

**HUMANLY POSSIBLE:
THE EMPATHY EXHIBITION**
curated by John Schuerman
(co-curator Mark Lawson)

January 12 – March 3, 2018
Frederick Layton Gallery

The word empathy comes from the Greek, Em (in) and Pathos (feeling). To feel in union with someone. It is not an acknowledgement; it is participation.

For humans and animals the first level of empathy is instinctual, a survival skill of sorts for the collective. The best way for an individual to avoid empathy is to avoid direct sensorial contact. This is the reason our slaughterhouses are off-limits to photographers and why governments try to prevent news coverage of the suffering being caused in countless war zones. Humans, and at least some animals, take empathy much further. We can choose to learn and imagine more about another's experience, or we can avoid it. There are times for both. Too much empathy can paralyze decision making. Not enough enables mistreatment of people and the other creatures we share this planet with.

As with any exhibition, the audience will complete Humanly Possible: The Empathy Exhibition. They will have many opportunities to launch into vicarious experiences, exercise empathy once removed, and ponder their own choices about when and where not to invoke it.

Artists:

Lois Bielefeld (Milwaukee, WI)
Tina Bondell (Minneapolis, MN)
Chase Boston (Pullman, WA)
Sue Coe (New York, NY)
Raoul Deal (Milwaukee, WI)
Nooskin Hakim (Minneapolis, MN)
Christopher E. Harrison (Minneapolis, MN)
Gudrun Lock (Minneapolis, MN)
Peter B. Nelson (Northfield, MN)
Juliane Shibata (Northfield, MN)
Liza Sylvestre (Champaign, IL)
Inna Valin (St. Paul, MN)

WHY DOES THIS EXHIBIT MATTER?

The title, Humanly Possible cuts both ways. Empathy is possible because we are human, but because we are human we can choose whether to exercise it or not. It is this human potential that we hope to encourage by showing artwork that inspires us to use our empathic abilities. Art has a way of opening the 'doors of perception' into the lives of its subjects and thereby adds to our lived experiences. Internalizing art simply makes us more human.

A quick internet search brings up a number of studies that indicate that empathy is on the decline in various populations (for example, U.S. college students, U.S. health care workers and Australians), and perhaps across the human race. Whether or not this decline is pandemic, we intuitively know that understanding, compassion and empathy must be part of the antidote for things like our current state of polarized politics, spousal murder rates, cultural conflicts, stereotyping and more.

PROMPT QUESTIONS Do you believe that empathy is on the decline across the globe?

- If so, what problems does this create?
- If not, what are some examples of how this is not the case?

Many of the world's great religions and philosophies cite compassion and empathy as primary goals of a person's behavior and spiritual growth. Do you feel these goals are still a critical element of contemporary American culture?

- If yes, how do they manifest?
- If no, what other goals have dominant influence in defining American morality?

Empathy is a form of identification with another person or living creature. Are there negative sides to this dynamic?

PROGRAMMING **Friday, January 19, 5:00 – 9:00 PM**

Public Reception: Winter Gallery Night

Thursday, February 1, 6:00 PM

Empathy Through the Visual Arts: An Artist's Discussion
Artist's reception to follow panel discussion

Thursday, February 15, 7:00 PM

Empathy, Connections and Borders: An Evening of Poetry and Storytelling

Thursday, March 1, 7:00 PM

100 Lullabies (Lullaby Song for Syrian Refugees)
An evening of music and participatory discussion