

Karen Bondarchuk 'Jabberwocking,' a study of speech vs. intelligence

It has been said that the thing truly setting humans apart from animals is the use of language, and that using language indicates a higher level of intelligence. [Karen Bondarchuk](#), an associate professor of art at Western Michigan University, doesn't agree.

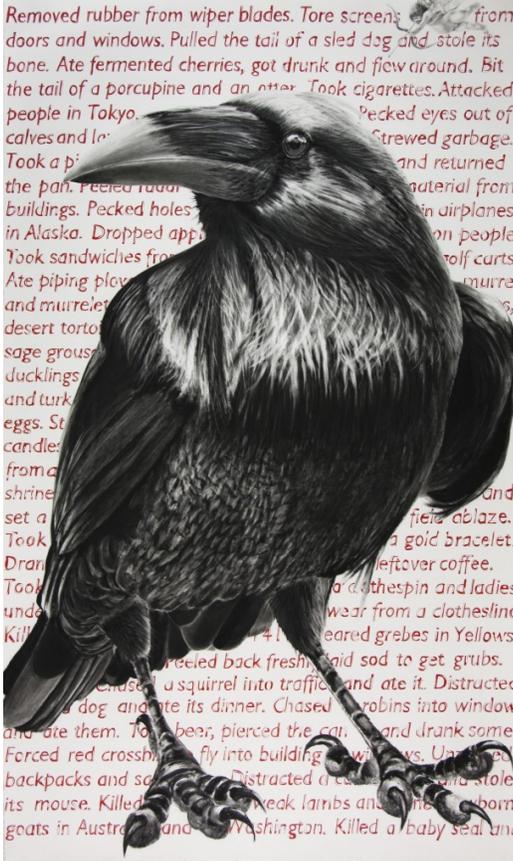
"More and more I think that social scientists, philosophers and biologists are really understanding that animals have very, very sophisticated ways of being," she said.

Much of Bondarchuk's artistic work focuses on crows and ravens, and it is a survey of her drawings of them that is housed in UAA's Kimura Art Gallery.

The show, "Jabberwocking," explores the intelligence of these birds.

"It's work that's dealing with the idea of communication and how language can be an unreliable way in which we talk about animals," Bondarchuk said. "As much as anything, it's about language and ideas around communication."

Crows and ravens can recognize human faces and associate them with the individual's potential to bring them danger. Bondarchuk explained that the Jungle Crow population in Japan is booming in cities due to large amounts of garbage, and the birds are so bothersome (downing Internet lines, causing power outages, carrying small animals out of zoos) the Japanese often gas them.



Removed rubber from wiper blades. Tore screens from doors and windows. Pulled the tail of a sled dog and stole its bone. Ate fermented cherries, got drunk and flew around. Bit the tail of a porcupine and an otter. Took cigarettes. Attacked people in Tokyo. Pecked eyes out of calves and lambs. Strewed garbage. Took a pig and returned the pain. Peeled rubber from buildings. Pecked holes in airplanes in Alaska. Dropped apples on people. Took sandwiches from wolf carts. Ate piping plover and murrelets and desert tortoise sage grouse ducklings and turkey eggs. Stole candles from a shrine and set a field ablaze. Took a gold bracelet. Drank leftover coffee. Took a clothespin and ladies underwear from a clothesline. Killed 41 grebes in Yellowstone. Peeled back fresh fish to get grubs. Chased a squirrel into traffic and ate it. Distracted a dog and ate its dinner. Chased robins into window and ate them. Took a bear, pierced the car and drank some. Forced red crossbills fly into buildings and stole backpacks and socks. Distracted a mouse and stole its mouse. Killed weak lambs and newborn goats in Australia and Washington. Killed a baby seal and

Images courtesy of Karen Bondarchuk

The birds learned to recognize this danger by memorizing the faces of those who do the gassing and have begun creating fake nests to mislead them.

It is examples like this that drive Bondarchuk's concept. "There's a bird biologist named John Marzluff who's talked a lot about how crows and ravens have co-evolved with humans, wherein, we do one thing, they see that one thing and do another thing. Then, we see that something and do another thing in response to that, and it's this kind of elaborate dance between us," she said.

Bondarchuk and UAA art Professor Hugh McPeck first approached UAA art history professor Charles "Sean" Licka, in August 2012 about showing the "Jabberwocking" exhibit in the Kimura Gallery.

McPeck and Bondarchuk met through their shared involvement in "Birds in Art," an annual traveling art exhibit, over the years.

"I got to know Hugh, and I said, 'You know, I've always wanted to see Alaska and have an exhibition,' and so he spoke with Dr. Licka and we went from there," Bondarchuk said.

The show in the Kimura Gallery almost included some of Bondarchuk's large rubber raven sculptures, but their size made them difficult to accommodate.

"He (McPeck) was interested in showing the rubber material ravens that she produced, the three dimensional objects, but we decided not to do that. We decided that it would be more effective to show the drawings," Licka said.

The large sculptures may not be on display, but Bondarchuk's drawings occupy plenty of space.

"You walk in and you see these ravens that are eight feet high, four feet across, and various other sorts of things," Licka said. "I think (students) will find a lot of humor and various kinds of narrative structures that she sets up in her body of work. She characterizes these ravens in very marvelous ways."

Bondarchuk hopes that students who see her show will reconsider their perceptions on human and animal communication, the intelligence of crows and ravens and analyze world culture itself.

"Depending on the culture one comes from, crows and ravens are worshipped. They're maligned. They are polarizing characters," she said. "People either really love them or really hate them, and there doesn't tend to be a middle ground."

"Jabberwocking" will be on display until Feb. 8 in the Kimura Art Gallery on the second floor of the Fine Arts Building. Gallery hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday. There will be an evening reception tomorrow from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Free parking is available at the Fine Arts Building after 5 p.m.

For more information about the artist, visit her website at <http://www.karenbondarchuk.com>.

