



# THE ALICE MANIFESTO

A catalogue for two exhibitions from *The Alice Sequence*

By Wilma Cruise

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Six impossible things before breakfast  
Gallery University of Stellenbosch

9 November 2016 - 31 December 2016

The 8th Square  
Cavalli Gallery, Cavalli Wine estate

6 November - 4 December 2016

MANIFESTO: a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer

*The 8th Square* at Cavalli Gallery, Cavalli Wine estate and *Six impossible things before breakfast* at Gallery University of Stellenbosch (GUS), are the final two exhibitions in *The Alice Sequence*. *The Alice Sequence* is a series of seven exhibitions held over a period of six years. The sequence is inspired by Lewis Carroll's two childhood stories, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871). Carroll's tales provide an extended metaphor for an exploration into the animal question. Through sculptures, prints, drawings and paintings I explore the human and animal interface. I specifically ask the question as to what happens in the communicative space between the human and the other animal. I am curious as to why modern humankind had developed an inability to listen to the environment and the other nonhuman inhabitants of the world. My search is based on the premise of the inadequacy of language as a means of communication between ourselves, as human beings, and the other sentient and sapient beings that inhabit our planet. Taking my cue from Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher, I interrogate the space-between humankind and the other animals.

Derrida's important meditation on the animal question, *The animal therefore I am* (2008), specifically focused on an individual animal, in this case is own little cat who encountered him naked in the shower. The cat's inquiring gaze shamed Derrida and caused him to question his own humanity and indeed his animality. What happened between them? What was communicated in the space created by the cat's inscrutable gaze and the philosopher's discomfort

before it? Speculating from this scene, I ask the possibly unanswerable question, "What knowledge is conveyed at that moment when the animal looks back at its observer?"

This is a key question. The traditional view is for the human subject to view the animal as an object. But if one were to invert the subject/object positions as Derrida advocates, the view point changes. He suggests that *Through the Looking Glass*, could be regarded as a type of mirror stage in which case questions about the animal are asked from the other side, that is from the point of view of the animal. This implies a shift from a humanist anthropocentric point of view to one that is more inclusive of all animal kind. And indeed, in the field of anthrozoology the Cartesian notion of the man at the centre of the world and the measure of all things is being challenged. *The Alice Sequence* in its visual manifestation and textual forms is a contribution towards this discourse.

But a caveat has to be added. The works that make up the sequence of exhibitions do not follow a logical path nor present a rational argument. Working with a visual language that does not necessarily mimic symbolic language creates a different kind of text - a dialogue that complicates more than explicates. Thus, the animals I depict in two and three-dimensional forms in *The Alice Sequence* are neither illustrations nor explanations of Carroll's texts. Yet, like the dream worlds in which Alice finds herself, there is a kind of nonsensical logic to them. It is a type of madness, of a kind that the Cheshire Cat alludes to when he proclaims from his lofty perch, "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (Carroll 1982:64). This is not insanity of the clinical order, but of the

knowing kind that alludes to the unhinging of words and objects from their usual contexts. As Alice found in her dream world, the inversion of the normal order allows access to new territories and permits new insights and new knowledges. Believing in speaking animals, as Alice does in Wonderland, opens the possibility of believing the impossible - or believing the impossible allows the possibility of speaking animals! In the context of this research, allowing for the "impossible", (the possibility of the impossible), arguably opens the doors to the recognition of minds other than our own. This can be translated into wish number one of this manifesto - to open the space for new ways of seeing and living with the nonhuman other.

Recognizing that the other nonhuman animals have minds of their own is an acknowledgment of subjectivities like ours. This allows for a relationship based on intersubjectivity rather than subject and object. However, I am not suggesting therefore that animals are our brothers or mini-humans. As the Oxford don, the Rev. Andrew Linzey phrases it, "In fact, it is their very unlikeness - and the corresponding unknowing - that should inspire, at least in part, an attitude of reverential respect" (Linzey in Regan and Linzey: 2010:xiv).

