

# The hidden talents of vets

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When you call in the vet to treat your cattle dog, cat, pet goldfish or prize bull, there's a chance you might also be calling in a skilled artist.

That's what the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Melbourne discovered when it decided to celebrate a half century of teaching at Australia's oldest veterinary school.

When the call went out for people in vet

science to contribute to an art competition, the results were remarkable.

More than seventy percent of the contributions to an exhibition called *The Artful World of Animals*, came from the vet industry clearly translating its care and concern for animals into art.

Purnima Ruanglertbutr curated the exhibition which explores the heartfelt and complex relationship we have with animals.

She says she wanted contributors to explore the impact of humans on the animal world, the relationships between humans and animals, what sentiments are stirred between humans and animals and the importance of animals in human culture.

"The show features photos and artworks of dogs, donkeys, tigers, and wild birds and one I am drawn to shows the world through the eyes of an animal.

"It's a playful interpretation - a photographic manipulation the vet created using her knowledge of a cat's eyesight and perspective - what their vision is like, what colours they can and can't see.

Other entries cover more controversial issues.

"A lot of artists explore the nature of zoological institutions (looking at) barriers and boundaries and shying away from portraying zoos as the innocent realm of childhood retreats. (They) question whether we, as sentient beings, have the right to confine other sentient beings behind bars (for our own pleasure)," Ms Ruanglertbutr explains.

Two entries by Deborah Storie bring an international perspective to the show.

She holds a vet's license but works in international aid and visits Afghanistan twice a



IMAGE: PURNIMA RUANGLERTBUTR'S ENTRIES REFLECT ON THE

year.

Her entry reflects on the role of the donkey, an animal that she says is critical to rural life in that part of the world as water, bread and peace.

"For most rural families, you can't live without (a donkey), says Ms Storie.

"I lived in a rural Afghan village for about six years which taught me to see our relationship with animals quite differently.

"I love animals and I think pets add a lot to our lives but sometimes the way we treat them is not healthy for them or for the world we live in.

"Animals are treated well in (rural) Afghanistan... in rural villages there was very little tolerance to any cruelty to animals at all," she says.

"They are extremely kind to their animals, they depend on them but they don't make them pets, they don't call them names and they don't sentimentalise them at all."

*Purnima Ruanglertbutr, curator of The Artful World of Animals*

*Deborah Storie, entrant, vet and consultant on international aid*

**Producer: Keiren McLeonard**

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