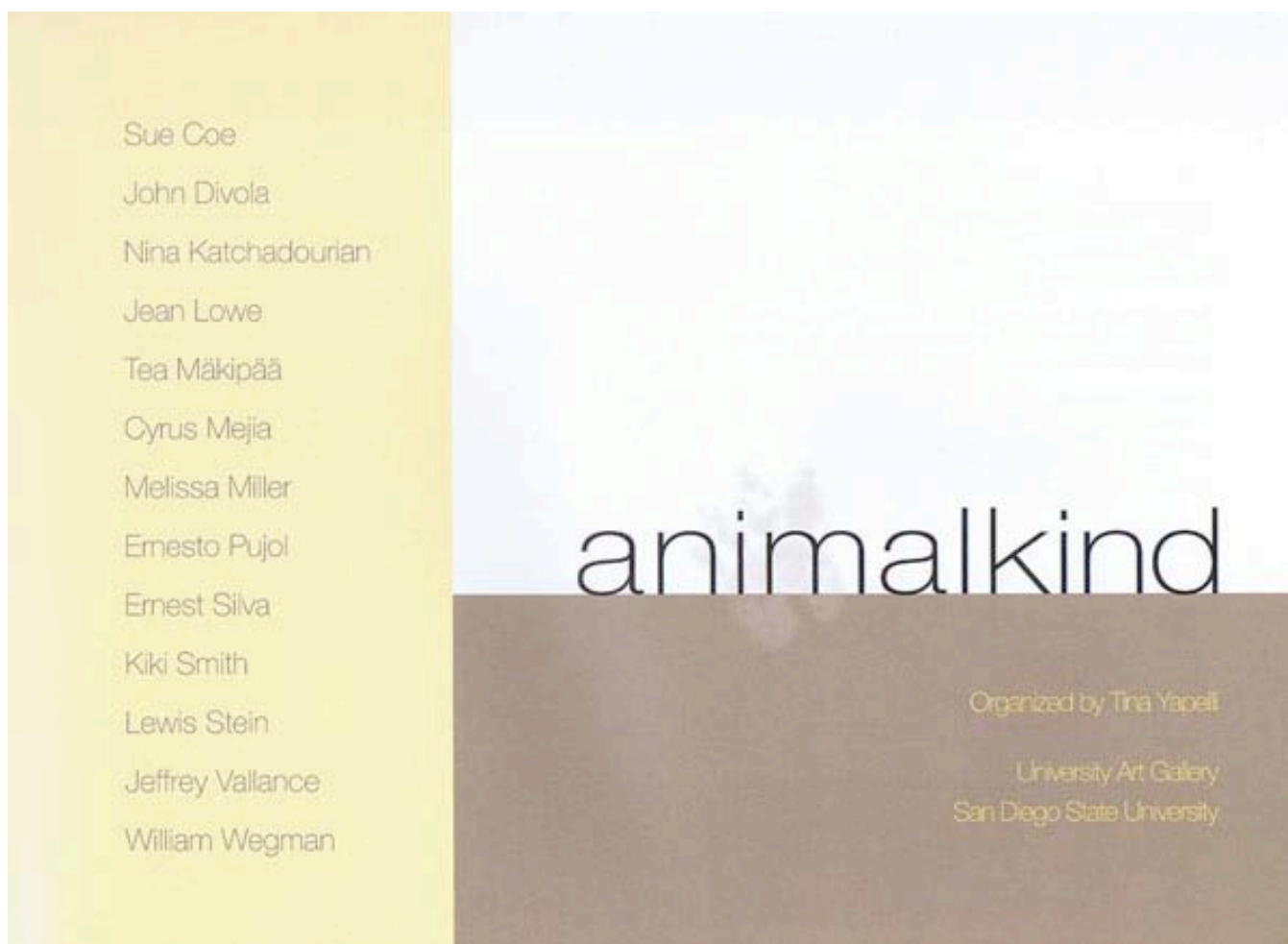


Yapelli Tina, ed. "Jeffrey Vallance." *animalkind* (San Diego, CA: University Art Gallery, San Diego State University, 2009), p. 52-55.



