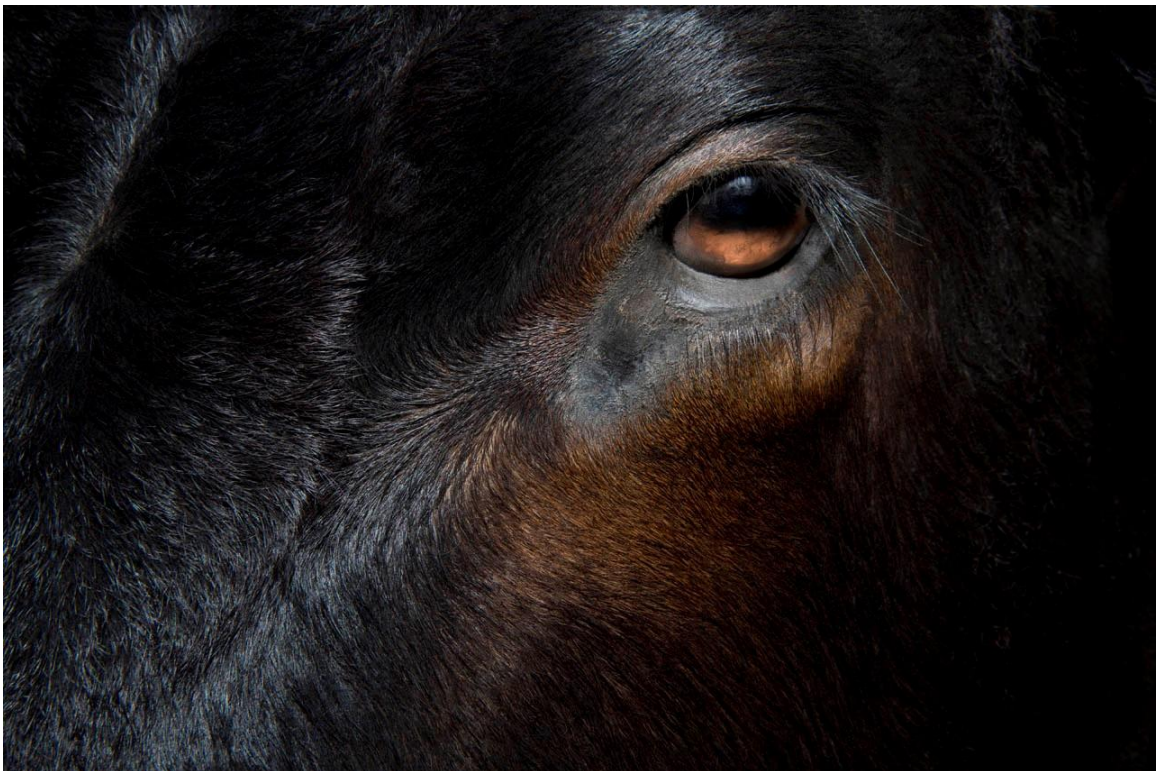


Eyes Open Slowly' Explores Art In Taxidermy

By SARAH DELIA • DEC 14, 2015



CONSTANCE THALKEN©

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An unusual place of business is the source of inspiration for the current exhibit at the Light Factory in Charlotte. The collection of photographs captures the transformation animals undergo when they're carried into a certain shop in Georgia.

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Complicated is the word photographer Constance Thalken uses when describing her work. Her collection Eyes Open Slowly is a group of images created from her time at a taxidermy shop.

One image captures a bird that appears to be airborne but a second look and you can see the tricks of the taxidermy trade. Wires, some foam, and nails help keep the bird together and create the illusion of flight.

Another photograph, abstract in nature, is a close up of an old metal door, the front door of a taxidermy shop.

The abstract swirls are actual scratches and markings made from pet dogs communicating that they want to go in. Thalken describes it as an archive between human and animal communication.

How Thalken, who teaches at Georgia State University, started to spend time at this shop is a story in itself. She teaches an art class on “the animal” - how humans interact, treat, and view animals. The class takes numerous field trips throughout the semester. One of them was to Bud Jones Taxidermy in Tallapoosa, Georgia.

After that trip with her students she found herself drawn back. She's been photographing inside the shop for about two years and says the owner, Bud Jones, has given her pretty much free range of the shop and even points out certain animals she might find interesting.

Thalken, an animal lover, says photographing the animals can be difficult. One black coyote was especially tough, it reminded her of her dog who was nearing the end of his life at the time she started this project. She says she struggled on where to photograph the coyote but finally settled on the shop's framing room, the coyote stands in front of a gold frame.

It's another complexity of her work, part of the reason she's able to be up close to such beautiful animals that appear so life like is because a death has occurred.

Much like the art of taxidermy, Thalken's photographs are very detailed and there's a story behind every piece. Like how she got the title for the body of work which was inspired by a little label on a metal cabinet drawer that read "Eyes Open Slowly." The drawer contained the plastic eyes placed on the animals.

Thalken says she has no desire take photographs at any other taxidermy shops. She doesn't consider this documentary work—but it is specific to the animals that enter and exit this particular taxidermy business. The shop isn't just any place of business, it's an important character in her work that couldn't be replaced.

Eyes Openly Slowly is on view at the Light Factory until January 29, 2016.