



Painting innocence

We chat to vegan artist, Maria Tiqwah, about why every animal matters

Since 2014, the creative Maria Tiqwah has been creating and sharing her thought-provoking vegan T-shirts, which feature bold and beautiful images of animals and slogans. The passionate vegan shares some of her designs with us, as well as her thoughts on why art has the power to spread awareness, and touch the viewer's heart and soul for the better.

Tell us about your vegan journey and a little bit about you now.

In the afternoon of August 23rd, 2011, I watched *Meet Your Meat* — it was the most horrifying thing I had ever seen. My

heart was racing. I was shocked. I gave the sausage I bought that morning for lunch to the dog and never ate meat again. I had already ditched dairy for health reasons, a few years before. However, I still ate eggs and honey, because at the time, going vegan had seemed a bit 'far fetched'. But, nonetheless, I started researching into the stories behind all animal products and fell from one astonishment into another. How could I have been so ignorant? How can people be so cruel? So, I gradually went vegan and, to my surprise, felt great — I was healthier, my life seemed enriched and the whole thing felt like a home-coming.

As a child, I was a big animal lover (my first word was 'cat' and my second was 'fish' because we had a cat and an aquarium). At 12 years old, I even had a rescued rooster, with whom I walked around the neighborhood every day and who I also took with me on my holidays. Shamefully, I also ate chicken at the same time. I merely used false justifications like 'It's just the way it is' and 'Other animals eat animals, too.' Nowadays, I consider the life of every animal valuable, not because of the emotional bond I have with the individual (like with my rooster), but because they value their own life.

If someone close to you died, you would be devastated. If a stranger at the other end of the world died, you wouldn't shed a tear. However, this does not mean that the life of the stranger is worthless or disposable. Both lives are equally valuable, the same way every animal's life is valuable.

When did you decide to combine veganism with art?

In 2014, I opened my Happy Vegan web-shop with organic and fair T-shirts, and started creating art with a vegan message, which I printed on the T-shirts. Then in 2017, I found The Art of Compassion project (artofcompassionproject.com). This is an amazing organisation, created by Leigh Sanders. There are over 190 member artists from 28 countries. The Art of Compassion Project has ventures like vegan art poster exhibitions, online pet portrait auctions and has published a vegan art book. Each artist is a volunteer, and all the money raised goes to vegan charities. I am so proud to be a member and it is wonderful to be able to show my art to a much larger and worldwide audience this way.

What inspires you?

Animals are my number one inspiration. My parent's attic is full of my childhood drawings, and every one features animals. Although I always saw myself as an 'animal lover', when I went vegan, 'animal lover' got a quite different meaning and I wanted to help them through my talents. I admire animals and, in some ways, I feel more at ease around non-human animals than people. Animals have always been a tremendous support for me. I don't know how I could have lived without them in my life — I want to give something back. Animals are amazing, but unfortunately, they need our help.

What are some of the messages behind your work?

The message behind my work is that every animal is precious and has a unique character. I paint a piglet as a feeling individual — the same way I paint a dog, cat or human. I paint a cute mouse living in a rose, instead of an unwanted pest. And I paint a calf as a whimsical character, instead of a 'piece of meat'. I paint animals the way I see them and hope other people will get a glimpse at them through my eyes.

How useful is art in spreading awareness of the vegan message?

I think art is very useful. As well as T-shirts and individual pieces, I also make advertising (like billboards) against animal exploitation. Advertising can hit you between the eyes, and art can touch your heart and soul. There are so many ways of communication and every way can play an important role. Most people don't go vegan overnight. Awareness is something that grows over time; with every stroke of paint, with every note, with every word and with every photo adding up to it. I would love to encourage all vegans who enjoy making any kind of art, to express their feelings and views about animals through their work.

Any exciting projects on the horizon?

I know it's a bit early, but right now I am actually having a lot of fun designing Christmas cards with Esther the Wonder Pig on it. The vegan cards will be available on my website soon. And I am very excited about my newest project; making 12 animal drawings for a big vegan birthday calendar, printed on ecological paper. I still have a lot to do, so if anyone has any suggestions about which animals should be in the calendar, just drop me a line on social media! ■

For more from Maria, visit mariatiqwah.com or follow [@mariatiqwahart](https://www.instagram.com/mariatiqwahart)

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