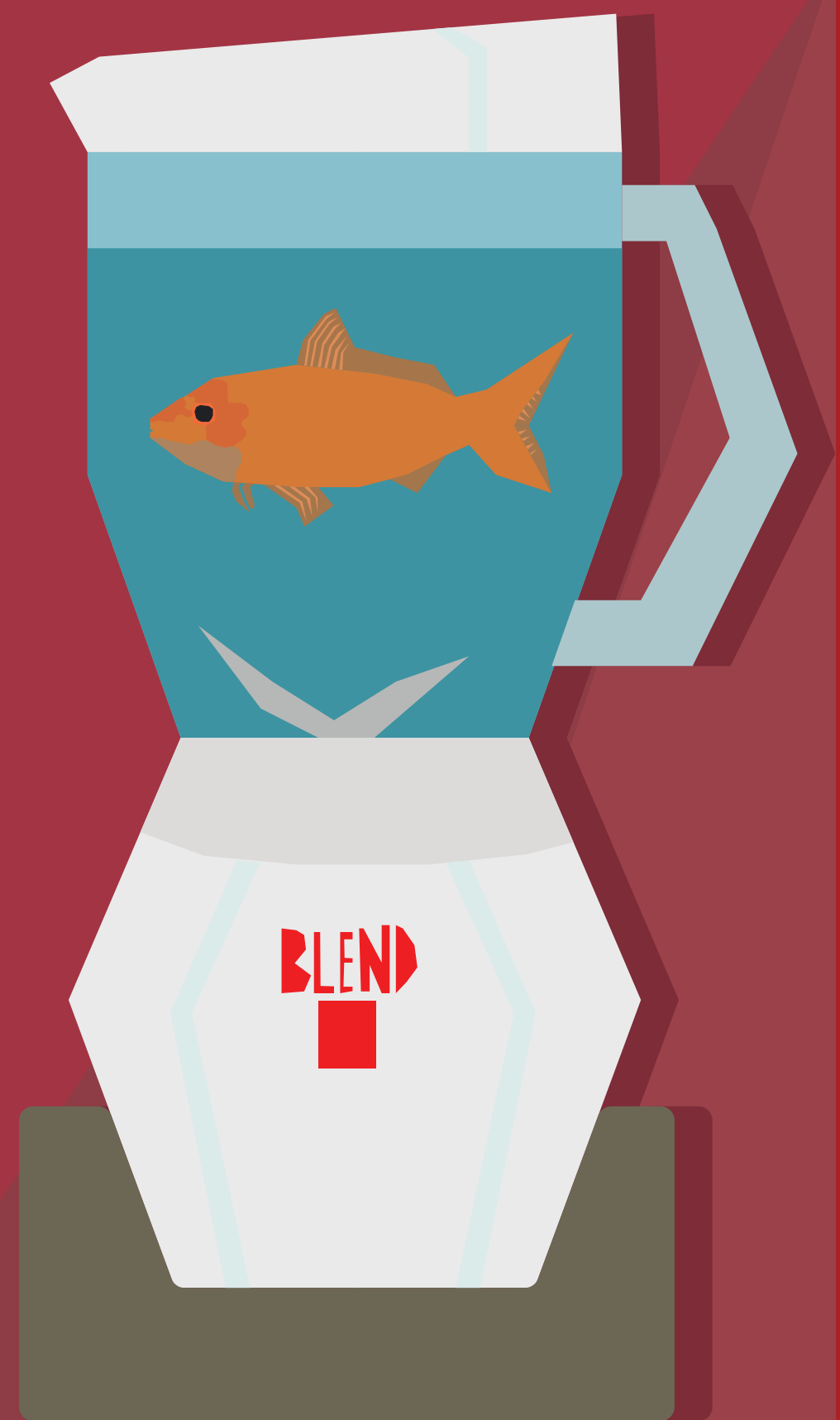


The Death of the Animal

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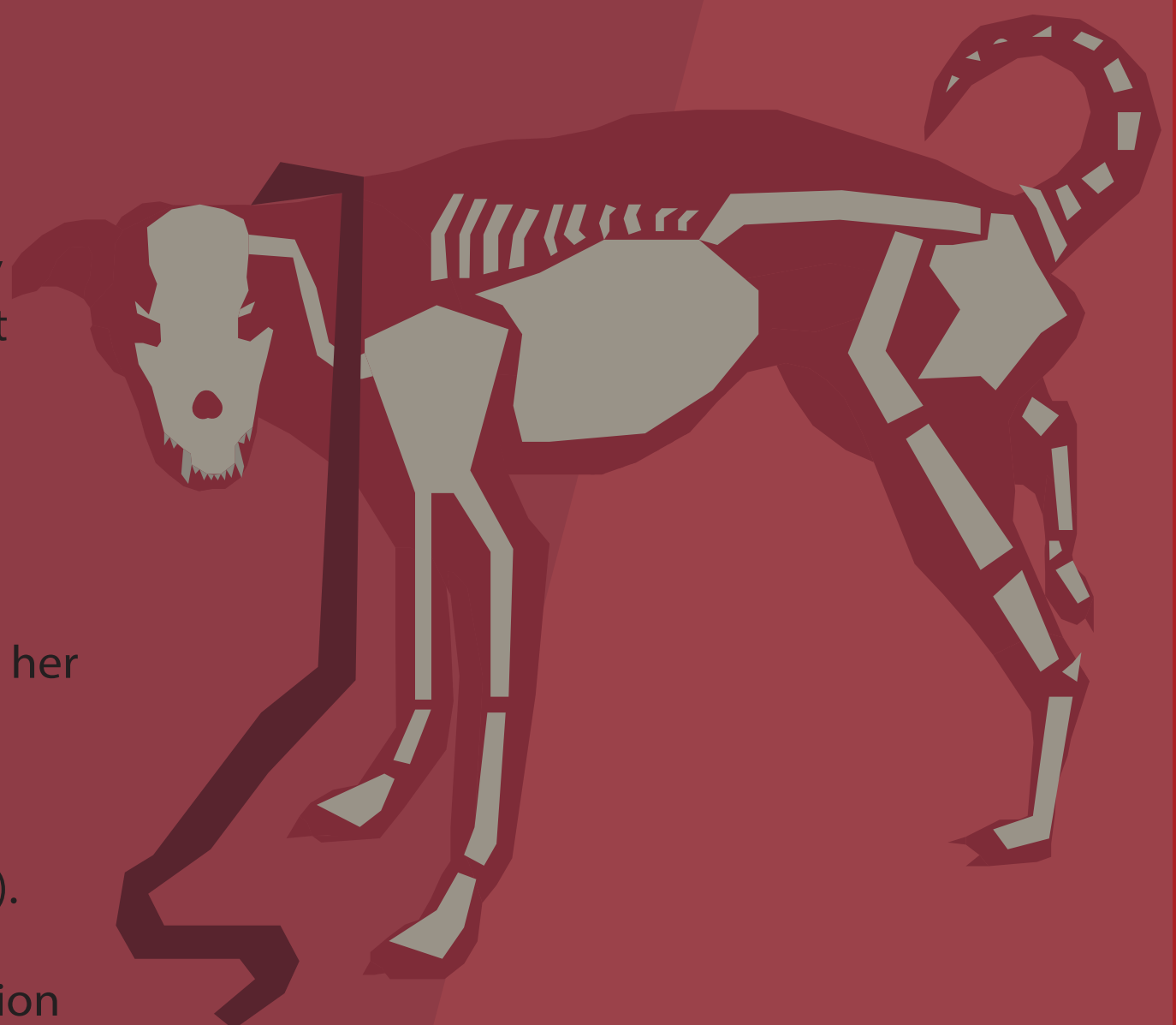
When is it okay to use animals in art? The Antennae Issue #5, *The Death of the Animal*, explores the ethics and morals of involving animals in the creation or distribution of art. It asks a question, "Do works of art involving the killing of animals speak about animality or more about the artist who stages the killing?" (Aloi, 2). The use of live animals in art has been a topic with widespread controversy and criticism. *Death of the Animal* dives into the world of contemporary animal art. It explores the pieces of many artists who utilize animals in their art, with either live, dying, deceased, or disfigured animals. Many of these artists are making animals the main focus of their art in order to shed light on issues involving either animal cruelty, environmental problems, or human morals.

