



Animals, ableism, activism

Sunaura Taylor

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STATEMENT/ABSTRACT

My work explores two prominent visual discourses of disability – freakshow imagery and medical photography. These visual narratives see disability as sensational, horrifying, tragic and in need of cure. I interrupt these stereotypical narratives in order to present disability as something else – a political issue. My disability work, which includes large and small scale banners and prints, sits at the intersection of disability studies, medical intervention, sideshow history and animality in both a humorous and subversive manner, challenging the dominant ways disability has historically been viewed and interpreted in American culture.

Animals and animality are central themes in my work. In my series of paintings of animals in factory farms I paint animals who are not seen as individuals but simply as products. These paintings transform images usually dismissed as animal ethics propaganda into memorials. They are works of portraiture.

*My practice often reveals the interconnections between the oppression of animals and the oppression of disabled people. I am interested in how ableism affects non-human animals, and in turn, how the oppression of animals perpetuates ableism. I explore these issues in much of my work, including in *Animals With Arthrogryposis* (a self-portrait with farmed animals who also have my disability).*

KEYWORDS

animality
ableism
disability
animal ethics



Figure 1: Chicken Truck, Oil on Canvas, 2008, 10.5'x8' (126'x96').



Figure 2: *Animals With Arthrogryposis*, Oil on canvas, 2009, 6'×9' (72'×108').

