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## Snakes and Things: A Comic Exploration of Species through the COVID-19 Crisis

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In this comic, I aim to unpack human-animal relationships through themes of body and space and provide an example of why the comics form is especially useful when understanding these topics. In this comic, I aim to explore questions like: Why is the comics form pertinent to understanding human-animal relationships today? How are animal bodies and identities considered living beings during the COVID-19 crisis? How are their bodies constructed and dismantled in spaces that have been created and defined by the COVID-19 crisis? This graphic submission aims to add a new intervention into the comics realm, explores how the comics form must be a considered approach in animal rights and spatial academia and offers a new lens in understanding how we can use comics as a method to approach body, space, and the COVID-19 crisis.

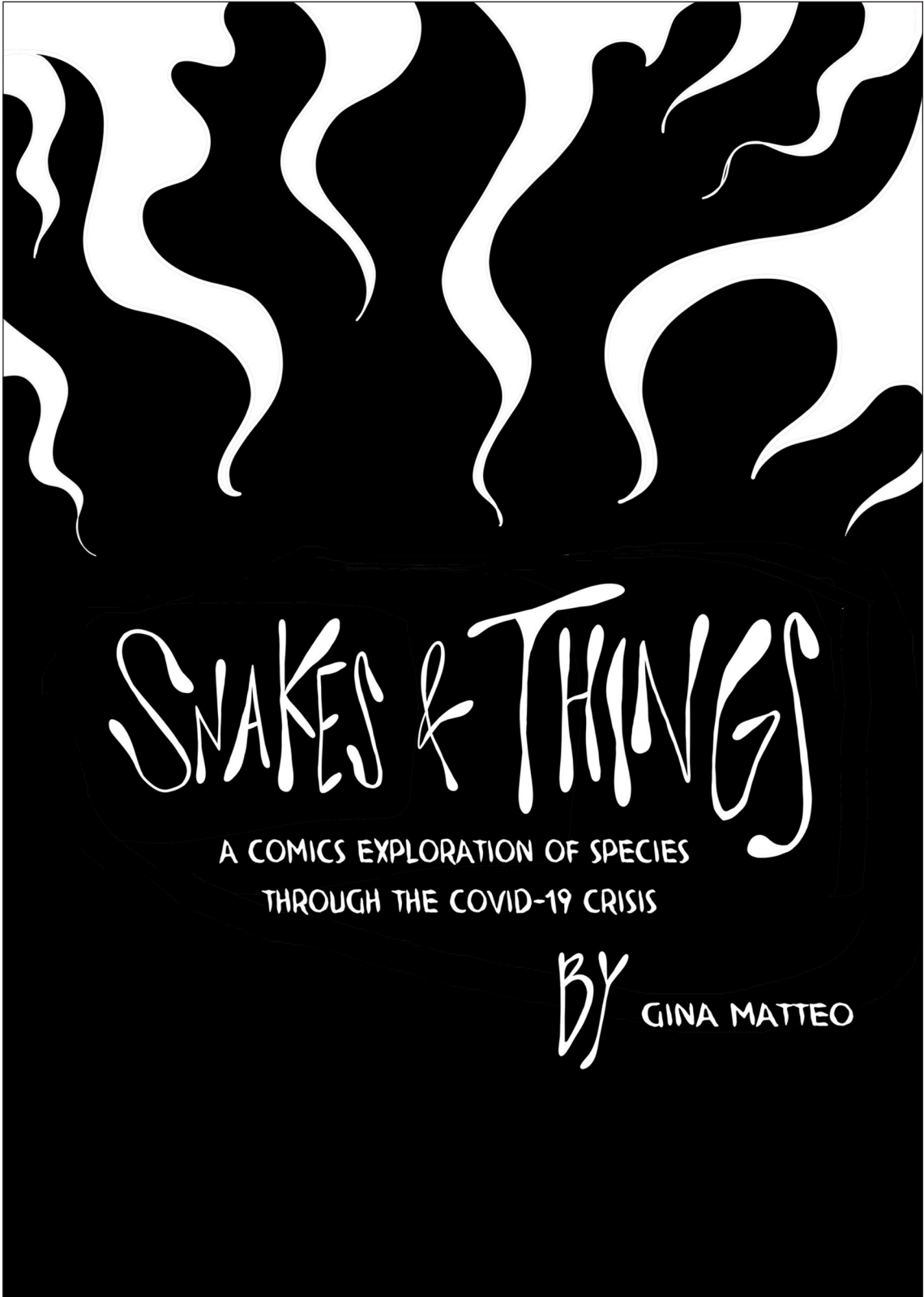
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## Introduction

