Preparing for your visit through
*Of Animal Importance*

Your visit through the gallery *Of Animal Importance* will be self-guided. This means that there will not be a staff member or docent available to lead you on a tour through the space. This guide, and the student packets, is provided to assist you in preparing yourself, chaperones, and students for a successful visit.

**Preparing for your visit**

- Read through this packet.
- Share pertinent information with chaperones.
- Print out enough “student packets” for your class and bring these to the museum.
- Go over “museum etiquette” with your students (and chaperones).

**Arriving at the museum**

- Please check in with the front desk. They will process any payment still owed to the museum.
- At the front desk you will also be able to check out clipboards and pencils for use in the gallery.
- Place lunches or backpacks in the white tubs provided.

**In the gallery**

Provide each student with a clipboard and pencil (from the front desk) and a packet (that you brought). Allow students to begin work on the packet, exploring the gallery space on their own. Do encourage them to begin on different pages so that they do not crowd around one piece of art.

After 45 minutes, gather the students together. Lead a 15 minute discussion about what the students found in their explorations.

**About the Gallery**

*Of Animal Importance*, a four-person exhibition, showcases the work of San Diego artists Laura Ball, Belle Baranceanu, Jeff Irwin, and Walter Haase Wojtyla. With the depiction of animals as a subject, these
four artists interpret the animal form through diverse media, each captivated by differing concerns ranging from human interaction with the natural world, animals as spiritual beings, and the wild beast within us all. Laura Ball and Jeff Irwin have both found enduring inspiration in social and environmental issues (conservation serving as a core undercurrent within their work). Ball’s watercolors transport the viewer to a realm of dreams where instinct and primal nature reign over moral judgment and mental dexterity. Irwin’s sculptural forms are delicate in their white simplicity, yet possess an undertow of violence, sharing a subtle bond with Walter Haase Wojtyla’s (1933 – 2014) aggressive paintings of canines. Ten block prints and one drawing by Belle Baranceanu (1902 – 1988), selected from the San Diego History Center’s own fine art collection, represent her as a key figure in the history of San Diego art.

How to Talk to Students about Art

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a method of talking to students about art that encourages critical thinking, inference, and evidence based conclusions. Keep in mind while walking through the gallery that, while artists have their intentions, they cannot control peoples’ reactions to them – people bring their own experiences and reference points to a piece and so interpret art differently from their neighbors. This does not make one person right or another wrong; but encouraging conversations about art and asking students to explain their thought process helps them to access art in a way that is comfortable for them.

Here are some tips to help you more effectively guide your students through this space.

There are three basic VTS questions to ask your students while looking at the different pieces.

1. **What is going on in this image?**
2. **What do you see that makes you say that?**
3. **What else can we find?**

- During discussion, link responses together – compare and contrast what other students have said.
- Try to paraphrase and repeat back what the student said. This not only allows the student to feel as if they are truly being listened to but also helps you ensure the child said what you heard.
- Avoid inserting information. Let students look closely and reason out their responses, rather than discussing the facts. If a student comes to a factually incorrect conclusion, gently correct if absolutely necessary.
- **The key point is that they are backing up their answers using what they see.**
- Allow the conversation to go where it will, even if it gets off topic. Remember, the goal is not to share information, but to encourage critical thinking.
Glossary

- **Installation** – a piece or pieces of art that are designed to be displayed in a specific way in a specific space.

- **Block printing** – a process of making art where an artist carves into wood to create an image. Where an artist carves will be left white on the page and the uncarved wood transfers the color.

- **Water color** – a type of paint used in paintings. Often looks somewhat transparent.

- **Commissioned piece** – a piece of art done by an artist for someone else who is paying for it.

- **Medium** – a word in art that describes the material or materials used in a particular piece.

- **Sculpture** – a piece of art, often 2D, that used paint to display an image.

- **Extinct** – there are no more of that plant or animal left anywhere on Earth.

- **Drawing** – uses pen or pencil on a surface. Sometimes drawings are finished works of art, sometimes artists use them to help imagine what they want to paint or sculpt before they begin.

**Artist Summaries**

**Jeff Irwin**
b. 1954

Throughout his career, Jeff Irwin has used sculpture to address environmental issues. Each of his *White Work* sculptures displayed in this exhibition was inspired by an extinct animal. This series is an alluring yet solemn cautionary tale regarding the rapidly increasing numbers of endangered and extinct animals. *40 Extinct Trophies*, a new work created for this exhibition, is comprised of forty individual sculptures each portraying a different extinct species. The mass approach to representing many species in *40 Extinct Trophies* effectively demonstrates that numerous animals today continue to fight for survival. Suspended somewhere between realism and make-believe, each of the forty forms elegantly jutuxtapose ceramics, taxidermy, and woodcarving. Combining the illusion of wooden forms and live animals frozen in time creates an elegant beauty that is the slipcover on the grimness of this topic. Each cut and area made to look like carved wood is a metaphor for the violent, reckless actions of man on nature. His white palette suggests the loss of these beautiful creatures as they fade from color to nothing at all.