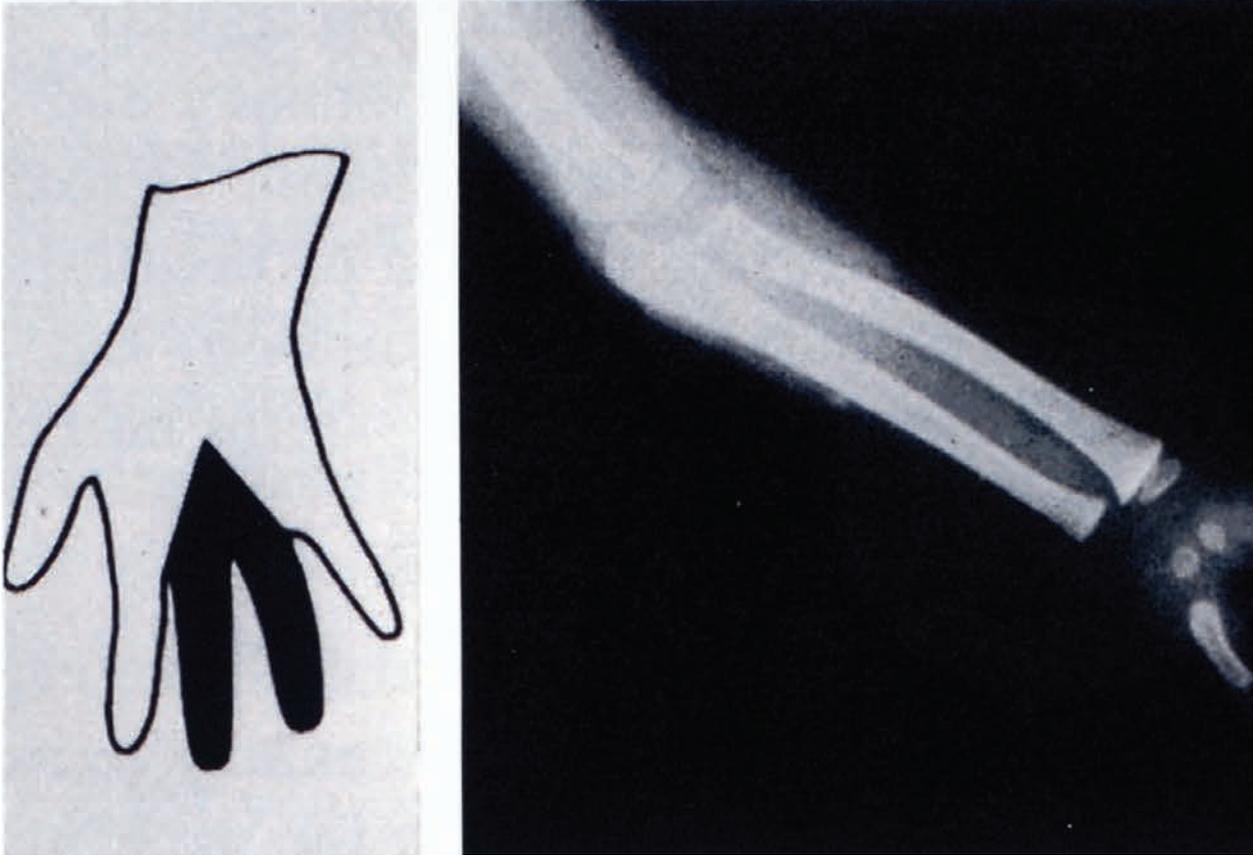
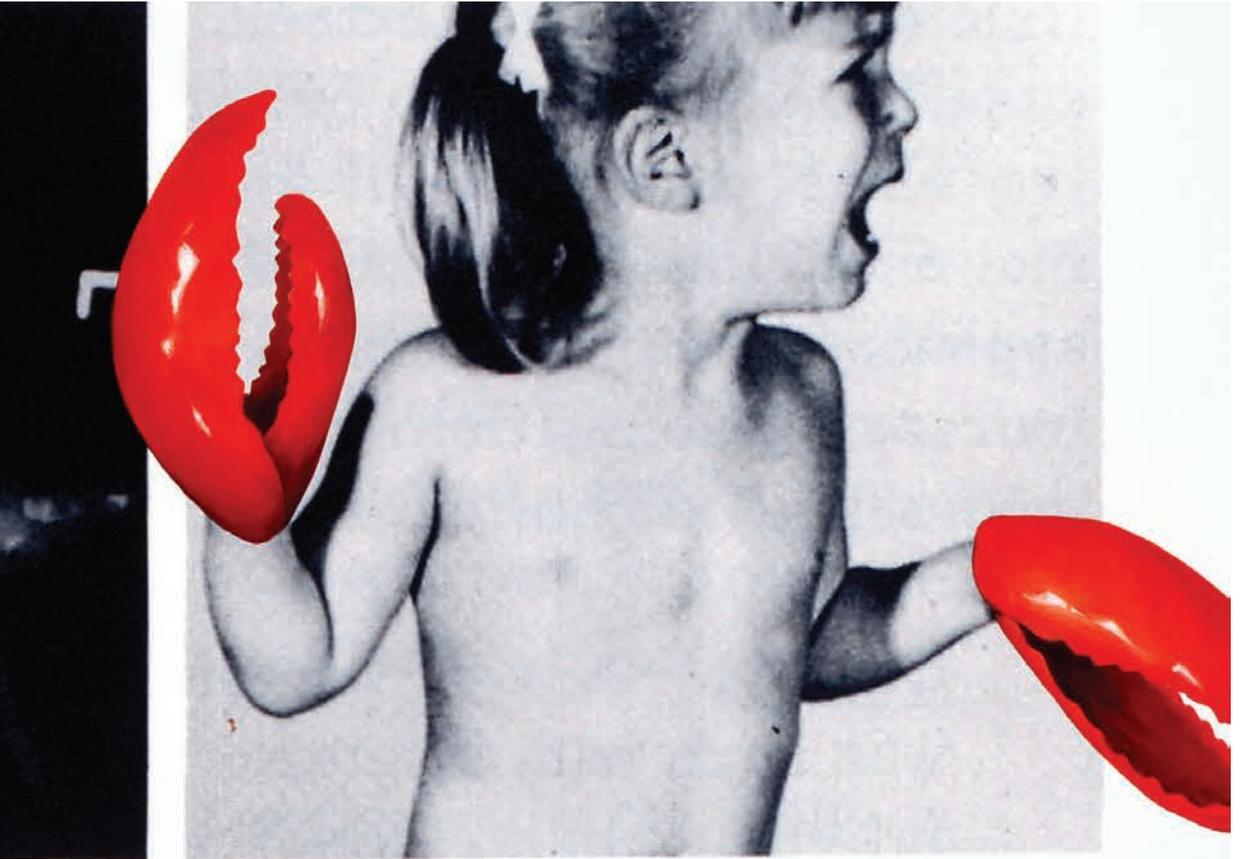


Figure 3: Lobster Girl, Oil paint on print on paper, 2010, 5.5'x3.5' (66'x42').



