words of a feather
an exhibition of drawings by karen bondarchuk

March 10 - August 22, 2014
Office for Sustainability
Western Michigan University
2529 W. Michigan Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 387-0943.
Office hours: Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
Opening reception: Friday, March 14, 5-7 p.m.

“Do we really understand the universe better than animals do?”
--The Lives of Animals, JM Coetzee

The work in this exhibition is a survey of charcoal and mixed media drawings that examine linguistic and physiological connections between animals and humans. Language plays a central role in the human-animal divide, often serving as the singular distinguishing trait that elevates “us” above “them.” In these works, Bondarchuk explores the fraught boundary between human sentience and what we assume – or guess – to be the limits of animal reasoning power, which entails communicative abilities as well. This, as well as the emotive range of animals, has been a particular focus of her most recent work, with language interposed as an unreliable marker of the divide. The drawings suggest the intricacies of human and animal relations, particularly the extent to which humans have come to dictate the terms of co-existence. The artificial constraints under which these creatures exist, often at the periphery of our world, highlights the reality that sustainability plays out under human direction although it is a pan-species issue.

Even if we believe we understand the universe better than animals do, do we not have a moral obligation to act as stewards to our non-human kin?

Biography
Karen Bondarchuk is a Canadian-born visual artist whose work employs a broad range of materials and processes. Her artwork has been exhibited widely in the United States, as well as in Canada, England, Italy and India. Bondarchuk has been the recipient of several fellowships, including residencies at the Moulin à Nef in Auvillar, France, the Virginia Center for Creative Arts in Amherst, VA, Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, VT and Ragdale Foundation in Lake Forest, IL. Her artwork has won awards in Virginia, Michigan, Illinois and Maryland and is in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada as well as several other public and private collections. She received her MFA in sculpture from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, and her BFA in sculpture and video from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She is an associate professor and foundation area coordinator in the Frostic School of Art at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI.