

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

Anyone who has passed through the Montreal metro in recent days could not help but notice the omnipresence of billboards in the BeFairBeVegan campaign. The Berri-UQAM station is fully dominated, while there are also 99 digital screens scattered throughout the network.

The panels present close-up images of animals used on livestock farms and laboratories, as well as those hunted or caught in the wild. The leitmotif "Different but Equal" appears on each of them, accompanied by messages such as "They value their lives, like we do", "Someone, not something" or "Mother, not a milk machine" .

BeFairBeVegan is a Colorado-based non-profit run by a vegan collective. New York was the scene of their first campaign in 2016, when the organization took over Times Square. After Seattle, Melbourne, St. John's and Connecticut, it is Montreal's turn to be the focus of the world's largest animal awareness campaign.

For those who have seen these posters distractedly, or who have watched them with real interest, the message is shocking, causing reflection or denial. In short, it does not leave anyone indifferent. These animals are clearly represented as individuals in their own right, persons who are concerned about living, flourishing and maintaining bonds with their peers, but who face ruthless exploitation.

Anthropomorphism? Manipulation? Sentimentalism? These criticisms are unjustified because they deny the wrongs being inflicted ("yes, but the hen does not know that she will be beheaded") or worse, ridicule the compassion of those who see that something is wrong in the realm of "meat".

DISTORTING THE ISSUE

Others believe that it is counterproductive. Nobody likes to be told that their behavior is immoral. We may not consider ourselves saints, but we do consider ourselves to be good people. Commentators keep repeating as irrefutable truth that anything experienced as an accusation or guilt is unlikely to convince people. That is what makes Patrick Lagacé say in his column "I love meat" that the right strategy lies in the maxim "Just fun! ": Show that vegan cooking can be delicious, or that being vegan is cool ". In short, we must stay positive and above all, not confront people.

Yes... but no ! There are certainly advantages in sparing feelings. But not at the cost of misrepresenting the issue. As veganism is a commitment to not participating in the exploitation of animals as a matter of conscience, it is a movement of justice.

But justice can be fun... or not — especially when it involves giving up privileges.

Focusing exclusively on fun can reduce this popular movement to something fleeting, and rather superficial, a simple question of "personal choice".

It would not occur to anyone to say that promoting equality — regardless of gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity — must be fun. Awareness must inevitably come through confrontation or, at least, uncomfortable truths. This is the great merit of the BeFairBeVegan campaign: it focuses on what's most important: the main victims of animal exploitation. Disturbing? Certainly. But this is the beginning of any real social debate on justice issues.