

Sharon Lee Hart: Project Statement: *Sanctuary*

For this long-term project, I visited farm animal sanctuaries and made portraits of the residents. This project began because of my love of farm animals and the knowledge that they are some of the most abused, overlooked animals on the planet. Many view farm animals as utilitarian, simply as a food source or as labor for humans. Not surprising, as exposure leads to understanding, after spending time with the animals I confirmed what I knew in my heart to be true all along. These animals are unique; some are quirky or funny, while others sensitive, shy, playful, intelligent, mischievous, inquisitive, and all seemed to have complex emotional lives.

I chose to photograph at farm animal sanctuaries because the animals have been removed from abusive and other extreme situations and are now getting the best care possible. The animals at the sanctuaries have escaped from slaughterhouses and live meat markets, lived through animal testing and cockfighting, and other unspeakable horrors. At the sanctuaries, they are free to live out their lives without fear and most have become comfortable with their environment, which enabled me to make a more accurate portrait. Each sanctuary I visited was different, but all have a similar spirit and passionate dedication to animals. My goal was to depict each individual animal's personality. Working within the traditions of portraiture and documentary photography I approached photographing them with respect and in the same way I would a person.

I had the pleasure of spending time with the animals I photograph. I met Jo, a sweet little duck who had her right wing amputated because she had been kicked in her side. Jo now resides in peace with her best buddy Mickey, who can always be found next to her at Woodstock Sanctuary. At Star Gazing Farm I was introduced to Newman, the mischievous, highly intelligent goat who can open car doors and is appropriately named after a character from the TV show *Seinfeld*. At Grateful Acres Farm Sanctuary in Michigan, I hung out with Mary Jane the beautiful, serene, dainty pig that arrived at the sanctuary malnourished and the size of a guinea pig, but is now a healthy 300lbs.

Understanding each animal is unique, it was important to me to show them as individuals. One way to achieve this beyond the actual image was to title the photographs with each animal's name. I rely on those that live and work with the animals to help me edit the photographs. They shared stories and gave invaluable input about which photographs best represent each animal. Ultimately, I hope the photographs encourage people to see with compassionate eyes and view farm animals in a new light.