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The Story Behind the Work

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Julie Comnick doesn't remember which came first: her love of art or of animals. But the 35-year-old Arizona-based artist has always found a way to combine the two, even taking a job at one point as exhibits preparator at Chicago's Field Museum. Working with the museum's extensive natural history collection, she says, allowed her to be "surrounded by the types of things that were already in my artwork," whose themes revolve around human and animal interaction. "I'm interested in how that interaction -- how our treatment of animals -- reflects larger aspects of human nature."

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That fascination is on full display in "According to Their Kind," whose images of captive breeding look, to the layman, like figures from a zookeeper's handbook.

Yes, Comnick's research can be meticulous, but don't call what she does scientific illustration. Comnick points out that she happily makes stuff up, combining elements from different pictures and incorporating information from her research that may not be accurate when taken out of context. Her giraffes, for instance, wear blindfolds used when the animals are taken into captivity but not typically worn while breeding.

Would her pictures pass muster with a specialist in breeding management? Probably not, says Comnick, who describes them as "pretty drastically edited." Of course, that's why it's art. "I'm entirely guided by aesthetics," she says.

-- **Michael O'Sullivan**

Julie Comnick's giraffes wear blindfolds, which are not usually used in breeding. (Julie Comnick)

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