

Pigeons have eye for paintings: Japan study

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Pigeon

Pigeons may sometimes appear to randomly target city sculptures with their droppings, but according to a new Japanese study they also have the potential to become discerning art critics.

Researchers at Tokyo's Keio University say they have found that the birds have "advanced perceptive abilities" and can distinguish between "good" and "bad" paintings, recognising beauty the way humans do.

The team -- which previously published research saying that [pigeons](#) can tell a Monet from a Picasso -- was seeking to find out whether the animals may also be able to prefer one to the other.

For their experiment, the scientists took paintings by elementary school

children and selected those that were commonly deemed to be "good" and "bad" by teachers and a control group of other adults.

The researchers then displayed the pictures on a screen to the birds and gave food rewards to those that picked at the "good" paintings while denying rewards to those pigeons that displayed poor artistic taste.

The researchers used a variety of images, including pastels and watercolours, still lifes and landscapes, which were judged on their artistic merit, including how clear and discernable the images were.

Through the month-long experiment, the pigeons learnt to peck only at "good" paintings said Professor Shigeru Watanabe of Keio's Faculty of Letters and Graduate School of Human Resources.

Crucially, they responded appropriately even to paintings they had not seen before, said Watanabe.

Keio University in a report clarified that the research "did not deal with advanced artistic judgements."

"But it did indicate that pigeons are able to learn to distinguish 'good' or 'beautiful' paintings the way an ordinary human being can," it said.

The findings of the government-funded study by the university's Centre of Advanced Research on Logic and Sensibility are due to be published in the journal *Animal Cognition*.

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