



Paromius

The blue-footed Paromius can be found skimming the water, consuming everything that will fit in its floppy gullet.

All Creatures Great

By Rosemary Carstens
& Small

Welcome to the phantasmagorical world of mixed-media artist Geoffrey Gorman



Geoffrensis and Alpius in Action

The Geoffrensis travels between past worlds and future environments. He is known for his fascination with discarded artifacts and “animology.” He is pictured here with the Alpius, a dog-like creature shown in two positions.

In a small studio in Santa Fe, N.M., a modern-day alchemist bends over his worktable. Around him lie piles of twisted sticks, bicycle tires, baling wire, rusted screws and washers, torn canvas, medallions and a few tools. Layer by layer, contemporary sculptor Geoffrey Gorman builds charismatic creatures that, with the final touches, suddenly become “real.” As the puppet Geppetto once carved from wood turned into the boy Pinocchio, so do Gorman’s creatures come alive, exploring the territories between reality and legend, science and imagination.



Audubonii

This bird specimen is weathered and care-worn, but just as strong and active as ever. Attached to the Audubonii's body are assorted metallic tags of unusual form.

Commenting on why collectors are increasingly attracted to Gorman's work and why she is pleased to represent it, Jane Sauer, of the Jane Sauer Gallery in Santa Fe, said, "Geoffrey captures whimsy in the midst of a serious dialogue on the relationship between man and animal. His pieces are so complex that you can return again and again and see new details. For me, it was love at first sight. Geoffrey has an uncanny ability to illustrate the core traits of any animal, yet make them quite human."

Gorman's childhood seems to have been custom designed to encourage imagination. The youngest of four boys, he ran as freely as Huckleberry Finn on his family's farm outside Baltimore, Md. A dozen ramshackle buildings, some dating back centuries, surrounded the main house. He remembers exploring abandoned houses, checking out local wildlife and ambling around in the woods for days without bumping into anybody else.

An assortment of unusual family pets was routine: four or five dogs, a red fox, a monkey, a raccoon, a goat, chickens and snakes. Geoffrey's mother was a talented artist and his father a travel agency owner. They were lively, social and outgoing, and their home was often filled with creative types. His great-uncle was Ogden Nash. It's no wonder the boy grew into an original force in the art world.

Gorman explored photography in high school and studied it formally at the Maryland Institute, College of Art in

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Apetola Investigates

During his mysterious journeys, the Apetola has attracted various talismans to his belly like magnets to metal.

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Baltimore and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He continued his education at Franklin College in Lugano, Switzerland, and spent a year as an apprentice to renowned furniture maker Michael Coffey, from whom he learned many of his wood-working skills.

Ten years as a furniture maker, followed by successful careers working in galleries and as an art dealer and business adviser to other artists, kept Gorman immersed in the art world.

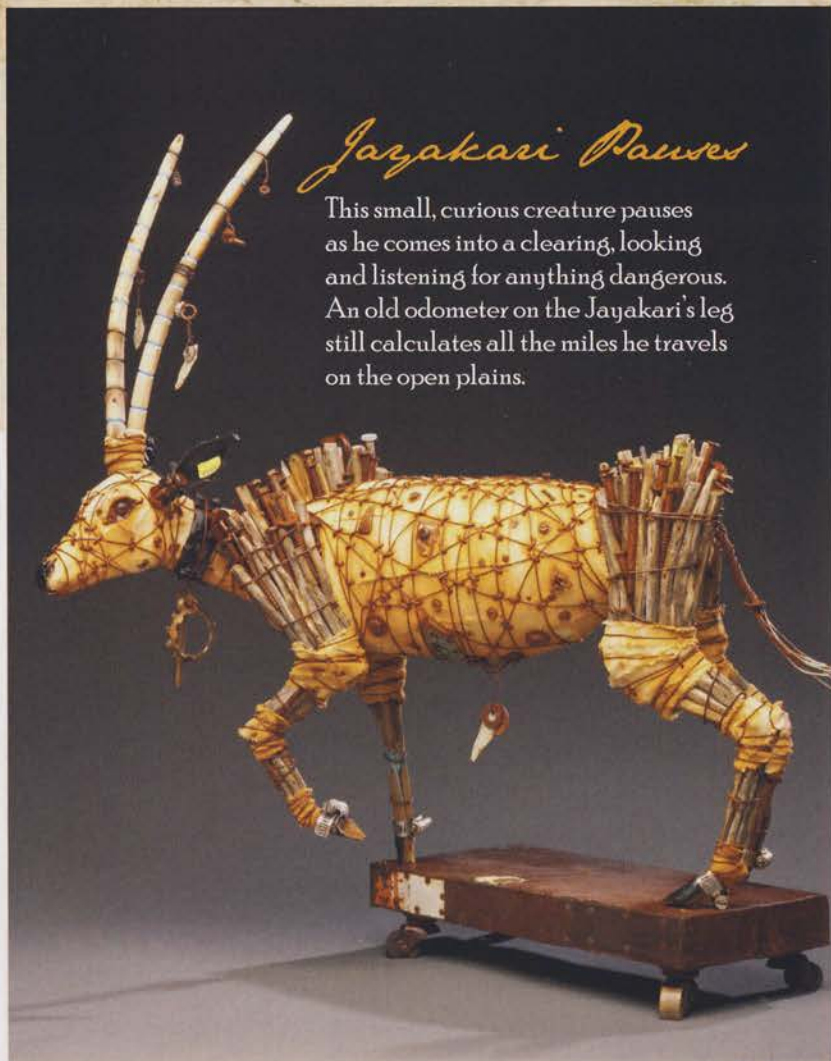
"I always knew that at some point I'd go back to my woodworking roots," he says. "The year I turned 50, I went on a trek in the Himalayas. It had a profound effect on me.

