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RvB Arts

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Bestiarum vocabulum proprie convenit leonibus, pardis, tigribus, lupis et vulpibus canibusque et simiis ac ceteris, quae vel ore vel unguibus
saeviunt, exceptis serpentibus. Bestiae dictae a vi, qua saeviunt.

The term 'beast,' properly speaking, includes lions, panthers, tigers, wolves, foxes, dogs, apes, and other animals that attack either with their mouth or their claws,
excepting serpents. They are called beasts from the force with which they attack.
Isidore of Seville (560 ca.- 636), Etymologies

In the Middle Ages, bestiaries were didactic-educational works of a symbolic, allegorical and moralizing nature, which collected and mixed scientific and naturalistic knowledge with religious and popular beliefs, along with fabulous and fantastic creations on the animal world. Descendant of the zoological treaties from antiquity and late antiquity (including the Etymologies by Isidore of Seville), they became a proper literary genre between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: such Christian encyclopedias allowed one to interpret the wonders of creation through an edifying perspective.
In Jungle, Bato takes his cue from this tradition to investigate the structural affinities that bind man and animal. Focusing his research on the jungle's inhabitants, Bato creates his own personal contemporary bestiary, which feeds on suggestions absorbed from reading numerous scientific sources and the works of some adventure writers, including Rudyard Kipling, Emilio Salgari, and Herman Melville.
His taxonomy of beasts – which includes bears, monkeys, tigers, marabous, lions, gorillas, mandrills, and crocodiles – trail almost literally the definition of Isidore of Seville, according to whom the mouth is the creatures' hallmark of aggression and ferocity. And it is precisely this feature that is always present in Bato's works: with a flickering and sinuous trait, he links the animal world to the human world in an indissoluble way, under the sign of instinct and ruthlessness, moving from analogy to homology, thanks to the free association of forms. Even the plants – innocuous spectators only in appearance – reveal thorny pitfalls.
The elegance of the sign and the color scheme, rarefied in warm and brilliant hues and used in an unrealistic way, spread over vast white backgrounds, and accentuate the violence of the subject matter. Despite the sense of apparent immediacy that the paintings communicate, Bato's creative process includes elaborate studies, sketches and drafts, which allow him to create a balanced, harmonious, and essential composition, as if it were a calculated improvisation that leaves no room to afterthoughts.
If the works on canvas aim at simplifying and emptying the form, until it is reduced to its outline, the sculptures – a new chapter in Bato's artistic research – represent its volumetric counterpart, with obvious cross references.
By comparing the versions of the same animal made with different materials, such as wax, white acrylic resin, bronze, and wrought iron, we discover new and different cues upon multiple

viewings, as if we were investigating a subject through different lenses. Here the sign seems to abandon the ethereal nature of the paintings and become concrete and three-dimensional, while maintaining the same flexibility and impressionistic character. With Jungle, Bato draws on a surreal imaginarium to create a microcosm inhabited by a nebula of creatures: in this stratification of shapes and images, we oscillate between the animal and the human, on the traces of a footprint and the arc of a mouth.

— Luisa Grigoletto, RvB Arts, March 2018