

# TITLTheme



**Beyond decoration.  
The animal art of Lucrezia Bieler**

Antje Buchwald in conversation with the artist

With incomprehensible detail, the artist Lucrezia Bieler cuts her sensitive animal portraits. Since 1994, the Zurich based artist lives in the USA;

She spent nine years in Seattle and now lives in Tallahassee / Florida. Her sectional images are often designed in the form of mandalas. A mandala (Sanskrit: = "circle") is an image of a symbolic order of the universe, which is formally represented as a diagram, combining a circle and inscribed square with a common center. It can be an initiation path, serves as an instrument or aid in meditation or spiritual concentration and is one of the most important elements of Tibetan Buddhism. Lucrezia Bieler's Animal Mandalas describe, on the one hand, the animal in its ecosystem and, on the other, the interaction of humans in the ecosystem. In the center of Bieler's western interpreted mandalas is always an animal - for example, a polar bear, a manatee or a turtle - which are bordered by an ornamented cutting frame. These frames tell the story of the life and destiny of the centered animal and surround it like a protective cloak. Although the artist never cuts the consequences of the threat of the animal through the environmental destruction of the human being, the threat always resonates. It is an intact nature that she describes. It is a fairytale place that tells of the beauty of nature when humans and animals still lived in harmony with each other. Lucrezia Bieler's paper-cuttings stimulate reflection, to loose yourself in thought, but also to dream.



Invasive 2014. 105 x 40 cm

**Lucrezia, why are you a member of the German Scherenschnittverein?**

Out of interest in the art form of the paper cutting. I think it's good that there are art associations.

**Since when do you cut and what was the trigger?**

Since my studies as a scientific illustrator at the Zurich University of the Arts. The study fascinated me because it focused on drawing and painting and on the pictorial explanation of knowledge. They taught us botanical, zoological, archaeological and medical illustrations. At the end of the 1980s, I was for many years chief illustrator at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Zurich.

I started to cut paper because our drawing teacher Christoph Göldlin went with us students to the circus to study the fast movements of the animals. He let us

freely choose material and tools. I reached for paper and scissors.

**Let's get to your work process. Which tool and material do you prefer? Are you sketching?**

I cut the paper with scissors. Yes, I sketch on tracing paper, because this allows me to play with the composition of the picture and to work over the sketches. When I'm satisfied with the composition, I transfer the sketch to the back of the scissors cut paper. When cutting I need the sketch as a guide. During the cutting, a dialogue develops between the black side of the paper and my sketch. This dialog often leads to deviations from the sketch.



Barefoot in the wild garden, 2014, 75 x 40 cm

**What attracts you aesthetically to papercutting?**

I am interested in fragile ecosystems and threatened animals. I use paper and paper-cutting because the material becomes more fragile the more detailed the picture becomes. For me, it is important that the picture is cut out of a single piece of paper. When I cut something off by mistake, the harmony and balance of the image is impaired. As in nature, when one species is absent in an ecosystem, this has consequences for the other creatures.

**The papercut will become an artistic concept for you. How did you find your topic? What meaning does the animal have for you?**

I love nature. Conservation is important to me. During my study of scientific illustration, I was particularly fascinated by animal drawings. I try to capture the character of the animals. At the same time, I find the expression in the eyes of the animals particularly important. One of my pictures shows a fox who has a guilty conscience because he wants to eat the rabbits (picture on page 7). The eyes are made so that one looks wild and the other tame. Yin and Yang. The front legs of the fox are those of a hare, because he walks in the footsteps of the hare and has pity with him.

**Could you tell us something about the papercutting “Barefoot in the Wild Garden” (page 3)?**

Yes gladly! The picture is inspired by the Millefleur wall hangings or tapestries. It is deliberately mysterious and wrapped in darkness. The woman is strong and at the same time vulnerable. It is unclear whether she guards the tiger, or is guarded by the tiger, or whether the tiger is wild or tame. The garden is an oasis of order and peace in the chaotic jungle, a place where the rules of the jungle do not apply.

**How important are symmetry and ornamentation to you?**

I rarely make pictures that are completely symmetrical, but need ornamental patterns. My ornaments are often made up of animals, as in my picture “Rattle race” (page 8), where the ground squirrels run like an ornamental element around the rattlesnake or in the picture “Polarstar out of Balance” (page 5), in which fish, birds, and seals form a dense ornament. I need patterns to repeat important ideas in the pictures, so that they rever-

berate like an echo in which a pattern conveys a sense of balance, harmony, contrast or movement.

