

"One Way through the Chute" by Kevin Wesley explores his childhood memories about growing up in rural America.

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Shocking work put together well

■ *Show explores relationship between humans and food*

BY WESLEY PULKKA
For the Journal

Kevin Wesley explores his childhood in a farming community with an intelligent and insightful multimedia installation at the Jonson Gallery.

Wesley's graphic and visceral imagery is not for the faint of heart, but it is very well thought out and executed. The show includes video projections, constructions, digital prints on canvas and two 19th-century-style moving picture prototypes.

Wesley's inclusion of rabbits running and having sex refer to his first realization as a child that his pets were actually food. In an artist's statement, Wesley chronicles his loss of innocence when witnessing his stepfather beheading and gutting one of Wesley's rabbits in preparation for the evening meal.

To reconcile this traumatic event and another involving the family bull named Blackie, Wesley began an internal exploration that questions our disconnectedness from and commonality with those living beings we kill for food.

His images of men in suits being herded through cattle chutes, nudes hanging on revolving meat racks and one scene of a man being gutted reveal the profound disconnect between how we see ourselves intellectually, culturally and spiritually in juxtaposition to the reality of our animal nature.

Wesley raises the question regarding how well our culturally driven pretenses will hold up if the thought machine of history were to suddenly stop. Reading the news of countless terrorist attacks might offer a glimpse of the answer to Wesley's question.

In a composite image that

REVIEW

If you go

WHAT: "Eye-catching: The Persistence of Vision," an installation of new work by Kevin Wesley

WHEN: Through Friday, Dec. 19. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. Call 277-4967

WHERE: Jonson Gallery, 1909 Las Lomas NE, University of New Mexico campus

HOW MUCH: Free admission and free parking behind gallery

mixes a high-technology factory chicken farm with a day at the office, Wesley presents the heads of men positioned in chicken coops as an analogy for businessmen toiling in corporate office cubicles.

Wesley's introductory video presents a flickering series of images of rabbits and people that periodically pop into focus and disappear. The effect reminded me of a Japanese television children's series that was filled with so many pops and surges that it gave some children brain seizures and had to be taken off the air.

The main gallery is occupied by a large black machine that projects images selected from the rest of the show on the east wall. The rectangular device has viewing ports that present different images than the ones projected from within.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell spent much of his career examining the terrible contradictions between human idealism, high aspirations and our need to kill to survive. Wesley does a credible job of revisiting this dilemma through his personal experience and studies of psychology and philosophers like Martin Heidegger, who wrote "Being and Time"

and was a highly influential member of the National Socialists Party during Germany's Nazi period.

By using human beings as stand-ins for cattle, rabbits and chickens, Wesley integrates concepts like political fascism with more benign ideas surrounding existentialism. This is a stunning and disturbing show that may shock some viewers. Unlike a lot of contemporary art that relies on shock value to cover weak conceptualization, Wesley's well-considered works are to be taken seriously.

Wesley, however, may find that a softening of visual rhetoric may help to make his message universal.

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