, interested in learning a bit about animals. The facts are carefully sourced from books, TedTalks, TedEd-videos and documentary films by leading experts, scientists and professors. I've looked at scientific research, studies and experiments on animal behaviour mainly focusing on their cognitive and mental abilities. My research method involves filtering the often heavy and serious format into "fun facts" that relate to human behaviour or culture, or that points out our differences and similarities like "Rats love to be tickled"⁴ and "Clownfish are transsexual"⁵.

Etology professor Per Jensen writes in his book *"Hur mår maten?"* how most Swedes get information of food production through either fairytales, advertising and propaganda.⁶ This is something I recognize as well. So like Jensen's book, I aim to educate from another more relevant and up to date perspective than perhaps the general perception. For example how we all learn that cows eat grass, and my book brings up that actually most cows diet is based on mainly soy, corn and even antibiotics.⁷ These kind of facts bring in a more serious tense to the story. I just want to open up for questioning, and for the reader to reflect on how we treat animals and what effect it has on our shared planet. Better conditions for animals, and caring for them can of course mean many different things. I simply think it is fun and fascinating to learn about animals. I hope this project reflects and share this interest. I say as ecologist Carl Safina; "We should get better acquainted with the animals we share the world with. If only because they are so beautiful and so interesting."⁸

4 Jensen, Per, *Djurens känslor: och vår känsla för djur*, Natur & Kultur, 2018.

5 Sveriges radio, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/avsnitt/1238223?programid=4765>

6 Jensen, Per, *Hur mår maten?*, Natur & Kultur, 2017.

7 Jensen, Per, *Hur mår maten?*, Natur & Kultur, 2017.

8 Safina, Carl, *Beyond Words: What animals think and feel*, Picador USA, 2015.

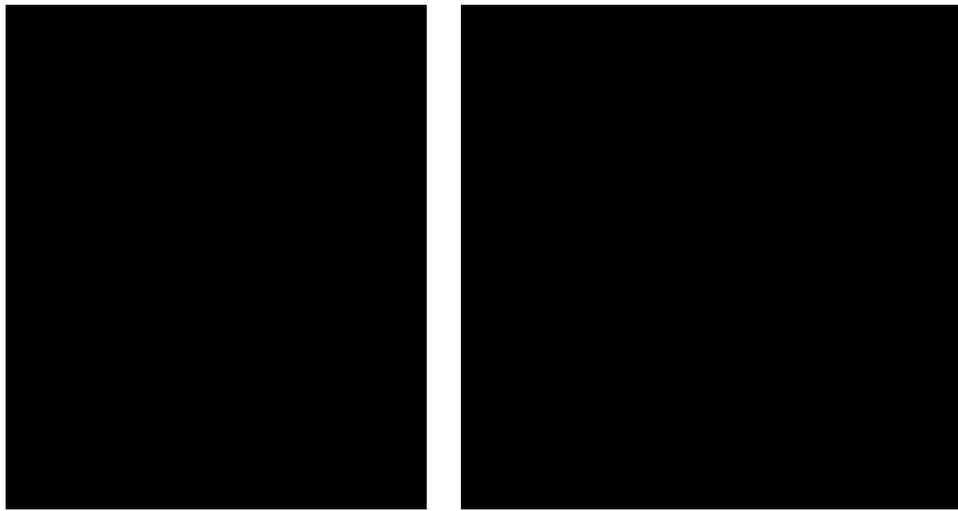
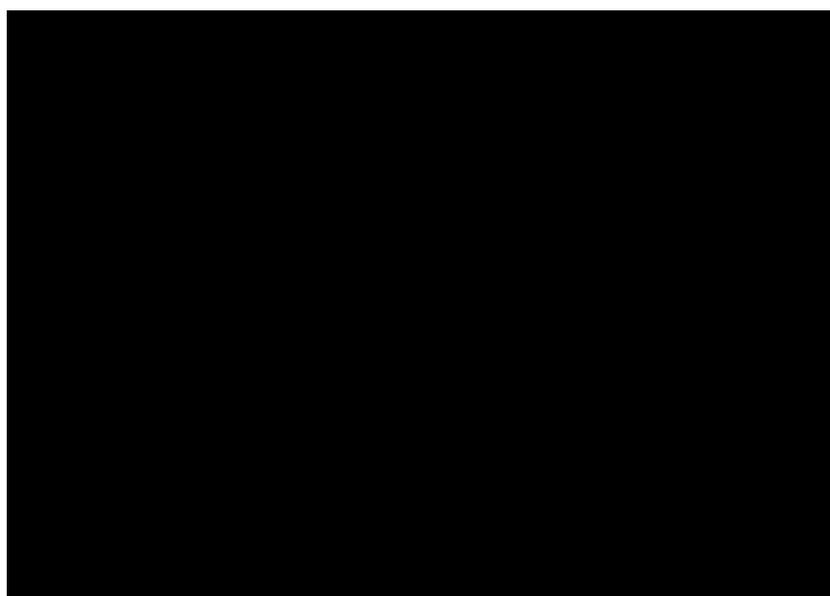


Image 18: Chimpanzee cuddling a feline. Image 19: Djurens Rätt advertisement 2019.

Veganism is currently thriving around the world⁹ and the discussion about the meat industry was recently brought to light thanks to the film *Okja*, that depicts a dark side of capitalism and the food industry, with a great dash of humour. What's interesting to me in *Okja* is how its because the pig and child are friends the line between pets and livestock suddenly becomes problematic as the storyline evolves around this. This reminds me of the theory of carnism¹⁰ which proposes how an invisible belief system conditions us to eat certain animal species, a rationale based on sociological and cultural values that allows (or tricks) us into eating cow but not golden retriever, shrimps but not cockroaches, etc. This is why animals categorised as pets, wild and farm animals are all included in the book to present them as equal, thinking and feeling beings, as a way to question the need for this categorisation, as well as why we separate animals from humans, and society from nature. Scientist and Chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall says in a TedTalk that "We used to believe that there was a very clear line between human and animal. But the more we learn, the wobblier this supposed line gets."¹¹ I strongly believe that it's impossible to change someones belief through force. This project is not about two sides or right and wrong as opposed to in *Okja* where there's an obvious villain and hero but the aim is rather to create awareness through increased knowledge and sharing a perspective. Reminding that humans are also an animal part of this world, not ruler of the world.



9 Report byer, <https://www.reportbuyer.com/product/4959853/top-trends-in-prepared-foods-2017-exploring-trends-in-meat-fish-and-seafood-pasta-noodles-and-rice-prepared-meals-savory-deli-food-soup-and-meat-substitutes.html> (2019-01-20)

10 Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao2GL3NAWQU&t=923s> (2019-01-20)

11 TED, https://www.ted.com/talks/jane_goodall_on_what_separates_us_from_the_apes#t-97189 (2019-01-20)

Cowboy character

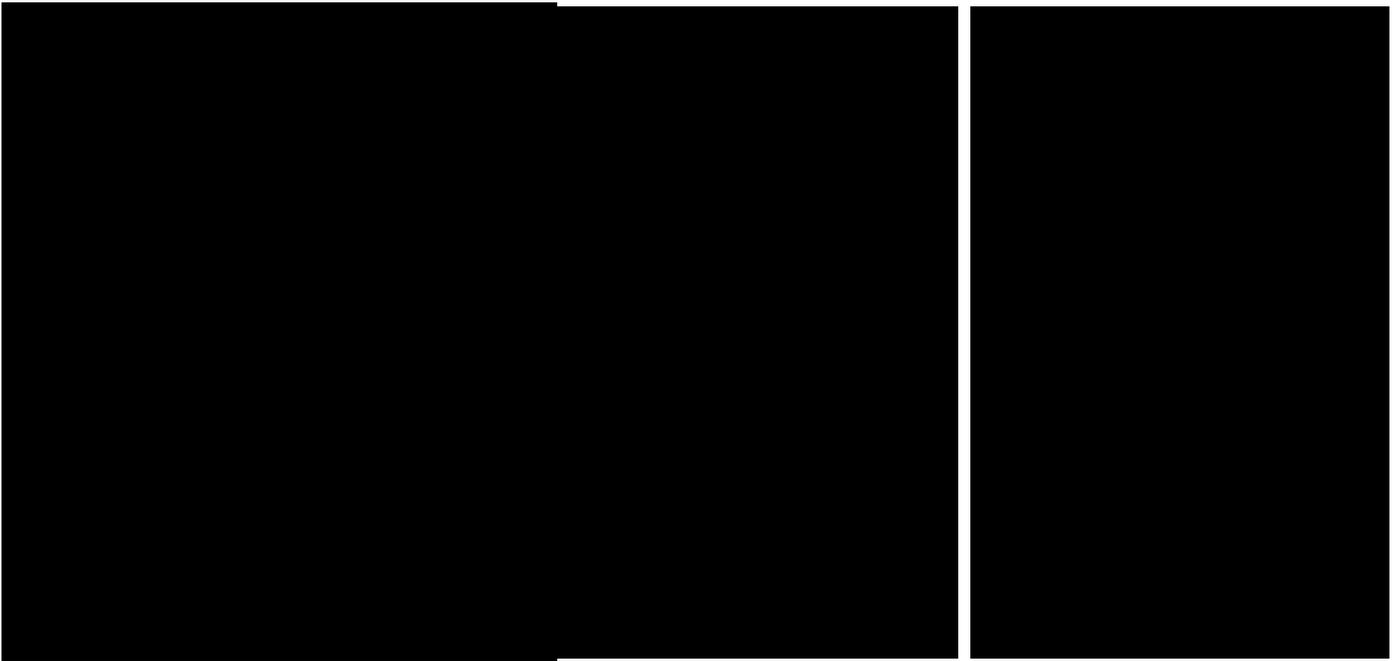


Image 21: Marlboro Man, Image 22: Illustration of a cowboy. Tom of Finland, Image 23: Woody from Toy Story.

A human cowboy character reoccurs throughout the story. Unlike the cowboy that we know from Hollywood as usually a heroic hyper-masculine character or even the stereotypical gay cowboy that is also hyper-masculine,¹² my interpretation is a queer character. I think of the cowboy as a reflection of myself and how I use craft as a personal expression to modify my hair, make up and clothes. This is reflected in Cowboy's feminine attributes such as tight clothing with flower patterns, a pink thong and heeled shoes. My Cowboy has a jelly-like body that is soft and almost boneless, rather curvy than muscular. The reader is free (or challenged) to apply whatever gender they like to the Cowboy. Because the cowboy holds a natural position between society and nature, representing a free spirit and a longing for nature, it can work a comment on the strict line we've built between animal and human, society and nature, by showing the contrasting human lifestyle.



Image 24 - 25: Johanna Welinder, work in progress Cowboy & other animals, 2019.

12 Tinkom, Matthew, *Queer Theory and Brokeback Mountain*, Bloomsbury, 2017.

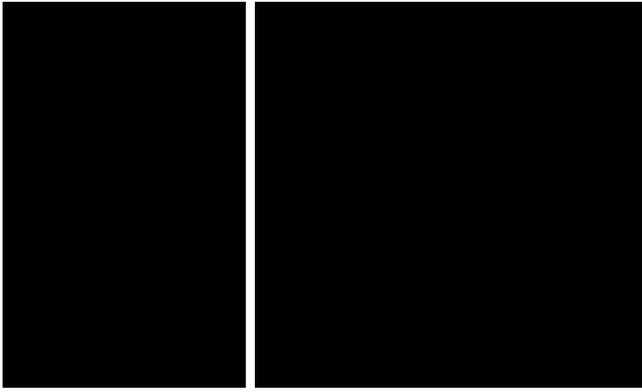


Image 26: Yosemite Sam. Image 27: Lola Bunny from Space Jam - the only female character from Looney Tunes.

