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Artist puts panda masks on pigs

Using metaphors to make his point

PITTSBURGH (AP) —

Americans see pigs as dirty, greedy slobs, but in China, the pig is regarded as a superior animal.

To installation artist Xu Bing, the American disdain for pigs is a metaphor for the all-too-human failing to recognize the value in certain other people.

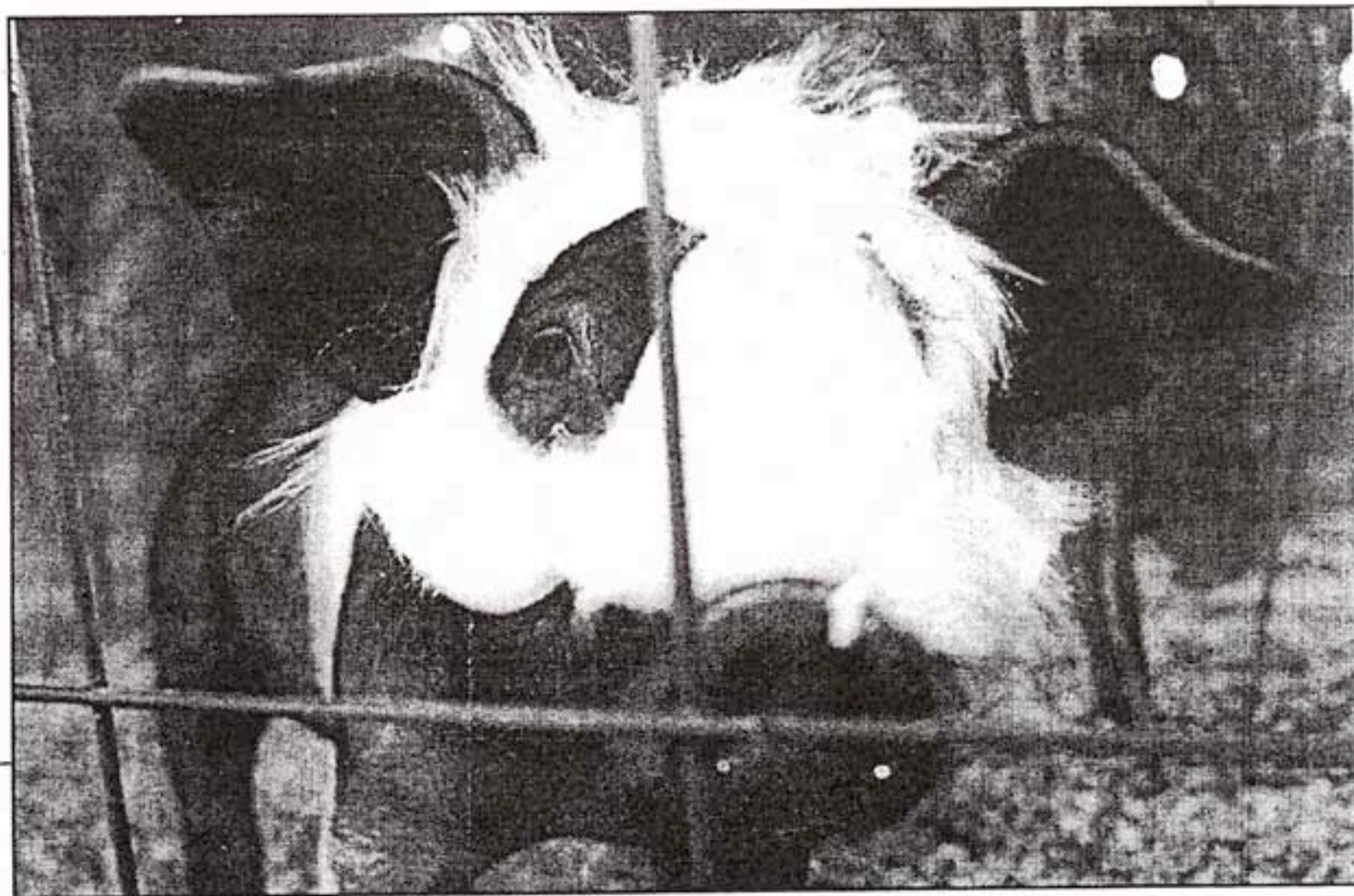
He expresses that idea through his exhibit, "Xu Bing — Cultural Animal," at the Wood Street Galleries in downtown Pittsburgh, in which he displays three black-and-white Hampshire piglets wearing panda masks.

Pigs, he said, have many good qualities.

"Actually, they are really smart, they are really cute and they are really sensitive. Each pig has a different personality," Xu said.

The artist lives in New York and has lectured at Carnegie Mellon University. The pigs come from a farm in Avondale, Westmoreland County.

Murray Horne, the museum's curator, explained that Xu chose the panda



AP Photo

Installation artist Xu Bing expresses his ideas by putting panda masks on pigs.

disguise because Westerners esteem the panda, which seems cuddly to them.

The fake-fur masks leave eyes and snouts free, and the pigs were able to eat, investigate a worker cleaning their cage and walk over to the edge of the cage to be patted. Their floor was covered with pine shavings and topsoil,

and rocks and bamboo were placed in their cage.

Bernie Wilke, a member of Animal Advocates, said he hadn't seen the exhibit and couldn't say whether the "Panda Zoo" portion of Xu's show used animals ethically. However, confining any animal runs counter to its interests, he said.

"It would seem that animals would like to be free and forage for their own food," Wilke said.

Spectators' reactions varied.

"It doesn't seem to be anything very specific. Everyone here is just talking it out," said Richard Pell, 22, a CMU art student. "He's not preaching, he's just stirring the pot."