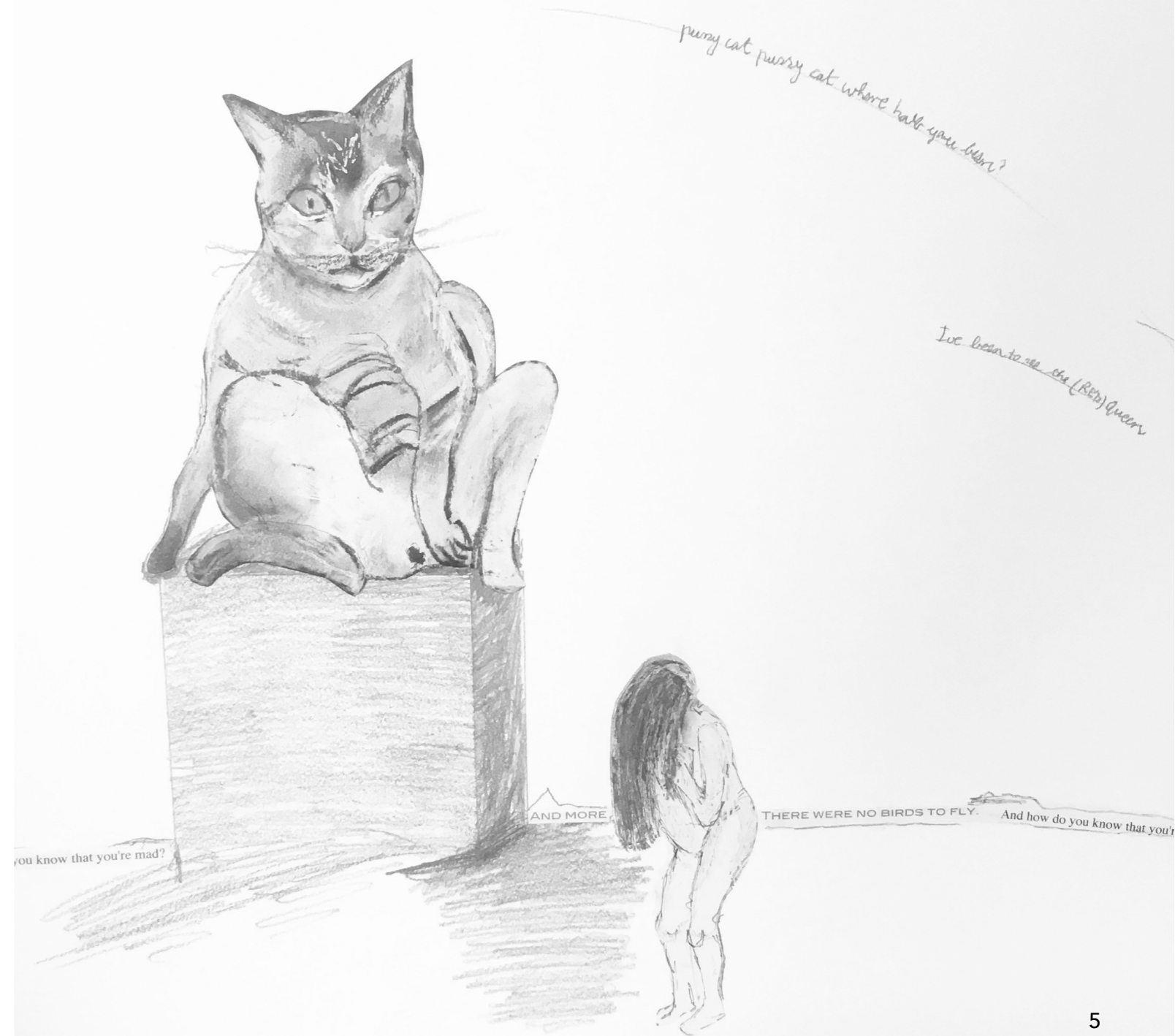
Which brings me to wish number two

- the nonhuman animals should be accorded and treated with reverential respect for their uniqueness and otherness without measuring them against humankind's attributes.

