





IOWA ARTISTS 2015  
JESSICA TECKEMEYER

Cover: *Impact (I-III)*, 2015 (In process)  
Left: *Human Shadow*, 2013



Jessica Teckemeyer's mixed-media sculpture depicts animals in surreal, often foreboding situations, and explores dualities in human nature. "The human condition is domesticated; we are animals," she states. "As social creatures, we combat reason versus instinct." She plays on the vulnerability we see in "safe" animals such as deer, and the danger we associate with predators like wolves, emphasizing the concept of multiplicity by often presenting both creatures in the same work. The smooth, highly-finished surface of these sculptures contrasts dramatically with the glossy, realistic eyes the artist chooses, and the safe, artificial space of the gallery is subtly subverted by a mass of driftwood and the mysterious sound of growling. Touching on broad themes of primal emotion and ancient mythology to specific current issues such as gun violence, Teckemeyer's art engages and unsettles on multiple levels.

Jessica Teckemeyer was born in 1981 in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota and raised in Frazee, Minnesota. She is a graduate of the Minnesota State University Moorhead (BFA) and University of Minnesota – Twin Cities (MFA). She serves as Assistant Professor of Art at Clarke University in Dubuque, and has exhibited in multiple venues across the United States.

Left: *Devour*, 2015  
Following page: *Chaos II*, 2015



## Interview with the artist by exhibition curator Laura Burkhalter

How did you choose animals as the main figure in your work? Was it a long process or something that always interested you?

In 2008, I was a visiting artist at the Dodeca Film Academy in Montevideo, Uruguay. I created a mixed-media installation with a fawn figure at the center. It was well received. However, my portfolio of more recent work was criticized for being focused on American culture. This changed my perspective to want to make artwork that would connect to a broader audience. On my return home, I began making animal-focused sculptures. Nine months later I traveled to Italy where the presence of the past is so evident through the art, architecture, and the people. From Bernini's *The Rape of Proserpina* to Francavilla's *Jason with the Golden Fleece*, I was drawn to works depicting mythology, specifically those with animals. My research then dived into mythology, folklore, psychology, and monster theory. Ultimately the research guided me to thinking about humans as social creatures, so animal figures are a means to create this metaphor. Through translating a human experience into the form of an animal, we look at ourselves from another viewpoint.

Your sculptures seem to reference mythology or folklore, but they aren't necessarily narrative. Can you discuss these references, and the importance of symbolism in these sculptures?

Yes, many of the sculptures are inspired by mythology and folklore. Myths and stories are an important custom to pass cultural values from one generation to another. Many utilize animals as metaphors to express human qualities and symbolize human relations. Some stories are well known. *Little Red Riding Hood*, for example, is believed to have been written prior to the 17th century, and there are many versions of the story. Studying popular stories became a way I felt connected to human history. In 2009, I decided to combine the modern adaption of Cerberus, the three-headed dog from Greek mythology, with the notion of multiple personalities made familiar in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Viewers can identify underlying concepts through knowledge of folklore and literature. I portray specific body language and facial expressions through the animals to illustrate the complexity of human behavior. Each artwork utilizes human-like eyes and a smooth surface, relating to skin, to provide viewers with clues to the introspective nature of my themes.

How do you construct the gun shots in *Impact*?

Events including the movie theatre shooting in Aurora, Colorado, the gunning down of 26 people in Newtown, Connecticut, and the Washington Navy Yard killings resulted in a series of studio experiments for me. I contacted a rifleman to fire a variety of ammunition types from handguns and assault weapons at a number of clay blocks. My heart pounded as I watched the clay burst and expand. The resulting forms record the effect of the projectile. After witnessing the effects, I sculpted several clay deer torsos and transported the objects to the firing range. The rifleman then fired each with a .38 Special gun with hollow point bullets at the specific areas I marked. I returned to the studio with the shot objects to prepare each clay wound to be kiln fired. The wounds were added to the fawn sculptures to depict child victims.

Your works are very direct, even disturbing in some cases. Are you looking for a specific reaction in viewers?

Overall, I want the sculptures to invoke conversations among viewers on difficult issues including fear, vulnerability, death, and spirituality. Humans experience a range of emotions spanning primal instincts to socially acceptable responses. In understanding our polarities, we can recognize the projections that color our opinions about others. Through establishing a new sense of awareness, we can embrace diversity. With *Devour* and *Impact I – III* I am asking for a call to action. The goal is to explore the dark side of human nature in order to engage discussion about healing our “collective shadow” —including violence. I seek to stimulate conversation about how communities can unite to heal our past and work to minimize violent acts in the future. Lastly, I want the sculpture to crawl into the viewer's head and never leave.

Interview conducted via e-mail, September 2015



Above: *Reliance (sinners and saints)*, 2011  
Right: *Impact (I-III)*, 2015 (In process)



This brochure is published in conjunction with *Iowa Artists 2015: Jessica Teckemeyer*. The exhibition is on view in the John and Mary Pappajohn Gallery in the Richard Meier building of the Des Moines Art Center from October 30, 2015 to February 21, 2016.

This exhibition is supported by KPMG, LLC.

© 2015 Des Moines Art Center  
All rights reserved  
4700 Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50312-2099  
515.277.4405  
[www.desmoinesartcenter.org](http://www.desmoinesartcenter.org)

Design: Annabel Wimer

PDFs of this publication may be downloaded from the Art Center's website.

All images courtesy of the artist.



## CHECKLIST

*Chaos II*, 2015  
Mixed media:  
Tree root, polyurethane, paint,  
foam, glass  
26 x 42 x 26 inches



*Devour*, 2015  
Mixed media:  
Polyurethane, paint, silicone, glass  
14 x 36 x 30 inches



*Impact (I-III)*, 2015 (In process)  
Mixed media:  
Shot clay, polyurethane, paint, glass  
Dimensions variable



*Reliance (sinners and saints)*, 2011  
Mixed media:  
Polyurethane, paint, silicone, glass  
21 x 24 x 18 inches



*Human Shadow*, 2013  
Mixed media:  
Polyurethane, wood, paint, glass  
18 x 24.5 x 25 inches