I like the rebelliousness and provocation the cowboy also represents as it reflects the political aspect of the project to question the norms and different hierarchies of our contemporary society. Like in the cartoon show *Looney Tunes*, where villain cowboy *Yosemite Sam* serves as a violent outlaw. My method of storytelling allows me to add quirky humour and fiction in relation to the facts. A queer feminist interpretation of the cowboy recognised from childhood cartoons works as a disguise for the scientific research and saddening facts in an imaginative animal-thriving world.



Image 28: Johanna Welinder, work in progress *Cowboy & other animals*, *Dolphin taking a bath in Cowboy's tub*, 2019.

I'm not afraid of being anthropomorphic by humanising animals or to confuse by mixing fiction with facts but rather enjoy using this as a method to shift perspective and question our norms and our perception of what is natural and normal. With this device the subject becomes more approachable and I think that's something I as a creative maker can add to the discourse. Pioneer of the arts & craft movement and Pattern designer William Morris also used writing as a method to spread values and ideas of social reform. In his book *"News From Nowhere"* Morris fuses Marxism and the romance tradition when he presents himself as an enchanted figure in a different time and place.¹³ I like to borrow this method of creating an alter-ego in a utopian society to spread ideas in the format of a book, sharing my point of view.

13 Morris, William, *News from nowhere*, NA, 1890.

Discussion



Image 29-31: Johanna Welinder, Sketches for spring exhibition presentation, 2019.

For the spring exhibition I see the opportunity to physically extend my world with enlarged illustrations and printed textiles, working with applied arts to create a cozy reading area where the visitor can enjoy the book. A chill spot to sit and hang out together is often what I enjoy the most in an exhibition context. Creating a world from my illustrations that goes beyond the book and together with interior, furniture and wallpaper together enhance the story. Reflecting the early arts and crafts movements ideas of surrounding yourself with beautiful things and to put value and accuracy in each object. Working with composition, rhythm and scale of the patterns and surfaces in relation to the body. Bringing in tactility, comfort and softness from fabric. Using craft to help the viewer notice and reflect upon the ordinary and the extraordinary. Even if visitors are just passing by, they can get a feeling of my cowboy-universe.

When discussing Konstfack spring exhibition with a colleague from ceramics department I was reminded of how important it is to play as a method because the playful feeling is often visible in the end result and brings emotion. Craft allows me to play, and this playfulness helps bring emotion and curiosity from the viewer. I like when you can see that the artist enjoyed making this. I hope this will be reflected in this project, and that the viewer will feel eager to explore the space and the book.



Image 32-34: Johanna Welinder, Spring exhibition, 2019.

My goal is "Svenskt Tenn on acid" with a rattan sofa and linen fabric used for pillows and curtain. There's a rich combination of patterns as both wallpaper, curtain and cushions. The framed poodle-painting adds a center and a focus point for the eyes that calms down the explosive mix of prints. 80's inspired glamorous plant gives a presence of nature and is also depicted in the book in a similar dotted pot in Cowboy's house. But there are contrasting elements like the newsstand with star shaped neon price signs recognized from supermarkets and low pricing shops, and a life size cowboy cut out sign that makes me think of buying ice cream or a hot dog kiosk. This meeting of the luxury and budget connotations adds another aspect of questioning hierarchies and class distinctions in our society. I hope this subtly reflects the consumerism criticism in the last spread in the book. When styling the reading corner in the exhibition I'm using the same method as for creating the illustrations in the book - by adding a few pieces at a time to be able to see what else I need and what goes with what. Within this crafted space it's important to me that the book is in focus. The book is displayed in a newsstand but also on the coffee table to help inviting the audience to sit and read.



