Sanctuary: Portraits of Rescued Farm Animals

The few farm animals I encountered growing up always struck me as similar to our beloved dogs and cats. But I noticed that they were not treated with the same love and respect. In fact, I later learned that farm animals are among the most mistreated animals on the planet. What is even more heartbreaking is that these sentient creatures are acutely aware of their horrific plight. With this in mind, I visited ten farm animal sanctuaries, all passionately dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and lifelong care of abused and neglected farm animals. At the sanctuaries the animals can finally live in peace. They receive love and care, and for many it is the first kindness they have experienced in their entire lives. While spending time with the animals, I confirmed what I knew in my heart to be true: they are unique individuals, with emotions and characteristics as diverse as any human.

I chose to make portraits of the animals to show their personalities and to depict them in the dignified manner they deserve. The animals you see within these pages are the fortunate ones. They have been rescued from misery and torture, but startlingly, an estimated ten billion others each year will not escape. With unbelievably few laws protecting them, these living, feeling beings are forced to live in tiny confinement crates, mutilated, mistreated, and deprived of even the most basic necessities. The animals I photographed are now thriving, but upon closer inspection, you can see evidence of their traumatic pasts. For example, you might notice a duck with a missing wing that was amputated after being kicked, or an unusually small older cow, her growth stunted by starvation. What surprised and continues to amaze me is that despite the horrible cruelty these animals have endured, their spirits are unbroken.

My process for making these photographs was to sit and wait for the animals to approach me. Once they did, I was greeted in a variety of ways, memorably Amelia the turkey, who nuzzled my neck and gave me a "hug", and Dee Dee the donkey, who rubbed her face on my cheek and rested her head on my shoulder. I saw first-hand just how wrong the stereotypes about farm animals are. I met many intelligent pigs (they are widely considered to be the fourth smartest animal on the planet), and exceptionally clean ones at that. I witnessed strong bonds between mother and child and deep friendships between unlikely pairs, such as Barbie the hen and Rambo the ram who were snuggling together when I visited Catskill Sanctuary. Each portrait of a safe, rescued farm animal is a plea to help those who are still suffering, and to see farm animals as the remarkable, emotional beings they truly are. I invite you to view these photographs with a compassionate eye and an open heart. My hope is that you will begin to see farm animals in a new light.