While extensive research has been done by environmental (Sustein and Nussbaum 2004) and interdisciplinary academics (Wolfe 2013) on the animal body in moments of crisis, there is little analysis and exploration of this topic in the comics form. I first became involved in this piece when I read about the mink cull in Denmark during the winter of 2020 in response to a possible COVID variant circulating in fur farms (Gorman, 2020). I was invested in trying to understand this odd space that minks themselves took up in this moment; already considered resources and “destined” to die for their fur, they were then selectively slaughtered, which resulted in a large public outcry. Yet, I questioned if their identity and value changed. This led me to reflect on other animal species and their experience during the pandemic, and what that means for human-animal relationships today. As a visual thinker, I felt that a comic was the only way to explore this concept.

The purpose of all of my comics is to question and create an uncomfortable contrast between humanity, our past and present episteme, and the complex world of animals. Through stylistic choices like minimal colors, intricate textural illustrations, and non-traditional comic layouts, I hope the reader can achieve multiple interpretations of this topic and not come away with answers, but a curiosity that can propel them to explore more. I use the word “crisis” instead of “pandemic” to encompass the complexity of the outcomes that have been caused by COVID-19 and to think beyond the virus itself. The comics form offers the ability for scholarship and theory to unfold and layer beyond textual analysis; with the use of both text and image, comics not only explore topics but reposition them to cultivate new meanings. Through engaging in the comics form (both as a maker and scholar), I argue that comics offer a unique perspective to consider body and space, especially regarding human-animal relationships in our current moment in time. In this comic, I explore questions like: Why is the comics form pertinent to understanding human-animal relationships today? How are animal bodies and identities considered living beings during the COVID-19 crisis? How are their bodies constructed and dismantled in spaces that have been created and defined by the COVID-19 crisis?



# SNAKES & THINGS

A COMICS EXPLORATION OF SPECIES  
THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS

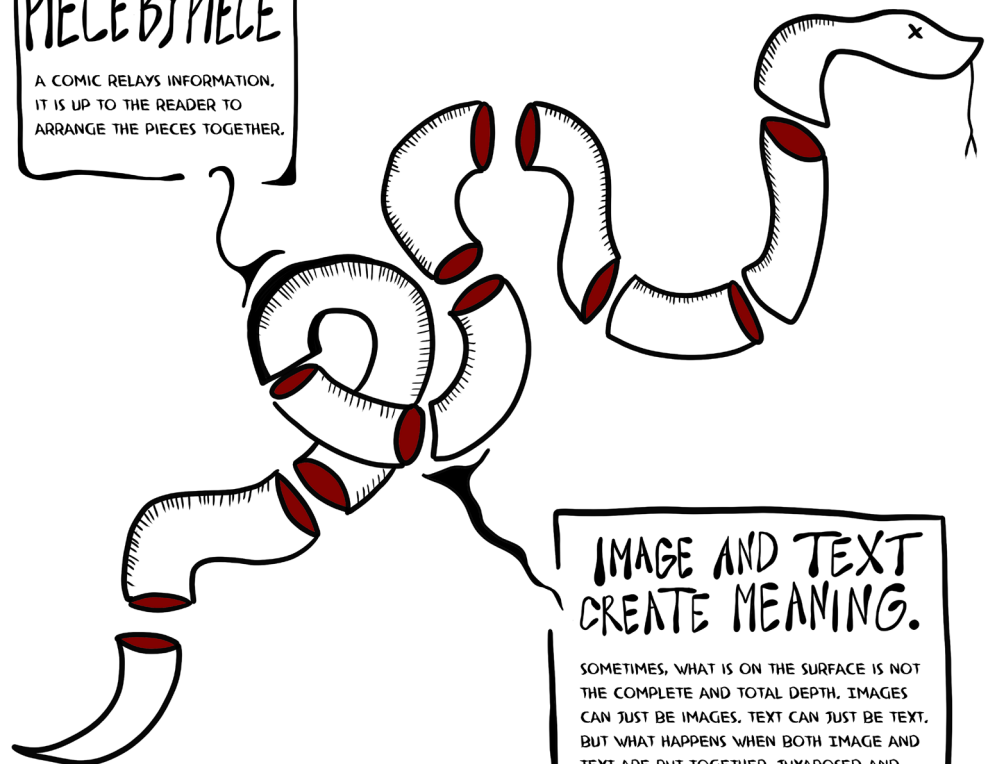
BY GINA MATTEO





(MAGRITTE, R. 1929.)

**PIECE BY PIECE**  
A COMIC RELAYS INFORMATION.  
IT IS UP TO THE READER TO  
ARRANGE THE PIECES TOGETHER.



**IMAGE AND TEXT  
CREATE MEANING.**  
SOMETIMES, WHAT IS ON THE SURFACE IS NOT  
THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPTH. IMAGES  
CAN JUST BE IMAGES. TEXT CAN JUST BE TEXT.  
BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BOTH IMAGE AND  
TEXT ARE PUT TOGETHER, JUXTAPOSED AND  
FEEDING OFF OF ONE ANOTHER? WHAT  
MEANINGS ARE CREATED. WHAT IS THEN  
THRUST INTO EXISTENCE AND IS THEN ALIVE?



WHEN THE COVID CRISIS OCCURRED,

THINGS WERE ON THE SURFACE. IT WAS HARD TO SEE MEANING IN CHAOS;  
TO LOOK CRITICALLY AT EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES, I WANTED TO CONSIDER  
THE MEANING OF BEINGS THAT WERE DEEMED

UNIMPORTANT.

TO CONSIDER THE CYCLICALITY OF LIVING BEINGS  
AND THEIR CONTINUOUS EXPERIENCE OF COVID  
ALONGSIDE HUMANS, I EXPLORE THIS THROUGH  
COMICS, AS THE COMICS FORM ALLOWS FOR A  
CONTINUOUS INTERPRETATION. ANIMALS,  
JUST AS HUMANS, EXPERIENCED THE  
PANDEMIC ON A VAST, CYCLICAL SCALE.