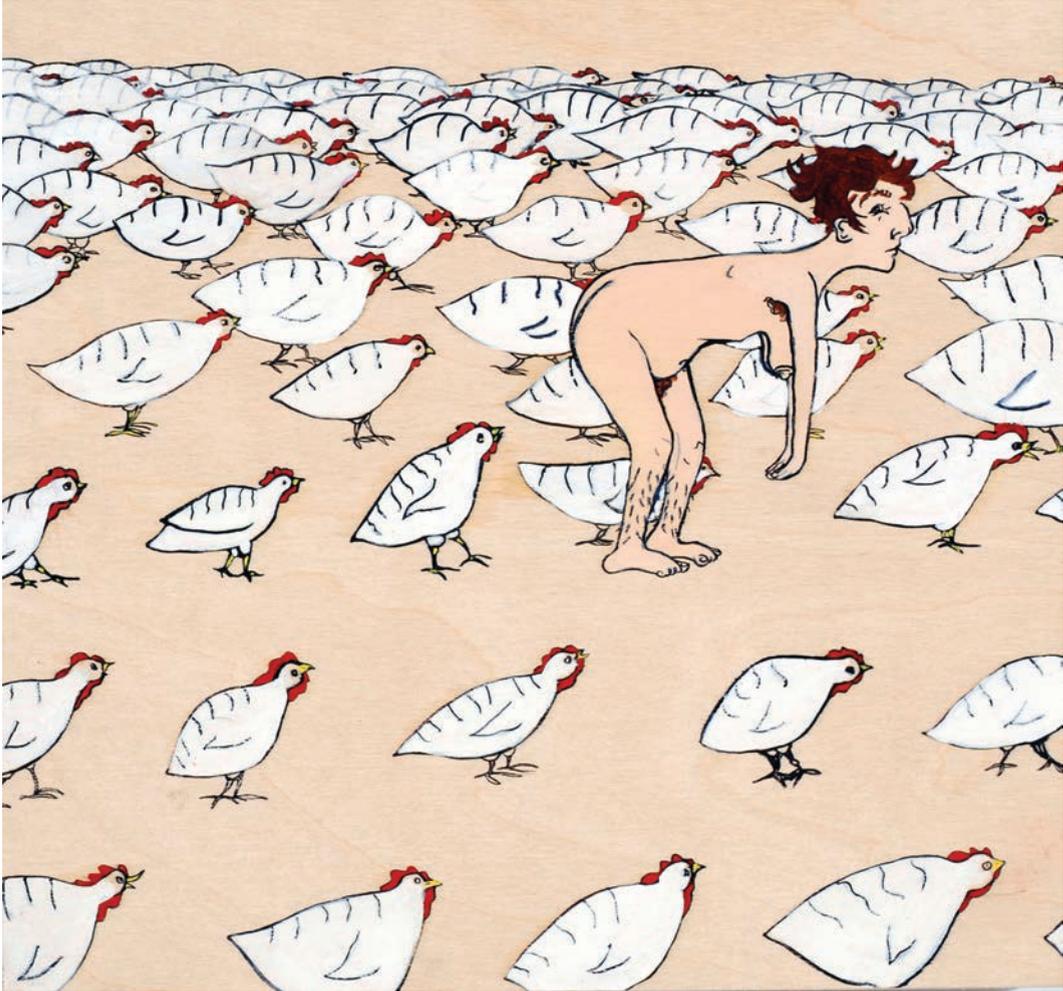


Figure 4: Self-Portrait Marching With Chickens, Oil on wood panel, 2008, 10'x10'.