But this is not to ignore the animal other and what is in his/

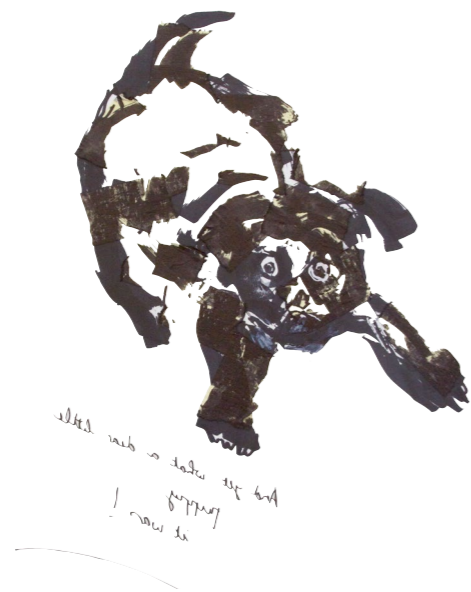
her mind. Without succumbing to the pessimism implicit in Wittgenstein's statement that we cannot know what the lion thinks even if he could speak, I suggest, along with JM Coetzee's fictional character, Elizabeth Costello, that we are capable through empathetic imagination to access the minds of other animals. Thus the final wish of this manifesto is articulated by the cognitive ethologist Marc Bekoff who advocates an approach of compassionate conservation which stresses the value of the individual animal even in the face of larger environmental demands.

- First do no harm by bringing empathy for each individual animal into environmental decision making.



Where do you come from  
Where are you going?  
Look up  
Speak nicely  
and don't twiddle your thumbs





Take a Bow.





to be seen —  
to be readable —  
to be seen looking back



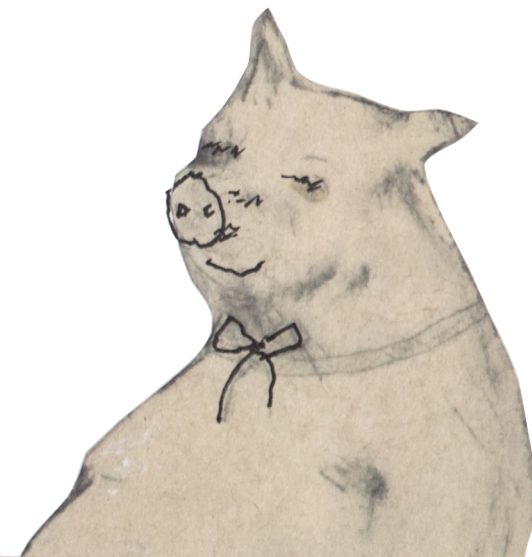
this is the only way to the 8th Square



and -  
the fifth belongs to Humpty Dumpty



If you believe in me,  
I'll believe in you.



*The All-knowing Pig* 15





I don't like belonging to  
another person's dream

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## Acknowledgements

Exhibitions of this size and nature would not be possible without the support and enthusiasm of many professionals and friends. I wish to thank the following:

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Professor Stella Viljoen for opening the exhibition/s

And as always, my husband,

John Cruise.



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## Artist's Bio



Wilma Cruise is a South African sculptor and visual artist. She works mainly with fired clay in her renderings of life-sized human and animal figures. Her sculpture installations and exhibitions are often accompanied by works on paper. She has also completed several series of print editions. A number of her ceramic sculptures have been successfully translated into bronze editions.

Cruise has had over twenty solo exhibitions. Her latest project is a series of six exhibitions entitled *The Alice Sequence*, of which *The 8th Square* and *Six impossible things before breakfast* are the last. She has curated others and completed a number of public works including the National Monument to the Women of South Africa, *Strike the Women Strike the Rock* at the Union Buildings, Pretoria and *The Memorial to the Slaves* in Cape Town - the latter in conjunction with the sculptor Gavin Younge.

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