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FREY NORRIS
GALLERY

KIN

Dana Harel

April 2- May 3, 2009

My work examines our complex kinship with the natural world, the physical and psychological. I am exploring the construction of fictional hybrid combinations, treating the body as kin to all wild things. The interaction of the body with its natural surrounding is presented through an organic process where nature fuses with our skin and flesh.

- Dana Harel

01

Cover Image
Circus ranivorus

graphite on paper, 96 x 72 in. (244 x 183 cm), 2009



Detail of *Circus ranivorus*



Figure 1: The artist in her studio

KIN: DANA HAREL'S THOUGHT DIAGRAMS

By Paul Woolford

To western life and art, two principles underlie all enduring works of art and literature – identification and objectification. To understand this conflict, its history and relevance to the modern world, humanist thinkers rely on ancient Greece and two of its most influential gods to inform us. Dionysus was an Olympian of mortal birth. He dwelt between primal reality and nature – identification. Apollo, his sibling and rival, is recognized as instilling logic and honor; or what we aspire to as our better selves objectification. If the Apollonian is the created ideal, then the Dionysian has no ideals. It is visceral, it is change, it is nature itself. This duality symbolizes the struggle within us all between our better selves and our primal instinct. By understanding this underlying psychological struggle, yet at the same time its interdependence, Dana Harel vividly brings it to life in the work of *Kin*.

Educated as an architect, Harel understands the world through the Apollonian eye of geometry, scale and order, expressing this fluently and elegantly through each of her drawings. Organically fusing themes of man and environment, Harel is a draughtswoman in the tradition of Donatello, who freed art from its medieval subordination to architecture. No longer entombed within structure, Donatello's sculptures liberated the figure, heralding the renaissance, and resurrected the debate between Apollo and Dionysus. In renaissance antecedents, wherein the human figure becomes object; figure and form shift scale not shape. From the miniature bronze

figurine to Michelangelo's marble David, the objectified form puts distance between the artifact and us.

In our time when the hand and the eye have been distanced by digital technology, Harel rejects such mediation, using only the instruments of her imagination eyes, hands, and graphite. Focusing her eye through the lens of biology and its classifications: kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus and species, she creates pieces that bend and flow to illuminate an earthy, organic and transformative process. Each piece combines thousands of refined strokes reminiscent of Renaissance drawing – her understanding of form through architecture leads to transformative depictions of human and animal. This drawing and creative process embodies the rhetorical while moving away from commonly accepted depictions of figure. Every work is of the actual size it is in life; for example Elephant is the actual size of an Asian pachyderm. Most importantly, while *Kin* offers such images to our eyes, they embrace us with their instincts, offering us an idea and not a solution to our own internal struggle.

Each work, *Circus ranivorus*, *Meleagris gallopavo*, *Elephas maximus*, *Alces alces*, *Python molurus*, *Cancer magister*, *Helix aspersa*, *Testudo graeca* and *Crocodylus niloticus* embraces the conflict of Apollo and Dionysus. Harel writes in her journal “exploring our kinship with nature, I want your question to be, who dominates, man or animal?” As humans, we live with the hubris that we are in control, the dominant species on the planet. However, we are not alone in creating built environments.

Nests, webs and coral reefs –a whole suite of nature’s creatures have been creating inhabitations for millennia. All of these were dependent upon outside sources in the natural world. The battle of object and identity provides Harel an opportunity to explore the conflict of man and nature anew through metamorphosis. In her hands this exploration is exhilarating. Each kin is a portrait of struggle, our inner demons letting go of the object and becoming an identity, each of which is reflected in the most primal of animal instincts.

In *Circus ranivorus*: fluttering fingers, become a soaring predator. Unlike the Winged Victory of Samothrace, this creature isn’t a static herald of victory. Nor is it an emblem of noble intentions, as patriotism might ascribe. No, this bird with its six foot wing span is in the arc of a ferocious descent. The vicious cycle of life made complete through the imminent death of unseen prey.

Python molurus returns us to the garden of original sin. This is no paradise, darker than Genesis, death lurks everywhere. In this parable man isn’t seduced by the serpent, he has become the serpent. The Dionysian metamorphosis of our basic nature has conquered our aspiring angels; Eve is devoured as readily as the snake swallows its lapin prey.

Crocodylus niloticus is the Kin that haunts me most. I look into it and see the battle of Apollo and Dionysus within all of us; two parallel but contradictory impulses. Upon first glance, I thought I saw a messenger bird being released. This ideal is of creatures in harmony communicating with another, and nature being the medium. It is an appeal to our better selves. A moment later I understand this is not a tale of loft. This is the desperate cradle of

life, dependent ecologies with one creature devouring another in order to survive. It is a tacit agreement within the animal kingdom. Nature blankets this tale, and we are reminded by Camille Paglia that, “Art, no matter how minimalist, is never simply design. It is always a ritualistic reordering of reality.”

Ms. Harel relishes her role as mother and the lessons of its transformative nature and inner conflict. As an artist, with each birth of Kin she challenges us to reorder our reality. The metamorphosis of a new being emerges – a hybrid of not the former self or the self that shall exist in the future, but a transitional being that knows no beginning or end.

Paul Woolford is a Senior Vice President and a Director of Design for the architecture firm of Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum. His work has been honored with numerous accolades including national, regional and local Design Excellence Awards from the American Institute of Architects. Named an “Outstanding Young Architect of the Year” by the AIA, Paul has taught design at the University of California, Berkeley; Cornell University; and Savannah College of Art & Design. His work has been published in Architectural Record, Architecture, Interiors and Contract Magazines. His work has been honored with numerous accolades including national, regional and local Design Excellence Awards from the American Institute of Architects.



