

Preface

The lack of spiritual space for the rhinos in local and international cultures has contributed more than a little to its endangerment. Endowed with no godly significance and no usefulness during life, rhinos are objectified commodities. The problem of the international conservation movement then is to give people a reason to keep rhinos around. Rhino conservation struggles to cast this odd animal in a new iconography. Conservation of wild animals relies upon the creation of new meanings – some might even say new mythologies – with global appeal.

Media attention on the unsteady fate of rhinoceroses often argues for the end of poaching by laying out graphic images of rhino slaughter. Instead of appealing to audiences with scenes of aesthetically pleasing rhino, or attempting to make rhinos cute, conservationists expose human brutality. Piles of disembodied horns suggest unstoppable greed. By saving the rhinoceros, they argue, we are saving ourselves from our own brutal nature and savage greed.

Does the continued existence of rhinos serve only to prove our own mortality? While there are ecological reasons for maintaining the diversity of life on Earth, most conservation literature calls upon sympathy to motivate the masses. The state of wildlife conservation has reached a precipitous point for many species. It is a frightening fact that the future existence of rhinoceroses is entirely dependent upon the will of humans. Rhinos must find another way to carry their fortune – off their noses.

– Kelly Enright, 2008

FOLLOWING SPREAD: A lone black rhino against the backdrop of the Kunene region mountains in northern Namibia. Photo: Wilderness Safaris/Dana Allen.