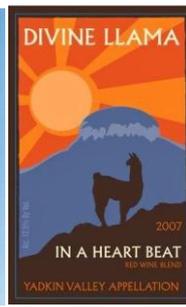


Visual Representations of Llamas in Modern Media

In recent years, llamas have inspired artistic works featuring on coins, in crafts, textile designs, films and songs, computer games and advertisements. People share their wedding day with llamas, wipe their feet on a llama door mat before entering their home, have their drink in a llama mug, take a shower shielded by a llama curtain, read a llama story to their children before going to bed wearing llama pyjamas, placing their head on a llama pillow and sleeping under a llama duvet. They dress in the morning into their llama socks, knickers, t-shirt, jeans and sweater before putting on their llama jewellery, llama scarf, gloves and hat to go outside to go on a llama trek and buy a llama greeting card for their friend's birthday. I could go on but you get my drift.



Llama-Rama

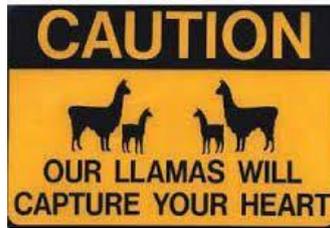


**Love of Llamas
12 Things You
Must Have if
You Love
Llamas.**



MyTurquoiseDoor

One assumes this must relate to them having popular appeal. Something marketing experts knew, for some reason would work.



What constitutes this popular appeal is an interesting question since llamas are portrayed in so many different ways in the media. The popular press appears to present llamas first and foremost as animals of novelty that are odd or funny. We humans seem to have a propensity to laugh at something unusual, something we are not familiar with, do not understand or makes us peculiarly nervous, so no wonder the spontaneous reactions of many individuals I come across whilst out walking my llamas is to smile with a broad grin. I know it is not just at me they are laughing at since I see it when incognito. I recently saw a TV programme in which they brought a llama into the studio. The presenters couldn't stop laughing at everything the llama did but this is not an uncommon reaction I have found.

In the media, the llama is often portrayed as Humorous or Peculiar



perhaps a bit Mad or Zany



Wacky, Weird or Bizarre



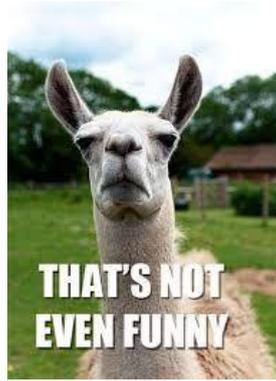
Funky



Feminine and decorative/dress able



Regal or Snooty



Masculine and Mischievous



However, at the same time it is also presented an animal of grace and great beauty



Intelligent



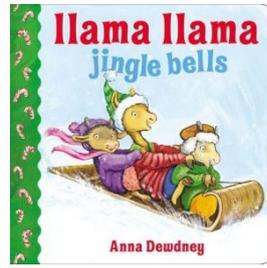
Trainable



And a cute and cuddleable,



A gentle creature that is innocent and cuddly making it ideally suited to children's stories and toys



Laid back, gentle and calming and as such suitable for therapy work with elderly, infirm and troubled teenagers.



Loveable and Romantic



It also is commonly presented as curious and inquisitive



something mystical



and occasionally as unpredictable or at worst aggressive and threatening



Only back in its native south America is it portrayed as a work animal, fibre and food.



Pictorial representations in the modern world also portray the llama more commonly in a feminine way, as suited as a toy for little girls, a print on women's clothing rather than men's. The odd thing is that perversely most of the role models in stories and films are male llamas. My wife tells me she thinks of them as 'feminine animals' because of their grace and beauty. They are not noisy or as excitable as dogs can be, threatening as horned goats sometimes appear, ugly and smelly as pigs but majestic with their attractive faces and eye lashes to die for.

The portrayal of the llama as something of a humorous oddity is perhaps borne out of them being so different to the animals we are more used to seeing in the northern hemisphere, for example, horses and cows with their proportionally shorter necks and bigger heads. Certainly, many visitors to my farm react initially by saying how strange they look.

Of course, many have also read stories and seen video footage of llamas spitting and so long as it is at someone else consider it very amusing. I was once speaking with a non English speaking Italian gentleman and his way of communicating with me about llamas was to gesticulate the spitting action so quite clearly it is the first image that comes to many people's minds when they think about llamas.