All artworks included in this exhibition were hand built from white earthenware and finished with Irwin’s specially formulated satin white glaze. Irwin received his MFA from San Diego State University and has taught ceramics at Grossmont College since 1989. He is represented by the R.B. Stevenson’s Gallery in La Jolla.
Laura Ball  
b. 1972  
Set in dream-like landscapes, Ball’s watercolors embody the interconnection and interdependence of all living things. Animals and plants of all sizes and species are pressed against one another to configure other larger animals such as elephants, horses, and rhinos. In Untitled (Elephant) the assembled elephant could not stand without its crocodile leg, nor breathe or eat without its albino boa constrictor trunk. As part of her practice, Ball often photographs and sketches wildlife at the San Diego Zoo to use as reference material. One of Ball’s main subjects was Nola, the world famous Northern White Rhinoceroses (Ceratotherium simum cottoni), who until Nola died (November 2015) was one of the last four remaining Northern White Rhinos in the world. The plight of the Northern White Rhino and other endangered, threatened, and near extinct animals has been the subject of several series of works created by Ball.

A master of her medium, Ball manipulates watercolor on the page demonstrating the paints abundant range from precise lines to exquisite abstract bleeds. The joy of painting is ever-present, evident in the bright color palette and whimsical movement captured in each work. A recipient of many awards and prizes, Ball has exhibited in galleries nationally and internationally. Her work is in private and public collections, including the Denver Art Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Ball received her MFA in 2004 from the University of California, Berkeley.

Belle Baranceanu (pronounced: Bar-en-cha-no)  
b. 1902 d.1988  
Belle Baranceanu, a seminal San Diego artist, contributed to the arts in our region through many projects; most notably the production of dozens of remarkable murals throughout southern California during the Great Depression under the Public Works of Art Project of the Civil Works Administration (November 1933 to June 1934) and the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). These programs put millions of unemployed Americans to work in jobs ranging from the construction of public buildings and roads to the creation of artwork, large murals, plays, and literacy projects. Important San Diego WPA mural projects include the La Jolla Post Office (Scenic View of the Village, 1935-36), which is still standing, and the now destroyed La Jolla High School auditorium (The Seven Arts, 1939-40).

The San Diego History Center maintains as part of its Fine Art collection many Baranceanu preparatory mural drawings, linoleum block prints, paintings, and other works on paper. The exhibited block prints were made as part of the WPA Curriculum Project and graced the cover of numerous books that were integrated into the SD City School’s lending library. At the conclusion of the Curriculum Project job, Baranceanu’s linoleum blocks were retained as federal property. The artist felt the works were successful and recreated the block series, adding several new pieces including Drill Baboon (printed in five colors). These brilliant works exemplify her strong confident line and clean bold aesthetic. Whether working on massive murals or small block prints, Baranceanu’s authoritative striking style holds its power.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Belle Baranceanu relocated to the West Coast at the age of 31, first settling in Los Angeles and eventually moving south to San Diego where she gained fame in a time when few female artists were recognized. In 1946, Baranceanu began teaching art at the Francis Parker School, where she stayed until her retirement in 1967. She served as president of the Art Guild in 1950. In addition to being active in the San Diego arts community, she also taught at the San Diego School of Arts.

Walter Haase Wojtyla (pronounced: Wo-te-ah)
b. 1933  d.2014
During his lifetime Walter Haase Wojtyla, produced three main series of works: *Nudes in the Shower, Crime Scenes*, and *Stalker* series, which are the concentration for this exhibition. Other offshoot series were created including a marvelous grouping of tennis court paintings built of remarkable compositional arrangements and some works centering on religious themes. Obsessed with true crime books and murders, Wojtyla utilized the wild dog in his *Stalker* series as a means to explore people’s capacity for primal aggression. ‘Man’s best friend’ is shown tail erect, jaws watering, and often looking at some unknown victim of attack. Cleverly representing a domesticated animal in a wild state, the work argues that no level of technological or social sophistication will remove the primordial violence which humans once depended on for survival.

Throughout the entirety of Wojtyla’s artistic practice one constant dominates--the perpetual dance between realism and abstraction, the grotesque and the beautiful. As he came into his own visual language, the world of abstraction was pulling apart the previous existing expectations of representational painting. Wojtyla embraced this pivotal point in the evolution of art, producing extraordinary works where a tension is held in the clash between figuration and abstraction.

Wojtyla lived and worked in Chicago, Ohio, New York, and Mexico, spending the last three decades of his life producing art in San Diego. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the early 1950s and went on to attain his Master of Arts degree from the University of Cincinnati.

**Answer Key to Student Packet Matching Game**

F – block printing

D – water color

E – installation

B and E – sculpture

D and A – painting

C – drawing

B and E – extinct
Jeff Irwin

40 Extinct Trophies

Throughout his career, Jeff Irwin has used sculpture to address environmental issues. 40 Extinct Trophies, a new work created for this exhibition, is comprised of forty individual sculptures each portraying a different extinct species. The mass approach to representing many species in 40 Extinct Trophies effectively demonstrates that numerous animals today continue to fight for survival. This installation was inspired by a June 2015 Huffington Post article, entitled “Earth Has Entered First ‘Mass Extinction’ Since Dinosaurs, Study Warns.” In this article a study published by Stanford, Princeton, and the University of California-Berkeley, states that the number of vertebrate species that have become extinct in the last 100 years should ordinarily have taken 800-10,000 years to become extinct, based on natural extinction rates.