Death of the Animal showcases one particular artist by the name of Marco Evaristti, who created the art piece titled, "Helena." The piece of art involves showcasing ten Molinex blenders, usually used to blend food. Instead of food, there are goldfish inside of the blenders. Guests who attend the showcase are allowed to press a button to blend the goldfish, or do nothing. Helena was one of the most controversial pieces of art that involved live animals, as it showcased the possibility of killing live animals in art. With many cases, buttons were pressed, and fish were blended. Evaristti sees the art piece as "a social experiment". he clarifies, "If people find that my use of live goldfish in my art piece is unethical, I would invite them to have a closer look at themselves and the world we live in." (Frank, 32). This begs the question, is Evaristti justified in his explanation of his art piece?



Another artist that sparked controversy in the contemporary art space is Guillermo Vargas, a contemporary artist that generated heightened controversy over his 2007 piece titled, "Exhibit No. 1." This piece involved the use of a starving dog picked off the streets of Costa Rica. The dog, "Natividad", is chained to a wall by a rope. A furnace in the area of the dog is filled with fake cocaine and marijuana. On the other side of the dog, the words "You are what you read" are written in Spanish by dry dog food. The dog is constricted by the rope and cannot move more than a meter. Viewers are not allowed to feed or give water to the dog. In the final stretch of the showcase, the dog dies. Controversy over this piece was overwhelming, as many cited, "the will to cause pain to the animal is undeniable." (Vargas, 51). Vargas justifies his art piece by stating, "The purpose of this work was not to cause any type of infliction on the poor, innocent creature, but to illustrate a point... tens of thousands of stray dogs starve and die of illness each year... nobody pays them a second thought... if you publicly display one of these starving creatures... it creates a backlash that brings out a bit of hypocrisy in all of us." (Vargas, 51).

This art piece could in some ways cross an ethical and moral line. Some would say the killing and cruelty of a dog is different to the killing of livestock, is there a hierarchy of animals that people would tolerate to use in art? Aniko Peri of unbore.org states that banning the use of live animals in art prohibits artists "creative freedom", she emphasizes her point by claiming, "their works cannot function in culturally significant ways, and they can't make the viewer confront fundamental ethical questions." (Peri, 11). Would the supposed cruelty of letting a starving dog die to make someone question their ethics and hypocrisy be justified?





The extreme use of animals in art has calmed down in recent years, as there have been many protests and criticisms that have called out their involvement in contemporary art. Isaac Kaply of artsy cites a guideline the College Art Association created, stating, “No work of art should, in the course of its creation, cause physical or psychological pain, suffering, or distress to an animal.” (Kaplan, 4). These guidelines created by the CAA intend to monitor the involvement of animals when artists create their pieces, where artists shouldn’t take animals from their natural environment and subject them to scenarios in the pieces without knowing the suffering they can cause to an animal, even if they’re trying to create a ethical or moral point in their artwork. Kaply cites a University of Tasmania professor, Yvette Watt, emphasizing the CAA’s points, claiming, “A work of art that reduces animals to a material- as inanimate as paint or clay- can be seen as unethical, especially if it is commenting on human issues unrelated to the animal.” (Kaply, 5). This point is even more important because it’s a main topic in “The Death of the Animal.” Many animals in the artworks that are shown in the article are used as the artists’ devices to make people question their morals, ethics, or to make a point across about a human issue. Just like the goldfish in Helen, they’re used as a device for Evaristti to question a person’s ethics. The dog in Vargas’ exhibit No 1. is used to highlight people’s hypocrisy. Should these artists be allowed to use these animals as (in some peoples’ judgement) materials for artists to emphasize their artwork?

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