

Animals have been on this earth long before humans, and I think that's why we find them so intriguing. They are simpler versions of us, a more pure form that is based on instinct rather than intellect. I am interested in how four animals have been portrayed and symbolized in art in different cultures. I've chosen to study: the rabbit, horse, cat, and dove because they all have been used in during many time periods, for both religious and philosophical symbols.

The rabbit is most commonly used as a symbol for femininity, fertility, and rebirth. Egyptian myths also associated the rabbit with the lunar cycle, believing that you could see all the phases of the moon in a rabbit's eye. The Greeks and Romans associated rabbits with rebirth; they are often found in tombs. Romans also believed the rabbits sleep with their eyes open so they can always be watching everything when the moon is out. In Greek mythology, the rabbit represents romance, love, lust, abundance, and fertility. Rabbits were considered to be sacred to Aphrodite (the goddess of love, beauty, and marriage), because they had Aphrodite's gift of fertility. Playing off of that, rabbit meat was used as a cure for sterility and rabbits were common gifts between couples. During the Renaissance, rabbits were thought to be able to conceive without a male, which is why many paintings of the Virgin Mary depict a rabbit to represent a virgin birth, like in the painting *Madonna with Rabbit* by Titian. The rabbit is clear symbol of the power and importance of the female's ability to reproduce and the importance that power has in society (Windling).



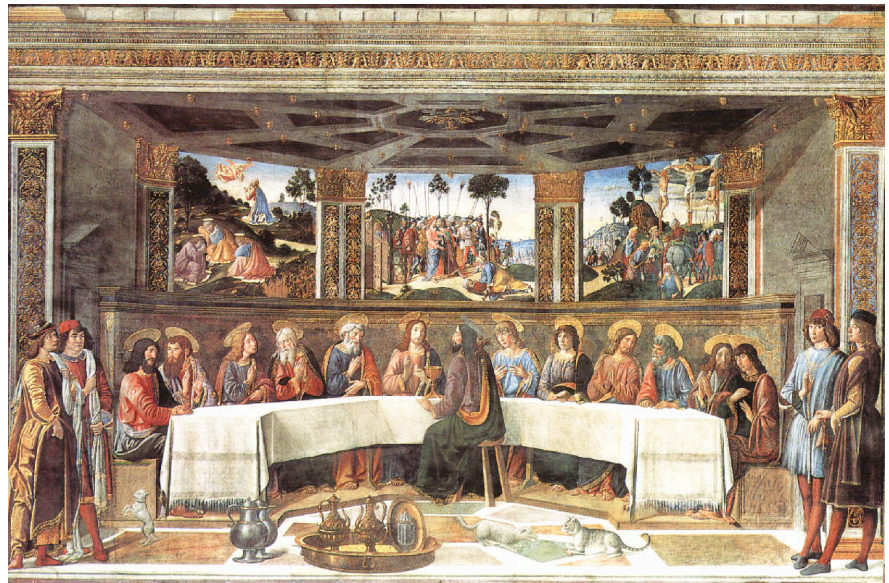
In art, horses symbolize strength and are depicted as warriors, workers, and equals to humans in beauty. In ancient civilizations kings were buried with sculptures of horses pulling chariots, so that their spirit could be driven to the afterlife. That isn't how horses began though; they were domesticated as pack-horses, and then used to help with hunting. Horses didn't become popular until chariot-racing. Many sculptures and reliefs were made of chariot-races, as they were the main entertainment of Greek and Roman society. After chariots came jousting; this was considered a more gentlemanly sport than chariot-racing which was not class particular. While horses were used in sports, they were also being used in battle, not as fighters, but to take the first hit. Horses were sent in first, with a few soldiers and were used to block the front lines. It wasn't until later in the seventeenth century that the horse became fully realized as a fighter. The French created heavy armor for horses that were very ornate. Though this armor was beautiful, it was not very useful and weighed down most horses, impeding their ability to fight. Before the