Combining the illusion of wooden forms and live animals frozen in time creates an elegant beauty that is the slipcover for the grimness of this topic. Each cut and area made to look like carved wood is a metaphor for the violent, reckless actions of man on nature. His white palette suggests the loss of these beautiful creatures as they fade from color to nothing at all.

Quick Reference

- The sculptures are an installation art piece.
- The forty sculptures were inspired by an article about the human causes of extinction.
- The animals are displayed as if they are taxidermy and look as if they were carved out of wood, complete with knots and whorls.
- The piece as a whole is trying to convey the violent and sudden loss of plants and animals at the hands of humans.
Laura Ball

*Elephant* and *Forget Me Not*

*Elephant* is the first watercolor Ball ever did where she used multiple animals to build a larger animal form. *Forget Me Not* deals with the same theme as *Elephant* – in both she uses multiple animals combining together to form one animal as a metaphor for the interdependence of species. However this is a more contemporary and recent work and we can see the artist’s style and process shift from *Elephant* done in 2011 and this work from 2015.

*Forget Me Not* is more constrained; there are elements of death and decay that are represented by bones and skeletons which are not present in the earlier works. Also the animals used to build the caribou are smaller in general than those used in *Elephant*, are more densely packed in, and interwoven with botanical elements. The latter piece also evokes a landscape. While *Elephant* appears as an interesting stand-alone design, the caribou in *Forget Me Not* appears to be standing on some kind of ground and includes live birds twittering around the animal. These differences illustrate the artist’s evolution of style over the course of her time working with this series.

---

Quick Reference

- Both works are in the similar style – using smaller animals to form a larger one.
- By showing smaller animals inside the larger one, she illustrates the interdependence of species.
- *Forget Me Not* includes elements that show evolution of the artist’s style (including bones/skeletons).
Belle Baranceanu

**Study of a Deer, Deer, Skunk, and Tommy Broadstripe the Skunk**

Baranceanu’s works displayed here could be categorized as “animal portraits.” Each piece shows an animal in detail, emphasizing the traits that define that species. She uses strong lines that give the animals shape, but also series of lines close together to provide shading or contouring. While they are not cartoons, they offer more personality than a scientific rendering of the animal would. This may have something to do with the intended audience of these pieces – Baranceanu was commissioned by the Works Project Administration (WPA) Curriculum Project to illustrate books that featured animals for students. The works displayed here also present a unique opportunity to view an artist’s work at several different stages.

*Study of a Deer* was a working drawing for the linoleum block prints produced for the WPA showing that a simple pencil on paper piece can have power and that art does not have to be complicated or large to be successful. Baranceanu often took her drawing classes to the San Diego Zoo to draw from the animals. This work may or may not have been done while looking at a deer, it is likely she did look at these animals while she was drawing.

*Deer* and *Skunk* are both linoblock prints. To make a linoblock, an image is carved into wood; the area you carve is the area that stays white on the page while the parts that are left behind transfer the color. This is the opposite way of thinking from drawing, where you create a dark line with your pencil or ink. For linoblocks, this also means the final produced artwork is backwards, or a reverse of what you see when looking at the block.

*Tommy Broadstripe the Skunk* is an example of Baranceanu’s published work. This project was completed for the WPA Curriculum Project in 1936. Her Curriculum Project publications (and others like them) were integrated into the San Diego City School’s lending library and used by countless students over the years.

---

**Quick Reference**

- Her works can be considered “animal portraits” – close up perspectives of individual animals.
- From a distance the animals look detailed and shaded – it’s only upon getting closer that you can see the multitude of small lines she uses to create that effect.
- Linoblock printing requires artists to imagine space differently than if they were drawing.
- Baranceanu’s work was also published as a part of a WPA project.
Walter Wojtyla

*It is not the business of art to make people comfortable.*

The clever title of this work embodies a main attribute of Wojtyla’s practice, that paintings and art in general does not have to be beautiful to be successful. When describing his work in the book, San Diego Artists (1988) Wojtyla stated “*I like to work directly on canvas, make a lot of changes and kind of build it up. That makes a statement too. I don’t like things to look too finished. That’s why I feel I don’t take it to the nth degree. I think I’d like to get more muddier, more dirtier on the canvas, not so much nice color...I think my paintings are finished when I start saying, ‘well, I’ll do a little bit here, a little bit there, a little cosmetic stuff.’ You shouldn’t do that. It makes it too sweet. I always like a little imperfection. I like that. It’s gutsy. I like gutsy paintings.*” This exhibition focuses on paintings and drawings from Wojtyla’s *Stalker series*. Within these pieces his fierce and bold dogs reference the wild beast inside each of us. Cleverly representing a domesticated animal in a wild state, these works argue that no matter how calmed and civilized we have become the violence and ferocity we depended on for survival 200,000 years ago is still inside all us.