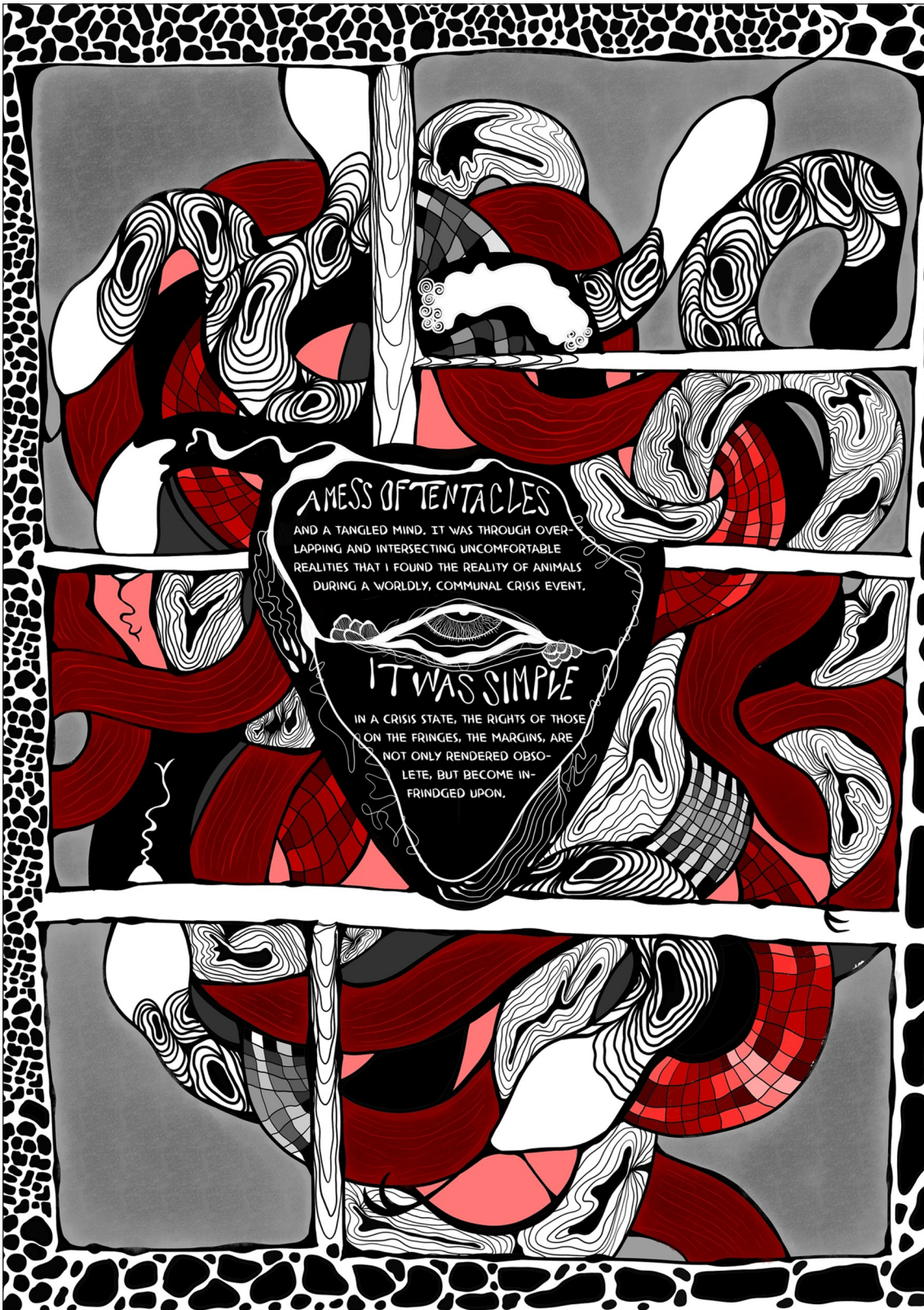
TEMPTATION

TO SEE THINGS IN ANOTHER POSITION,  
REDEFINED AND UNCOVERED--  
WE ONLY OWE IT TO OUR MOTHER  
NATURE. TO QUESTION HOW WE  
DEFINE A LIFE. A LIFE IN A

CRISIS.











# A PURGATORY

## KNOWN?

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE. A SPACE TO EXIST IN THAT ISN'T ACTUALLY A SPACE, AN ANIMAL'S POSITION IN A CRISIS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE.

## TO SERVICE

TO AID IN THE DISCOVERY OF A CURE, AS ESCAPE FROM THE PANDEMIC, THIS SERVICE, WHILE THE ANIMAL BODY IS REVERED AND HELD TO A HIGH IMPORTANCE, IT REMAINS ONLY VALUED AS A RESOURCE, AND, AS A RESOURCE, RIGHTS AND CONSENT ARE ABSENT, THE ANIMAL BODY INHIBITS A SPACE OF CONTRADICTION, VALUED, EXPLOITED, AND CONTROLLED, ALL IN THE SAME MOMENT.  
(WOLFE, 13).

## SUSPENDED

IN A SPACE WHERE EXPECTATION MEANS POKING AND PRODING, DISSECTING AND VIOLATING, LEAVING THE BODY FLAYED AND REVEALED.

# A SHARED PLIGHT

THAT IS NOT EQUAL. THE ANIMAL BODY AND ITS FATE IS PRE-DETERMINED WHEN A CRISIS UNFOLDS. A TIME WHEN THOSE ALIEN TO A SOCIETY BECOME EVEN MORE EVIDENT.





### Author's Note

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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