seventeenth century, all sculptures were religious in theme, because churches were the main sponsors of artists. Since the Bible has very little focus concerning horses, horses weren't very present during this period in the Renaissance. During the Renaissance there was a Greek/Roman revival period that brought the horse into a new light; horses were now studied for their structure and muscles, much like humans shown in George Stubbs series or *The Anatomy of the Horse*. The Romantic and Renaissance era was the height of horse painting. Beautiful renderings and anatomical studies that put the horse at the center and main subject of the painting for the first time were exposed to the public. This coincided with horses becoming part of families as pets and farm workers. The domestication of the horse brought human admiration for them in art, as they became the stars of the paintings, not just used to symbolize war or strength, but as symbols of individual beauty, strength and nobility (Baskett, 2006).

Throughout history, there have been two very distinct and contrary sides to cats; they are a symbol of domestic peace, but are also associated with the devil. In ancient Egypt, the cat goddess, Bastet, was highly popular; she was thought to help with childbirth, was a lady of peace, a protector of cats, and was the dispenser of abundance and happiness. Ancient Greece and Rome also depicted the cat as peaceful and domestic, but in addition and for the first time, we see cats being associated with children. On the other hand, this is when the "black cat as evil" myth emerged. Cats were sometimes portrayed as vicious hunters and were considered extremely moody. In the Middle Ages the "cat vs. dog" myth was formed. In *The Last Supper*, painted by

Cosimo Rosselli, and in most other paintings of The Last Supper, a cat and dog are fighting. The dog represents loyalty of the Apostles and how they are fighting the cat, which symbolizes the betrayal of Judas. Christian mythology portrays cats as being demonic, causing a widespread belief that they were possessed by the devil; although, cats were still kept in monasteries to protect manuscripts from mice. The Renaissance and Romantic



Eras bring the idea of patience, grace, and elegance to the cat. Symbols for domestic peace, cats were often depicted in paintings of young ladies, either in their arms or in the rooms. The dichotomy between the two images of the cat reflect the dual feelings people may have regarding the power a woman has at home, with the power that allows to her to hold over those in her home (Zuffi, 2007).

Dove symbolism derives from religious roots, reaching the height of its popularity in the Renaissance when most painting depicted religious scenes. A typical symbol for the Holy Ghost, doves can be depicted in three different colors to mean three different messages. A red dove

symbolizes how Christ redeemed man with blood; a speckled dove represents the diversity of the twelve prophets; while a white dove represents innocence, gentleness, motherhood, and peace. White doves are seen most often in art. The goddesses Venus (the Roman goddess of love, beauty, sex fertility, prosperity and military victory) and Fortuna (the Greek goddess of fortune, luck, fate, and justice) are often depicted with doves resting on their hands or head. The Virgin Mary is also depicted with doves, representing the merging of Mary and the Holy Spirit as in the painting *The Word* by Fra Filippo Lippi.

Doves were also depicted in the barn when Jesus was born. In The Bible, it also says that God required Mary and Joseph to sacrifice two doves after Jesus's birth to ensure he was pure. In Renaissance art, doves are often shown flying into or towards prophets' mouths to represent divine authority. The connection between doves and peace come from the religious tale of "Noah and the Ark." God looked down upon the world one day and saw man's wickedness. After seeing what he had created, God decided to wipe out all living creatures on Earth and start over. God decided to flood the world and called to the last non-wicked man on Earth, Noah, to build an Ark and bring forth two of every animal to repopulate the Earth once the flood was over. Noah built an ark and gathered two of every animal and then joined his wife on the ark to wait for the flood. Once the world had been flooded, Noah sent out a crow see if the flood had stopped and if there was land to be seen. When the crow returned after finding no land, Noah sent out a dove. This dove came back after finding no land, but Noah sent the dove one last time to find land. This time, the dove came back with an olive branch to show it had found land. This gesture meant the flood had ended, and God's judgment was over. After the Renaissance, doves lost popularity with most artists because religious paintings were becoming out of style and were seldom used for symbolizing anything other than peace (Dorothy).



We let animals into our homes and our hearts because they mean something to each person. Animals have been used as symbolism throughout history. Whether in art or literature, animals are viewed as the purest forms of archetypes.

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