

Why Look at Animals?

MARCUS COATES, *Extinct Animals* (installation view, detail), 2018, group of 19 casts, plaster, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry, London, photo Paris Tavitian



Inspired by art critic John Berger's essay 'Why Look at Animals?' (1977), this exhibition, curated by Katerina Gregos, champions the burgeoning non-human rights movement, elements of which have already been enshrined in the constitutions of Bolivia, Ecuador and Switzerland, among others. Apparently, Greece has recently taken huge steps to adopt a fairly strict legal framework for the protection of animals (primarily companion animals), including a clearer articulation of the obligations expected of pet owners. Even so, animal abuse prevails.

'Why Look at Animals?' features over 200 artworks by 60 artists from 30 countries across four continents, much of it intended to spark empathy for non-human animals, while bringing attention to their significance as agential beings. Exhibitions such as this one invite spectators to reconsider speciesism, the flawed view that human animals are naturally superior to non-human animals and are thus justified in exploiting animals, so long as doing so benefits human beings.

While Berger's main focus was our uncanny desire to observe animals, as epitomised by zoos, the artworks on view

here question a range of morally specious human habits such as caging songbirds, factory farming, allowing suffering, hunting for sport, trading exotic pets, experimenting on animals, destroying habitats, driving species extinct, bioengineering species, anthropomorphising non-human animals and ignoring complexity. Although Berger attributed humans' capacity to distance themselves from non-human animals' agency to the lack of a shared language, it rather seems that the cause lies in the nature of the human species itself, given how terribly some humans treat other humans. If, as Berger claims, non-human animals are largely absent from humans' lives, hopefully exhibitions such as 'Why Look at Animals?' not only draw humans closer to non-human animals, but boost our awareness of non-human animals' agency. (Sue Spaid)

'Why Look at Animals? A Case for the Rights of Non-Human Lives,' National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) Athens, through 15 February 2026, www.emst.gr

Various locations
Berlin

Berlin Biennale



JANE JIN KAISEN, *Wreckage*, 2024, video still, © Jane Jin Kaisen

Since its launch in 1998, the Berlin Biennale has evolved into one of Europe's most vital platforms for contemporary art. With each edition entrusted to a new curator or curatorial team, the Biennale remains in constant renewal: open to experimentation, driven by urgency and attuned to the cultural and political currents of its time. The 13th edition, taking place from 14 June to 14 September, continues this tradition with a concept as elusive as it is evocative. Titled 'passing the fugitive on', it is curated by Zasha Colah, with Valentina Viviani as assistant curator. Their proposal centres on the idea of fugitivity, not just as escape, but as a conscious artistic and ethical position. Inspired by Berlin's urban foxes, which roam the outskirts of the city largely unnoticed, the Biennale explores how art can operate outside institutional systems. It asks how art might create its own rules or values, resisting imposed structures and opening up new ways of connecting and making meaning.

As usual, the Biennale unfolds across multiple venues, forming a meandering trail through central Berlin. The KW Institute for Contemporary Art remains the Biennale's familiar base,

while the Sophiensæle provides a platform for theatre and performance. At Hamburger Bahnhof, the exhibition connects with one of the city's key museums for contemporary art, and a former courthouse in Moabit becomes an interesting setting for exploring ideas of justice, structure and resistance. Together, these locations reflect the Biennale's restless themes and anchor it physically within Berlin's complex urban landscape.

By focusing on what is fleeting, unconventional or quietly defiant, this edition offers a vision of art that moves gently, thinks critically and leaves something behind. At its core lies the question: How can art stay connected to the world without being defined by it? By inviting us to explore these ideas while moving through the city, the Biennale presents itself not as a solution, but as a path to follow. (Luc Franken)

2025 Berlin Biennale, 'passing the fugitive on', through 14 September 2025, various locations, Berlin, 13.berlinbiennale.de