Elephas maximus
graphite on paper, 96 x 72 in. (244 x 183 cm), 2008

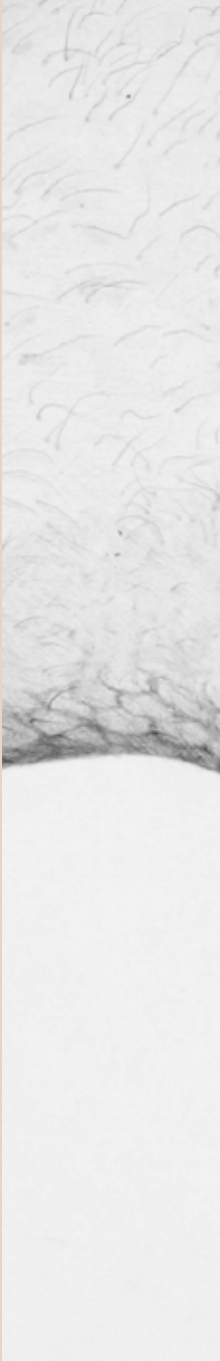




Crocodylus niloticus
graphite on paper, 46 x 62 in. (117 x 158 cm), 2008



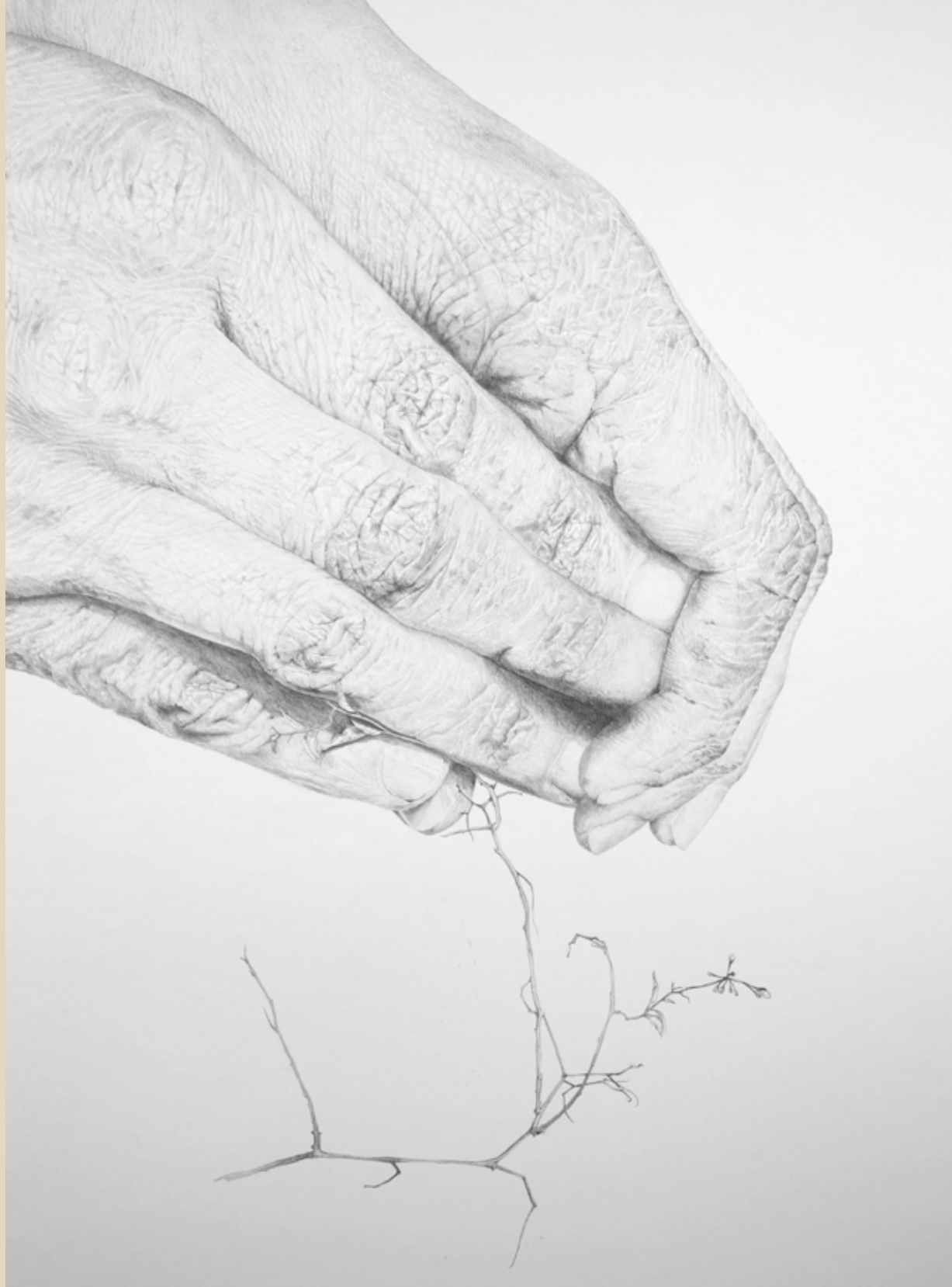




Detail of *Python molurus*







Detail of *Alces alces*





Helix aspersa
graphite on paper, 34 x 25 in. (86 x 63 1/2 cm), 2009



07

Cancer magister

graphite on paper, 30 x 25 in. (76 x 63 1/2 cm), 2009



Meleagris gallopavo
graphite on paper, 27 x 31 in. (69 x 79 cm), 2008

08



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