

Selections from Sue Coe's "*Sheep of Fools*" at Emmanuel Gallery
By Janine Sytsma

Emmanuel Gallery currently has on view a selection of provocative drawings from Sue Coe's recent series, *Sheep of Fools*.

Sue Coe immigrated to the United States from England in 1972, and since settling in New York she has produced a substantial body of drawings, paintings, and prints on a wide range of political topics. She began her career as an illustrator for such publications as the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*, however, the constraints inherent in the industry soon led her to begin producing expansive series on subjects she felt were not adequately addressed by the traditional news sources. Coe has since gained something of a cult following both in the United States and abroad.

Her inspiration for *Sheep of Fools* came from a newspaper story about the sinking of a ship transporting over 60,000 sheep from Australia to Jordan. Affronted by the insensitive treatment of the event, Coe produced in 2002 a short series entitled *Ghost Sheep* to document the tragedy. Over time, this transmuted into the more extensive investigation *The Sheep of Fools* that exposes the moral issues within the industry, and underscores the problems with international commerce generally.

Sheep of Fools is an outgrowth of two earlier series concerning the unethical treatment of animals. The first, *Porkopolis: Animals and Industry* was the product of a ten-year investigation into factory farming and slaughterhouse practices completed in 1996, with its publication under the title *Dead Meat*. With this series Coe developed her distinctive style, intended to reach a wide audience, that is rooted in the realist tradition and complete with complex lyrical compositions and dark gruesome details.

The second, *Pit's Letter*, 2002, exposes the problems with vivisection in ways that underpin the relationship between human and animal abuse. With this illustrated novella, originally intended for publication, Coe began to develop more fluid and cohesive narratives. *Sheep of Fools* integrates the documentary-style illustrations of the former to compose disturbing narratives, with a narrative style more reminiscent of the latter, *Pit's Letter*.

The examples selected by curator Shannon Corrigan are set in the tranquil environment of Emmanuel Gallery, illuminated by soft lights from above. Visitors to the gallery are invited to circumambulate the room and interact with each work individually. Those prone to scour the gallery walls for explanations may at first feel ill at ease, but they will soon realize that such additions are unnecessary. The power of Coe's works stem from their ability to communicate her position sensitively and clearly. In addition to the works, there are books that provide more background information available for visitors in a reading area.

Of the exhibition, Corrigan explains: "I have followed Sue's career since the late 1980s and could not be more pleased to work with CU-Denver Live! in bringing this timely exhibition to Denver. This exhibition and visiting artist program is a true success story in every way. It is a rare opportunity for Emmanuel Gallery, Auraria Campus and the Denver community to see this important body of work by one of the most legendary artists working today."

The exhibition runs through Friday, September 8th at Emmanuel Gallery on the Auraria campus. Following a closing reception at the gallery on Wednesday, September 6th from 5:00-6:30PM, Coe will give a lecture starting at 7:00PM in the King Center Concert Hall, also on the Auraria Campus. This exhibition and lecture were made possible by the support of the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, CU-Denver Live!, and the Alliance for Contemporary Art of the Denver Art Museum. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, call 303.556.8337.