It may also relate to the fact that with their big ears and long eyelashes llamas can be very expressive compared to many other species and this makes them all the more intriguing to humans. That said, there is also a curiosity about the uncertainty of their expressions. Many visitors to my farm think that spitting at humans is the desire of llamas to which they are naturally risk averse and don't want to get too near, just in case!

In contrast, the relatively gentle movements of llamas, coupled with their peaceful sounding humming and soft woolly fleece can invoke an image of warmth, peace, calm and serenity.

I have never been very sure why so many llamas get kissed by fellow humans and are perceived as having a romantic aura about them. I know that llamas traditionally greet each other and human companions by placing their nose to nose. I assume it is because they have a strong and distinct sense of smell, but I doubt it is anything more than this.

Dare I say that some of my more pretentious acquaintances have expressed appreciation of their perceived regal behaviour. That is their considered aloofness and snooty behaviour when holding their noses high or turning their heads away from individuals as if disapproving. To some this is regarded as an ability to discriminate superior beings from the general riff-raff. I guess it just depends on whom the llama is turning away from!. I could be controversial and ask whether this perceived rejection of approval and affection ties in with their image being commonly portrayed with femininity. If it was perceived that this disapproving activity was linked to any rational or intellectual behaviour, it would in a male dominated society, be more suggestive of masculine behaviour, but llamas seldom get portrayed as butch, courageous, egoist characters as would normally a male of any species. Many female llama lovers did in my research think of them as female and again it was explained in terms of soft furry coats, big dreamy eyes and long eyelashes. Actual evidence, however, shows that llamas have smaller eyes than cattle or horses but it is their relative size to their head that makes them appear to be bigger.

Briefly, returning to the image of being an intelligent animal, other than their perceived aloofness/dismissive behaviour being a tied in with the commonly held perception of university dons, there does not appear to be any hard evidence of llama showing problem solving abilities or utilising tools as used to illustrate the intellectual powers of some primates and birds. Instead, what some owners point to is what may be better more appropriately termed 'emotional intelligence'. As what one respondent commented:

They have an ability to adapt and moderate their behaviour in the presence of very young people or vulnerable adults which we see all the time with our farm visitors.

In other words they exhibit sensitivity and this is a feature which lends them to successfully proven therapy work across a diverse range of populations ranging from juvenile delinquents to elderly dementia patients.

A relatively new coined term is 'social intelligence'. I have spent many hours observing their social behaviour and cannot but help think they have some rational processing going on in how they behave and who they relate to and reject. Yes, like sheep and other herding animals they can follow blindly, but within the herd there are social relations at play in who they bond with or fall up to. They commonly stay in close proximity in their little cliques and have llamas they willingly share feed buckets with and others they never will. These cliques or groups can be familial, reflect a common type, age or size but not necessarily. One assumes there must be some reasons but I am unsure what.

Their ability to process information and recall previous learning has also been mentioned in relation to their intelligence.

Whilst we could enter into debate as to what philosophically and/or psychologically constitutes intelligence, learning, training, etc., suffice for now to say that there is plenty to suggest they are certainly not dumb creatures.

As to why they have something of an exotic and mystical status I struggle all the more with. In the Western World, I would have thought it either relates to their unusual/unfamiliar physical and behavioural features that suggest they must have come from beyond planet Earth. In their native South America because of the way it has always been regarded as an animal of sacrifice. However, why they are sometimes associated with unicorns, portrayed with a horn on top of their head, I have no idea.



Finally, a question I would like answers to in respect of popular images of llamas is why do people like to dress them up. Its not a new phenomenon since native South Americans have a tradition of decorating their prized llamas. In contemporary Western society the only other animals I can think of we humans like to dress up are dogs and possibly ponies. Making llamas look nice and decorated would certainly fit in with the feminine image held of them, just as we typically think of French Poodles being owned, dolled-up and paraded by fine French ladies or ponies by teenage girls. Youngsters dressing llamas in North America is encouraged as a way of engaging their interest in llamas. It is part of the 4H programme with show class at most ALSA events.

It will be interesting to see how long this fascination goes on for and reflects itself in demand for llamas and the popularity of different types.

Dr Richard Cox, Hillview Llamas

This article is an abridged version of a broader chapter on the Llama as a Cultural Icon in Modern Society in a forthcoming book on llamas written by the author. Over 3,500 images of llamas, organised in classified order, can be seen via the *Hillview Llamas* website providing you register for a free *Pinterest* account.