# Jeffrey Vallance

## Blinky, the Friendly Hen

In 1978 when I was twenty-three years old, I had a job restoring antique penny arcade machines. For the first time in my life I had money in my bank account—five thousand dollars to be exact. I decided to spend the entire amount on an art piece, so I self-published the story of *Blinky, the Friendly Hen*. Blinky was a piece of meat (chicken) that I purchased at a local supermarket. (Blinky was so-named due to the chicken's peculiar cockeyed gaze.) I took Blinky to the Los Angeles Pet Memorial Park to see if they would bury a piece of meat—if I had the cash. They did. What followed was the entire burial ritual for a dead pet.

The *Blinky* piece was originally like a prank—just to see what I could get away with. I thought it had no meaning at all. But I soon realized that Blinky was a stand-in for us. In that way, I could go through all of society's death rituals without having to produce a "real" dead body. At the time of the *Blinky* piece I was a vegetarian, so the piece had an underlying vegan statement, as well.

Over time I came to believe that Blinky was an archetype of sacrifice. I saw serious correlations between Blinky's sacrifice, suffering, death, burial, exhumation and ossification and the story of Christ's Passion. It was as if this story (without any specific symbols) is written on the human heart. Culturally we inject familiar signs into the story to give it meaning—the Meaning of Life. Take the Friendly Hen, for example. Blinky was born from an egg, the Easter symbol of birth and life. The chicken and the

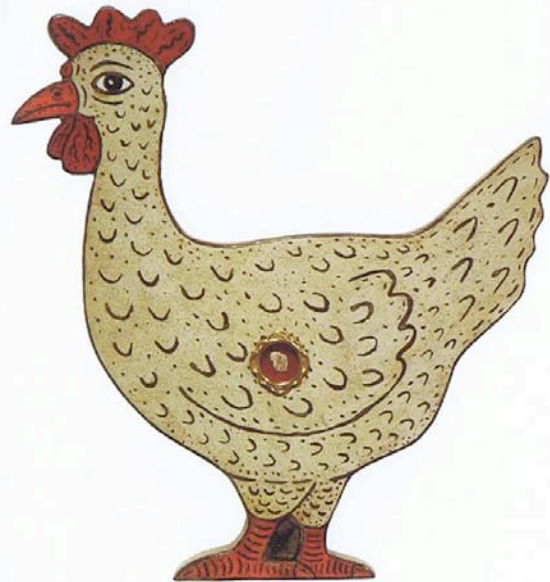
cock are symbols of virility and sexuality; they also signify sacrifice and redemption. And ultimately the rooster is the emblem of resurrection—the cock crowing three times at the Dawn of Salvation. In the Bible, Christ compared Himself to a hen saying, "How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings!" (Luke 13:34)

Like no other work, the *Blinky* piece has caught the public's imagination. Blinky is listed in several California travel guides and there are manifold references to the Friendly Hen on the Internet. The *Blinky* saga has become akin to an urban legend, with even the pet cemetery workers embellishing the story of the funeral service to include "hooded chanting mourners holding candles." On Blinky's grave, I often find strange votive offerings left by cemetery visitors. I was invited to be a guest on *Late Night* with David Letterman to tell the *Blinky* story. A reference to Blinky appeared on the TV show *Married with Children* in the episode "Yard Sale" in the form of Winky, the Dead Bird. On *The Simpsons*, Blinky's headstone can be seen at the Springfield Pet Cemetery. Blinky is now like a cult thing. I have to be very careful in exhibiting Blinky relics, as they are the pieces most frequently stolen from museums (for who knows what diabolical purpose).

From the press release for Jeffrey Vallance: *Blinky, the Friendly Hen* 30th Anniversary Exhibition, Track 10 Gallery, Santa Monica, 2008.

Jeffrey Vallance, *Blinky's Coffin*, 1989





Left Jeffrey Vallance, *Blinky's Plastic Bag*, 1978  
Right Jeffrey Vallance, *Chicken-shaped Blinky Reliquary*, 2008



Left Jeffrey Vallance, *Blinky Exhumation Bone*, 2006  
Right Jeffrey Vallance, *St. Peter and the Dionysus Monument*, 1980