Conclusion

As this project takes the shape of a colourful picture book with cute animals I assume that the viewer automatically think it's aimed for kids. In the beginning of the project I imagined my friends or people around me as a possible audience. I have not made changes to adjust it to a child's mind but I think they can enjoy it too. I think the best children's books are equally enjoyed by the parent reading to the child. Storytelling in picture books can be more than reading the texts. I think there's room for discussion or questioning between the child and the adult reading and that is part of the experience in a way. Perhaps in the situation of an adult reading this book to a child, the adult can choose to discuss their reflections regarding the political aspects of the project, or not. As I've mentioned earlier in this paper - this book targets anyone who enjoys exploring through text and imagery, interested in learning a bit about animals. But perhaps this project even more would interest someone reflecting upon mass-consumption in a contemporary society, our relationship with animals from a wide perspective and the connection between these issues. What our current lifestyles are doing to ourselves, animals and the planet.

I've worked with some elements from my own childhood that I guess probably won't mean anything to a child, like the old Volvo car. The styling of the rooms and 80's inspired bathroom is something I do because its something I dream of or romanticize. Again, this story has been created from personal perspective, thoughts and desires. I think if I was specifically making it for children I would have focused on adding other elements instead and maybe not dressing the cowboy in a thong. I believe that the method of making something I like myself might even result in a more interesting and truthful outcome than if I had adapted it towards a specific target group.

The final layout, graphic design and order of the pages formed in the end of the project. The book has a single stapled "magazine-look" that easy fall out in spreads. The title and text is applied as shiny holographic effect sticker circles on the front and back, contrasting the thick matte paper. These text-circles/speech bubbles continue throuout the book but simply printed not as stickers. A western, decorative font is used for headlines and or the body I've used a serif, times new roman kind of font to give a trustworthy impression that's not stealing attention from the illustrations.

A friend helped and gave feedback on my writing. I'm really happy about this, because it was challenging since I haven't written something like this before, and it also felt really important for the project. I think I managed to find the right tone I was aiming for. I think it's great that I tried a new form of creative expression in this project as well.

During this project I really enjoyed making the illustrations, I can see a progress in my work especially regarding my exploring of illustrating rooms, furniture and objects. The goal was to spend more time drawing, to focus and deepen my knowledge and expression within my illustration. Looking back now i see that i something I managed to do. Both by focusing on the book and by working with applying the illustrations as wallpaper and cushions.

This Cowboy character exist both as me, in the story, and reoccurs in the patterns and objects around you. After re-examination with Bella and Anders I realised how evident this is to the viewer, and that this adds value by making it honest and personal. It is not just applied decor, but the patterns contains a story, my textiles become part of a universe and the world I have created.

Appendix

I think that my installation and project did manage to invite an audience with a limited experience in viewing art. I think this was achieved by using objects recognised from homes and by working with humour. Visitors from the art and design field were also intrigued. From this audience I got the feedback that the name Yoyo Nasty is great and really works as a character. To be a living character that is part of my art practice. For me this is a way to try out ideas during the process as well as to in the end realise them and “proof” they work. I realise this makes my work feel truthful and personal that helps me challenging established knowledge within the field of arts and craft. I was encourage to continue my own practice and start my own business instead of working for someone else. I got the feedback that I’ve done the “ground work” by having created an entire world, that appeals to a lot of people. And this could be a foundation for many different projects and collaborations, as for example a Yoyo Nasty computer game. I consider this an important skill to take care of for my future progress.

I did expect that most people would pass by, have a quick look and think twice before taking a seat and this is also what happened. Partly because the visitors are too stressed to sit down and read, but also in an exhibition context visitors are careful and unsure if they are allowed to even touch the works. My reflection now is that if the sofa or sitting area was bigger it would have been more inviting because most people walk around in groups or pairs. I think it was good that the book was for sale and not only available to look at in the exhibition. Because now since I sold all the copies I feel like the story will live on and hopefully the book can be enjoyed in peoples homes instead where it’s allowed to be more properly experienced. So even if the reactions became more focused around my patterns, textile and interior design they really helped the viewer notice. The people that did read the book giggled and smiled and learned things they didn’t know about animals. A lot of the response was that people felt happy when they saw my installation. I think that even the visitors that are just passing by or stop and look for a little while, just by seeing the mix of patterns and figures they get a feeling of my universe and left with a fun impression.

I had many requests about buying the pillows and curtain and wallpaper. I’ve heard people say Svenskt Tenn or a modern Josef Frank so many times now that I almost feel sick of it. But, it means I reached my goal. Looking back, it’s actually an amazing progress for me, when I started my Master studies at Konstfack I had barely any repeated patterns in my portfolio. With this new knowledge I feel more confident continuing my practice as a print designer and to even further challenge norms of print design and illustration within the field of interior textiles and fashion. Viewers have also referred to Henri Matisse, Carl Johan De Geer and the Jobs sisters. So I feel like I’m in good company. All of these references I like, but haven’t really thought about as similar or studied very much so I would like to further discover their work. I don’t think I would have received this response if I had done the presentation more “punk” with papier maché and painting a big cowboy directly on the wall. Which was something I was considering for a while. But I think it would have been fun and that’s still something I can do in another project when I have more time to investigate this part of my making.

My work was placed in a corridor with nothing on the opposite wall. My reflection now is that it could have been good to have the title “Cowboy och andra djur: en faktabok om djurs känslor” written on the opposite wall. So when you sit in the sofa surrounded by colour and print you don’t stare into just a white wall. Also that the project evolves around a book would be emphasised. While building the exhibition I considered putting something here but decided to focus and max out the space around the sofa instead.

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Image reference list

Image reference list

Image 1 Johanna Welinder, Cowboy & other animals, work in progress, gouache and markers on paper.

Image 2 Tove Jansson, Hur gick det sen?

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Image 3-5 Johanna Welinder, sticker set, 5x10 cm, 2018.

Image 6 Johanna Welinder, Tiger pattern, 2018.

Image 7 Josef Frank, Hawaii, textile print on linen fabric, <https://www.svenskttenn.se/sv/sortiment/textil/metervara/textil-hawai/100650/>

Image 8 Johanna Welinder, work in progress from Cowboy & other animals, gouache and markers on paper.

Image 9 Svenskt Tenn, from @svenskttenn Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/p/BjwZA_EhgK6/) Online access at (2019-03-19)

Image 10 - 15 Johanna Welinder, Cowboy & other animals, work in progress, gouache and markers on paper, digital process.

Image 16 Laura Callaghan, Tropicophobia, Gouache.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bo6zIOUnApL/> Tropicophobia'

Image 17 Johanna Welinder, Cowboy & other animals, work in progress, gouache and markers on paper.

Image 18 Barry Bland, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1210084/III-mummy-little-kitty-cat-Anjana-chimp-shows-parenting-skills--puma-cub.html> Online access at (2019-03-19)

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Image 20 Still from movie Okja, Online access at (2019-03-19) <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2017-06-30/okja-gullig-jattegris-i-en-grym-varld>

Image 21 Advertisement for Marlboro, <https://medium.com/content-shailee/semiotics-analysis-of-the-iconic-marlboro-man-ba933411d465>

Image 22 Tom of Finland <https://mattsko.com/2018/01/30/tom-of-finland-cowboy/>

Image 23 Woody in Toy Story from 1995. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheriff_Woody

Image 24-25 Johanna Welinder, Cowboy & other animals, work in progress, gouache and markers on paper.

Image 26 Yosemite Sam from cartoon Looney Tunes, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yosemite_Sam

Image 27 Lola Bunny, Still from movie Space jam, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lola_Bunny

Image 28-31 Johanna Welinder, digital sketches, work in progress Cowboy & other animals.

Image 32-34 Johanna Welinder, Konstfack spring exhibition 2019.