



T E R E S A J O R D A N

Artist Statement

“WHAT *ARE* THEY THINKING?”

I had just started on the work for this show when I learned of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. It broke my heart, a pain especially acute after so many other acts of senseless violence, the great human suffering wrought by recent storms, and the seemingly intractable wrangling in Washington. As I worked in my studio, I listened to the radio. Someone made the comment: If aliens looked down at us from outer space, they would ask, “What *are* they thinking?”

It’s a familiar trope, even cliché, but it struck me anew. I was working with animal images, as I often do. Usually mine is the observer’s eye, depicting animals as they go about their day unaware of me. But suddenly they became the observers, some regarding me surreptitiously out of the corner of an eye and others turning to look at me straight on. I had the sense they were asking of me—and by extension of all humanity—“What *are* you thinking?”

After these animals turned to look at me, I was always surprised at their expressions. First came a polar bear who looked out with great sadness (*Blue*). Next a horse turned up, craning his neck to stare back at me over his shoulder, and he looked angry as hell (*Leaving Us Behind*). I often do several versions of the same composition, and in the second rendition the horse looked worried; in the third, simply perplexed. A giraffe looked down with a look of bemusement, as if to say, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (*Above It All*.)

I work in monotype, a painterly form of printmaking that dates back to at least the Renaissance. Usually I work reductively, which is to say I work from dark to light, covering the plate completely with etching ink and then taking away what is necessary to reveal the form. I use Plexiglas plates and work on a light table, and I often had the sense of these animals emerging as if on their own, from out of the darkness.

I came to art in midlife as a meditation, a way to pay attention. In Zen painting there is a fundamental idea known as *kiinseido* or “living moment,” defined as the intuitive expression of a subject’s essential nature. I don’t know if I am capturing the essential nature of these animals or if they simply carry my projections. But I am always grateful for the surprise of what turns up in the studio, for what it tells me, and for what it asks of me in return.