

# Neil Goldberg's 'One Version of Events' Makes Animals of Us All

By **Jessica Dawson** Wednesday, May 13 2015

**There's a reason they call it the urban jungle.** Count on artist Neil Goldberg to remind us.

In a wide-ranging show at Participant Inc., Goldberg pings between the veldt and the Whole Foods, recalling our animal nature even while pointing out our housecat reality. The 51-year-old New York-based artist is a sharp observer, and the often hilarious proceedings chronicled in "One Version of Events," his exhibition of recent video, photographs, and drawings, will taste particularly fresh to those starved from too many art-about-art-about-art-theory shows. Goldberg documents humanity's quirks, wishes, and darker desires — beginning with his own.

A suite of nine drawings, "Wild Animals Eat My Family and Me," is exactly that. We see vultures munching on Goldberg's mom, a cheetah jawing his nephew's jugular, and a wolf making a TV dinner of the artist. Because Goldberg renders the beasts as unhurried and the victims as resigned (or is it simply deceased?), these pictures have a deadpan humor that comes off as more of a Freudian solution to domestic discontent than a horror show. (Who among us hasn't imagined evisceration as a solid resolution to a laundry argument?) The drawings' soft contours and small scale add a dulcet intimacy, imbuing the proceedings with a tinge of eroticism.



*Courtesy Neil Goldberg*

Let's make a dog-doo deal: Neil Goldberg trades in nickel bags.

From here we set out for precincts both animal and human, and their juxtaposition hints at some of the absurdity behind modern-day lives. Five looping videos of animals on the hunt — among them, a cheetah chasing an antelope and a hawk swiping a rabbit — become progressively more abstract (they end up as simple outlines of predator and prey) as they conjure the thrills, at once gustatory and sexual, of the hunt. Across the room, a wall of 45 inkjet prints of photographs of gay couples exiting Whole Foods, shopping bags in hand, suggests how far from those origins we've come.

In past works that took New Yorkers as subjects, Goldberg shot and tightly edited footage of cubicle drones circling the salad bar or straphangers emerging from the subway, lending a heroic cast to the minor anxieties of urban living. At Participant he is both observer

and prankster, setting up strangers in a charade that reveals much about our economies of value. The gem of a two-and-a-half-minute video *Shit Hunt* is a string of vignettes in which the artist approaches dog owners as they bag Fido's feces and offers five bucks for the turds. We see the range of reactions, from bewilderment to scorn: One woman can barely be pried from her cellphone and seems pleased to get the shit off her hands. Some take Goldberg's money, others refuse it. Some won't hand over the poop. Meanwhile, the dogs sniff the artist's pant leg. The intervention is as hilarious as it is instructive: Goldberg creates an economy out of a set of circumstances, an economy that changes the value of excrement. All the while, the canines (remember they descend from wolves?) look on.

Goldberg has borrowed his show's title from Polish Nobel laureate [Wisława Szymborska's elegant poem](#) about disembodied beings contemplating the possibility of living. But "One Version of Events" also sounds like the language of a police blotter. With the crimes in Goldberg's show ranging from wished-for murder to waste trafficking, it's high time we all got locked up. We're animals.