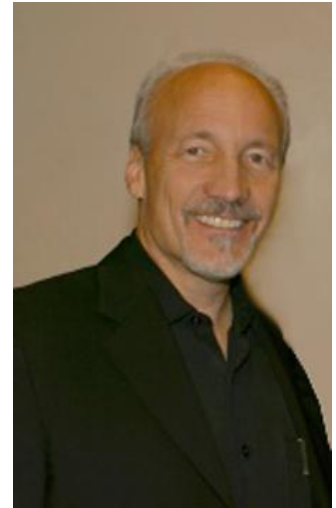


There Really Is An Elephant In The Living Room!

By Ed Boks

Not long ago, Los Angeles played host to British artist Blinky's exhibit that included a live elephant painted to blend into the wallpaper of a living room. Hopefully the exhibit is an apt metaphor for the awakening consciousness of Angelenos. LA is a community with arguably the most vocal animal rights community, a strong public and politically supported "no-kill" initiative in our city shelters, an unprecedented Anti-Animal Cruelty Task Force comprised of Police and Animal Care Officers and City Attorneys, and internationally known celebrities who care enough about animals to use their celebrity to speak on behalf of the voiceless.



As a community we are concerned about pet rabbits fed to snakes, dogs on chains, parakeets sold on Santee Alley, the fate of feral cats, and how animals are treated in the movies. But beyond all the conversations, discussions, protests, policy statements, rules, and laws there remains an elephant in the living room that nobody seems to see.

Until Tai came to town! Looking into Tai's eyes, I could not help but think of Jeffrey Masson's book "When Elephants Weep". Looking into her eyes nearly brought me to tears. Dozens of people came up to ask me, "Is this right?" Somehow we seemed to know intrinsically that what we came to see was wrong, perhaps even profane.

It was as though there were two groups of people in the room. One group could not see past Tai, the other saw into her soul. George Bernard Shaw once said, "The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity." There was an elephant in the living room and most of us could not see her. We saw an oddity, a freak or clever expression of "art", but we failed to see the very essence of our inhumanity manifested through our indifference.

In 1780 another Brit, an attorney by the name of Jeremy Bentham, wrote a book entitled, "An Introduction to the Principle of Morals and Legislation." In his book there is what many consider the most quoted footnote of all time: "The question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But, can they suffer?"

That was an original question in 1780 when scientists and clergy alike truly felt animals could not suffer as humans do. To answer that question today you only had to look into Tai's eyes. Animals are a test of our character. How we treat them is the measure of our humanity as a community, and there is no greater sin than to be indifferent.



Los Angeles is a city that has made many people wealthy through the exploitation of animals. We see wild and exotic animals everywhere, in the movies, commercials, TV shows, billboards, ads, and even in the homes and yards of the rich and famous. Dare we admit there is a suffering elephant in the living room? Will we have the courage to ask if causing animal suffering is reasonable? Will we talk about how to end animal suffering? Because if we don't, the elephant won't suffer alone, we will all suffer the loss of some part of our humanity.