**Interesting! The ornament is therefore a kind of symbolic order for you. What significance does the tradition of Swiss paper cutting have for you?**

The use of patterns around a paper cut is an important part of traditional Swiss paper cutting and has certainly influenced me, although my motives are not so traditional. Like the Swiss paper cutting, I usually work with black paper and scissors.

**Which projects are you planning in the near future?**

I'm working on a series on coral reefs.

I wish you a lot of inspiration! Thank you for the interview!

[www.bieler-beerli.com](http://www.bieler-beerli.com)



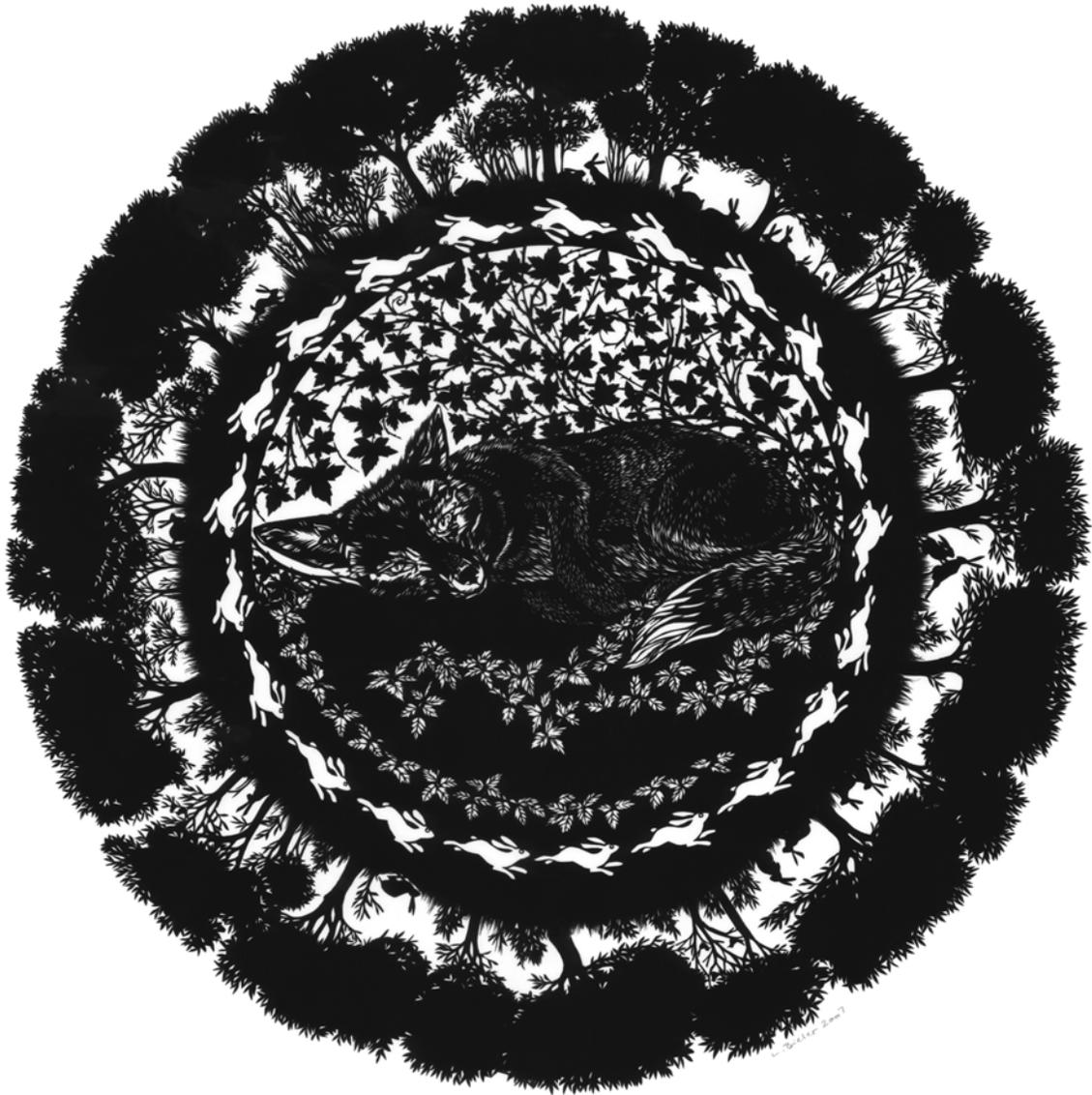
Beauty and Beast 2008, 50 x 50 cm



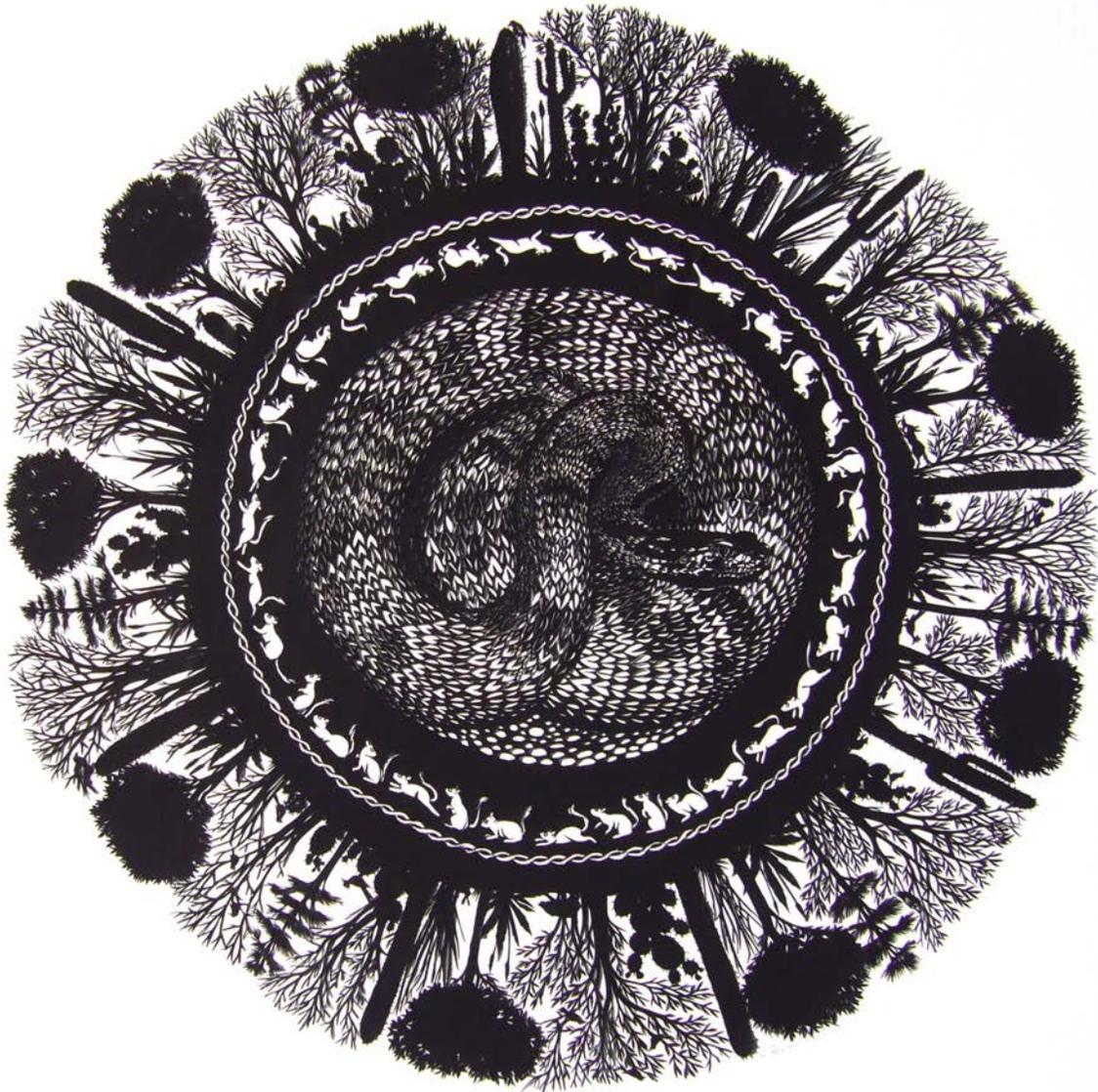
Polarstar out of Balance, 2010, 52 x 52 cm



Kindred Spirits 2011. 52 x 52 cm



Evil bunny rabbits are tempting me with their fluffy fur, 2007, 47 x 47 cm



Rattle race 2007, 50 x 50 cm  
(Title is a wordplay with Rat race and the rattle of  
the rattlesnake.)