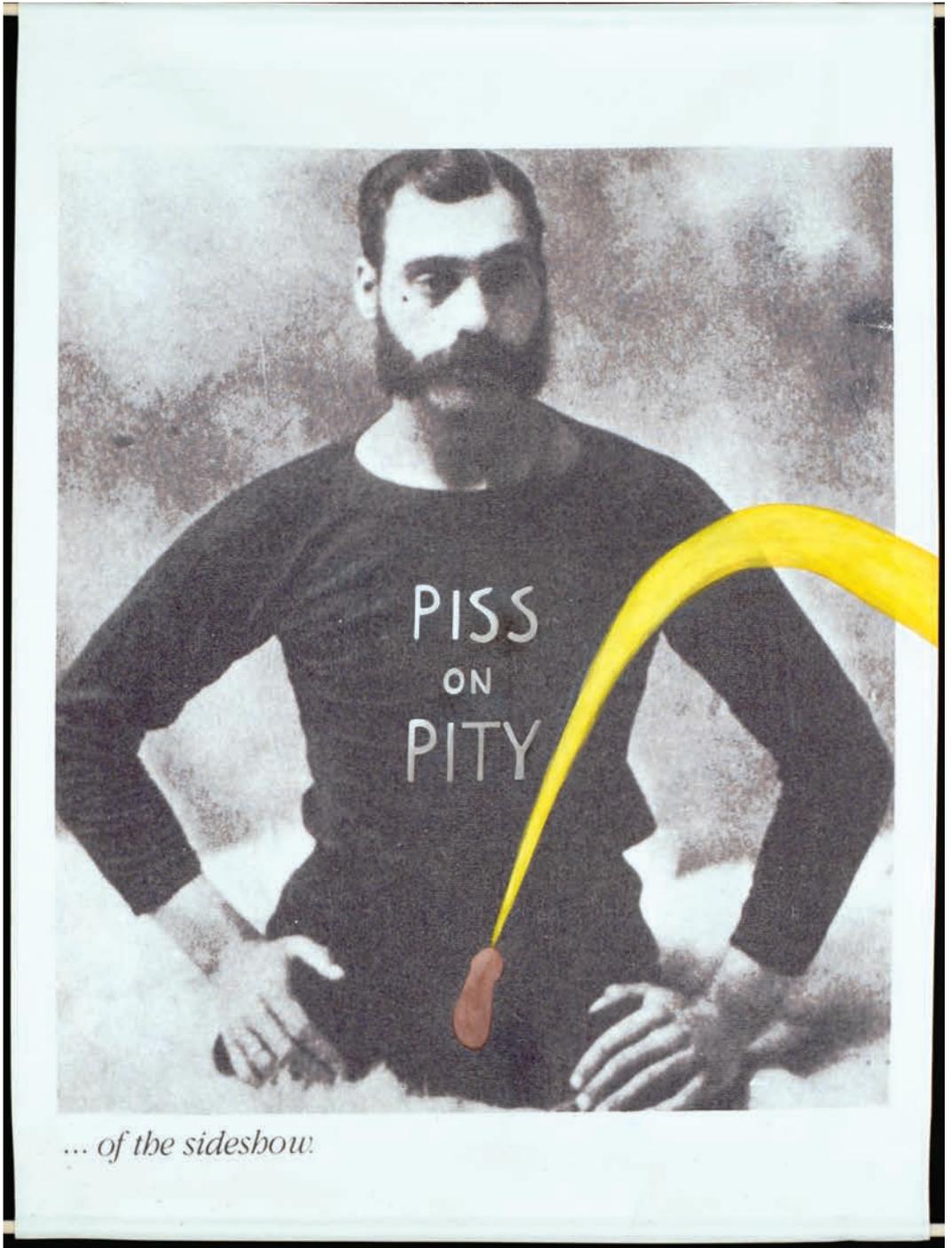


Figure 5: Of The Sideshow (Piss On Pity), Oil paint on print on raw canvas, 2010, 4'x5' (48'x60').



Figure 6: Self-Portrait With Chicken Looking Up, *watercolour on paper*, 2012 (5'x3.5').

IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Figure 1. Chicken Truck. This is a painting. The image depicts rows and stacks of cages in which chickens are being housed on a truck: many of the chickens are depicted as laying down or deceased.

Figure 2. Animals with Arthrogryposis. This is a painting. The image depicts an adult pig, a foal, and a piglet, all of which have the same muscular disease, affecting the musculature in their legs. Also depicted with them is the artist, nude, posing with them. There are arrows pointing at each of the figures.

Figure 3. Lobster Girl. This is a mixed media work of print and paint. The image depicts three separate images: on the left, a hand drawn with pencil with the ring finger and middle finger painted black, in the middle an x-ray of an arm with a deformed hand, on the right, a photograph of a small girl, from the waist up, naked, with depictions of red lobster claws painted where her hands should be.

Figure 4. Self-Portrait Marching with Chickens. This is a painting. The image depicts a field of white chickens. The artist is depicted with them, nude, bending over, mimicking the posture of the chickens.

Figure 5. Of The Sideshow (Piss On Pity). This is a mixed-media work of print and paint. The photograph depicts a freak show performer, a man without legs. The words "Piss on Pity" have been painted on his black shirt; a (His) penis spraying a wide, yellow stream has also been painted over the photograph.

Figure 6. Self-Portrait With Chicken Looking Up. This is a watercolour painting. The image depicts a profile of the artist sitting on the floor, nude, looking up. Perched on her leg is a chicken, also looking up, whose feathers have been completely plucked.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Sunaura Taylor is an artist, writer and activist. Through painting, printmaking, writing and other forms of political and artistic engagement her work intervenes with dominant historical narratives of disability and animal oppression. Taylor's artworks have been exhibited at venues across the United States, including the CUE Art Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution and the Berkeley Art Museum. She is the recipient of numerous awards including a Joan Mitchell Foundation M.F.A. Grant and an Animals and Culture Grant. Her written work has been printed in various edited collections as well as in publications such as the *Monthly Review*, *Yes! Magazine*, *American Quarterly* and *Qui Parle*. Taylor worked with philosopher Judith Butler on Astra Taylor's film *Examined Life* (Zeitgeist, 2008). Taylor holds an M.F.A. in art practice from the University of California, Berkeley and is co-founder of the disability arts collective *Yelling Clinic*. Her book *Beasts of Burden*, which explores the intersections of animal ethics and disability studies, is forthcoming from the Feminist

Press. She is currently a Ph.D. student in American Studies in the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis at NYU.

Web: <http://www.sunaurataylor.org/>.

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