"I realized that, most likely, I had less time remaining on earth than more and that I'd better start doing what I really wanted to do." A short time later, he found himself co-curating a show at St. John's College in Santa Fe. His contribution to the show was a Huckleberry Finn sculpture he created solely from materials at hand. That piece became the catalyst for everything that followed.

Initially Gorman meant his work to be a reaction to the overintellectualization of art, saying that he wanted to keep the dialogue between art and viewer as direct as possible. His early meditative human figures eventually gave way to more expressive animals. "There is a thin membrane dividing the animal and human worlds," he maintains, "and I wanted to pierce it. Animals are very spiritual and have profound learning experiences to share."

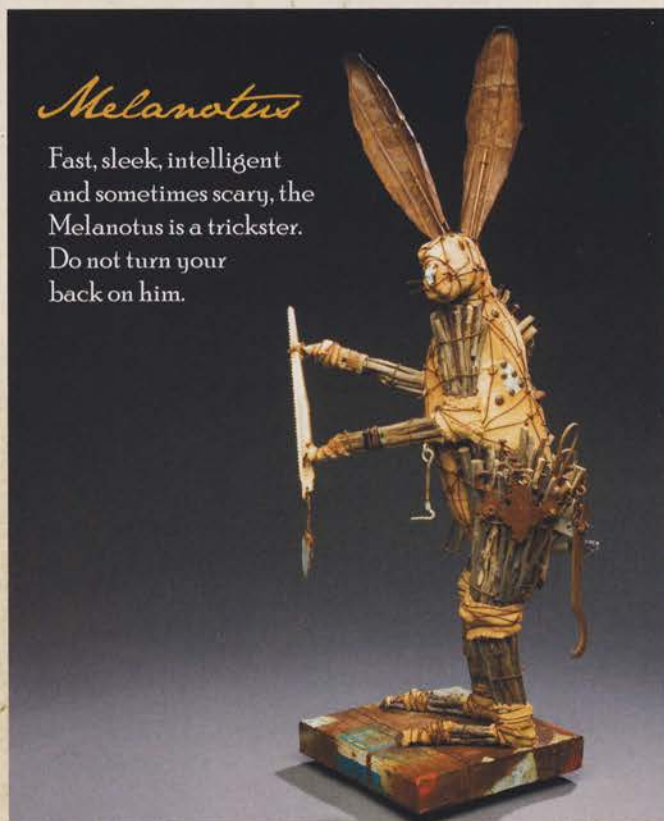
Many of Gorman's works are skeletal, shaped into forms from weathered branches, sculpted wax or hard foam. Ragged scraps of stained cloth are fastened with wire, tacks or nails. Riveted bits of tin cans form ears. Collages of materials transform into faces. Rusted steel wool adds texture to a baboon's head; a door latch forms a dog's private parts.

Each animal is adorned with hanging talismans marked with tattoos or tribal symbols. Gorman says, "I try hard to incorporate materials so that they transmogrify in unexpected ways, becoming something new."



Jayakari Pauses

This small, curious creature pauses as he comes into a clearing, looking and listening for anything dangerous. An old odometer on the Jayakari's leg still calculates all the miles he travels on the open plains.



Melanotus

Fast, sleek, intelligent and sometimes scary, the Melanotus is a trickster. Do not turn your back on him.

*Dryomis
and
Perigyps*

These two have a curious relationship. Dryomis and Perigyps live in a world just outside of our perception. They see us, but we don't see them.



The creatures emerge
from an enchanted world,
tucked between
the pages of history.

Long hours of research and observation have taught Gorman about the unique attributes of animal species. Before starting a piece, he checks out a range of reference materials. He then takes his time choosing materials and settling on a “caught in the moment” pose. He regards the broader surfaces on his largest pieces as “paintings” in which texture, color and contrast create depth. His intuitive sense of when to emphasize or exaggerate certain iconic aspects of each creature has been honed by years of exploring nature.

Each new animal is often the first iteration of a series he develops on a larger scale. Each design generation incorporates characteristics inherited from its predecessor, plus innovations he arrives at from increased familiarity with the materials. As he explains it, “It’s like conjugating a verb: it’s not just a one-shot deal.”

As he works, Gorman imagines a life story for every animal. He assigns each a Latin species name to hint at what “family” it belongs to. Like the novelist who creates entire histories for fictional characters, Gorman gives his creatures backgrounds and biological attributes: they emerge from an enchanted world, tucked between the pages of history. As each workday begins, he looks around his studio and asks, “What blend of fantasy, nature and imagination can I make of this?”

Ancient alchemists claimed they could transform base metal into precious gold. Geoffrey Gorman’s art takes the discards of America’s throw-away society and blends them with a full measure of science and craftsmanship to forge connections to the natural world. It’s an evocative treasure of a different sort, but one that continues to rise in value and popularity as Gorman’s menagerie grows. ●

AmericanStyle contributor **ROSEMARY CARSTENS** writes about art and travel for national magazines and publishes the award-winning online magazine *FEAST* at www.FEASTofBooks.com.

The Courtship of Purcist and Osmia

These two fowls are in the middle of a courtship dance. Purcist shows off his tail feathers, while Osmia struts. Each is trying to impress the other.



Degeeri

This otter-like creature uses a rock to break clamshells. The Degeeri is expressive and energetic and can be found on the beach.

