

Photo Exhibit Speaks to Species Under Threat of Extinction

Artist Clint Jenkins says he's doing his part to spread awareness with his first show *Endangered: The Collection*

By Steve Bornfeld 9/25 4:56pm

Stripped of skin, devoid of bodies, bereft of life.

Alive, nonetheless.

"It's an awareness thing," says Australian-born Clint Jenkins, a Vegas transplant, commercial photographer and first-time exhibitor with his pointedly titled *Endangered: The Collection* at MCQ Fine Art. "People need to know there is a threat."

Big, stark and haunting, Jenkins' photos are of the skulls of animals listed as endangered by the global governing body, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. And the effect, both of the cause and the style in which it is visually addressed, is powerful.

"Some of the skulls look like they're pulling out of the page," gallery director Michele Quinn says. "They could come across as flat and dull, but there is such a great quality of depth. It's understanding how lighting contrasts really come together. There is some soul to the work."

Draped dramatically between shadow and light, the skull photos were mostly shot earlier this year at the Museum of Osteology in Oklahoma City, which is devoted to the study of bones and skeletons. Set against black-as-night backgrounds, printed on hot press cotton rag and dispersed around the cozy gallery, the vivid images seem sprinkled around the vast emptiness of space, as if eternal, but no longer of this earth—that being precisely the point.

"Keeping it simple is more impactful," Jenkins says. "When you're not distracted by anything else, it's almost as if it's alive. I'm keeping them alive in my way."

Staring out from vacant eye sockets, what once was a Pacific green turtle looks foreboding in its 60-by-60-inch portrait. Giant tusks of an African elephant flare out like some fossilized handlebar mustache. With fangs bared, an Eastern black rhino, a snow leopard and a Tasmanian devil look ready to pounce, chomp and devour. Comically, the skull of a chimpanzee—with its simian overbite over crooked teeth and heavy brow over wide-set empty eyes that resemble sunglasses—looks like an orthodontically challenged celebrity.

Endangered took shape when the 37-year-old Jenkins, who had been doing underwater cinematography and vacation documentation, was photographing fishermen off the back of a boat. “Fishermen put out these long, multiple lines, but there is collateral damage, which are the turtles—they drown quite quickly,” Jenkins says. “One line had broken off from the boat and had washed up on shore. The poor guy had been dead from the line. It was a bit of a mess.”

Attending a wedding at a Tampa Bay marine preserve also influenced him. “There was a glass cabinet with the skull,” he remembers. “I connected with it right away. I knew they were endangered. I thought I was ready to use my skill set to do something cool.”

Numerous other species peer out from the walls, lending a natural history museum aura to this out-of-the-way Downtown gallery: polar bear, orangutan, Western lowland gorilla, *tamaraw* (dwarf buffalo), addax (white antelope), babirusa (Indonesian pig) and Siberian tiger.

“I spent quite a bit of time researching different animals, and I made the choices for which ones I connected to the most,” Jenkins says. “And I spent a lot of time with [the skulls]. You don’t just plop it down and take a picture of it. If you move the skull up or down, it changes the whole dynamic of the skull. I wanted to get [the positions] to where people could connect with them.”

Being a rookie exhibition artist, Jenkins had to quell some nerves before the opening artist’s reception earlier this month, but the reaction was encouraging.

“This community really responds well to new work,” Quinn says. “And I’ve reached out to some colleagues in New York and L.A. for them to see this work and give some feedback on it. I think the work is strong enough so that someone else should show the series.”

Beyond the photographic artistry, there remains the cause itself—noble, vital, deserving of support—to stave off the extinction of entire species. “I don’t think this will make everybody pull out their wallet and contribute,” Jenkins says. “But at least I can make a difference.”

Endangered: The Collection

by Clint Jenkins, 9 a.m.- 5 p.m. Mon, Wed and Fri through Oct. 18, MCQ Fine Art, 620 S. Seventh St., free, 366-9339, MCQFineArt.com.