

# **Animal Mugs**

## **An Exploration of Animal Images on Ceramic Vessels**

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**Cite as:** Chait, Emma. 2008. Animal Mugs: an exploration of animal images on ceramic vessels. Dollarware Project, report 14. <http://dollarware.org/report14.pdf>.

*Abstract: How do dollar store mugs reflect human relationships with animals? Several mugs collected from dollar stores around Montreal feature animal images revealing information about how our culture interacts with animals. I reflect on the high frequency of mugs featuring cats, the practice of anthropomorphizing animals, and the use of animals as symbols in society. I discuss fundamental similarities between humans and animals as an aspect of anthropomorphism and explore how social proximity between humans and animals determines which animals are featured more frequently on mugs than others. Support from anthropological literature provides insight into human and animal society.*

### **Introduction**

Do dollarware mugs represent human cultural attitudes toward animals? If so, how? Eugenia Shanklin writes, "...the investigation of human and animal interaction may be one of the most fruitful endeavors of anthropology." (1985: 380). Animals have traditionally appeared to possess benefits for humans and have traditionally been studied in comparison to humans. Increasingly, animal lives are studied for their own value, and more anthropologists are studying relations between humans and animals. Data from dollarware mugs may provide suggestions on how humans and animals interact in our society today.

Of the 228 mugs collected from dollar stores around Montreal, 38 feature animals (16.7%). Of the 61 mugs collected from Value Village, 17 feature animals (27.9%). Value Village represents a collection of second-hand, non-dollarware pieces to compare with dollarware. Of the collection of 54 animal mugs, cats are most frequently depicted (13 mugs, 24%). Many mugs anthropomorphize animals by depicting them expressing human emotion and wearing clothing. These images tell stories of relationships between humans and convey information about relationships between humans and animals, while also reflecting on the personhood of animals.

Some questions directing this study are: Does dollarware represent a hierarchy of animals? If so, how? Is anthropomorphizing more common on mugs featuring higher ranked animals? What does anthropomorphizing mean about the relationship between humans and animals? How do dollar stores compare to each other in the number of animal mugs they have available for purchase?

### **Methods**

Initially, mugs featuring animals were separated from other mugs collected from dollar stores and Value Village. If a mug showed an animal, no matter how discretely, it was included in the study. Animal mugs included ambiguous insects, sea animals, and animals of the zodiac. Descriptive data for each mug including which animal species, colors, words, and seasonal themes were depicted, and whether the animal's image was a photograph was then collected. Mugs were divided into three types: companion animal, farm animal, and wild animal in order compare mugs from these three groups. Edmund Leach identified similar terms (tame, game, and remote) in his article, *Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse* (1964), as commonly used by humans to describe animals.

Controversy arose over assigning animals to these types. Some animals, like rabbits, fit into each category. Therefore, criteria for assigning mugs to each type had to be established. Companion animal mugs featured domesticated animals, bred, and raised for human companionship. Farm animal mugs featured domesticated animals, bred, and raised for human consumption. Wild animal mugs featured non-domesticated animals. If an animal mug could fit into each type, this aspect was noted, but ultimately the mug was included with farm animal mugs since these animals.

Mug morphology in relation to animal size was then collected. Height (mm) measurements classified mugs as smaller, medium, or larger sizes. Smaller mugs were shorter than 80.0 mm. Medium mugs were over 80.0 mm tall. Larger mugs were over 100.0 mm tall. A similar method was used to categorize animals into smaller, medium, and larger groups. Smaller animals were cats, chickens, fish, rabbits, bats, bees, dragonflies, mice, scorpions, and squirrels. Medium animals were dogs, ducks, pigs, sheep, and monkeys. Larger animals were cows, bears, dolphins, and reindeer.

Finally, percentages of animal mugs per assemblage were collected to allow a comparison between dollar stores on the availability of animal mugs. Number of mugs per animal was also collected to help discuss whether a hierarchy of animals is evident in dollarware. Dollar store mugs were compared to ones from Value Village and discussion of cultural attitudes toward animals formed final parts of research.

## **Results**

<b>Animal Type</b>	<b>Specimen</b>	<b>Height (mm)</b>	<b>Mug Size</b>	<b>Animal Size</b>	<b>Photo</b>
<b>Companion Animals</b>					
Cat	B-14	106.0	larger	smaller	Photo
	B-15	105.8	larger	smaller	No
	F-12	109.6	larger	smaller	Photo
	F-17	96.1	medium	smaller	No
	I-06	96.7	medium	smaller	No
	I-15	96.7	medium	smaller	No
	J-01	102.0	larger	smaller	No
Dog	A-17	103.7	larger	medium	Photo
	C-06	103.0	larger	medium	Photo
	D-08	102.0	larger	medium	No
	I-18	96.6	medium	medium	No
<b>Farm Animals</b>					
Chicken	F-05	105.4	larger	smaller	No
	K-08	103.9	larger	smaller	No
Cow	F-18	94.5	medium	larger	No
	F-20	94.4	medium	larger	No
Duck	D-13	109.1	larger	medium	No
Fish	A-10	64.8	smaller	smaller	No
Pig	F-11	63.0	smaller	medium	No
Rabbit	F-02	62.9	smaller	smaller	No
	F-13	110.7	larger	smaller	No
	L-03	92.7	medium	smaller	No
	L-04	91.7	medium	smaller	No
	L-05	90.2	medium	smaller	No
Sheep	L-07	94.9	medium	smaller	No
	B-12	105.3	larger	medium	No
<b>Wild Animals</b>					
Bat	J-14	109.8	larger	smaller	No

Bear	C-10	103.3	larger	larger	No
	C-11	103.2	larger	larger	No
	E-12	102.0	larger	larger	No
	L-01	97.6	medium	larger	No
	L-02	97.6	medium	larger	No
Bee	K-14	103.7	larger	smaller	No
Deer	B-17	117.0	larger	larger	Photo
Dolphin	I-17	101.1	larger	larger	No
Dragonfly	C-08	121.0	larger	smaller	No
Monkey	F-01	94.0	medium	medium	No
Mouse	J-12	93.7	medium	smaller	No
Scorpion	B-19	98.9	medium	smaller	No

**Figure 1: Dollar store mug morphology in relation to animal type and size.**

Animal Category	Specimen	Height (mm)	Mug Size	Animal Size	Photo
<b>Companion Animals</b>					
Cat	N-13	91.5	medium	smaller	No
	N-14	89.6	medium	smaller	No
	N-15	93.2	medium	smaller	No
	N-37	98.5	medium	smaller	No
	N-57	98.5	medium	smaller	No
	N-60	90.3	medium	smaller	No
<b>Farm Animals</b>					
Chicken	N-07	88.7	medium	smaller	No
	N-12	151.1	larger	smaller	No
	N-36	99.7	medium	smaller	No
	N-47	83.5	medium	smaller	No
Duck	N-28	88.4	medium	medium	No
Sheep	N-10	95.2	medium	medium	Photo
<b>Wild Animals</b>					
Bear	N-20	94.4	medium	larger	No
Other Bird	N-51	98.1	medium	smaller	No
Flamingo	N-21	98.4	medium	smaller	No
Reindeer	N-52	92.7	medium	larger	No
Squirrel	N-48	90.0	medium	smaller	No

**Figure 2: Value Village mug morphology in relation to animal type and size.**

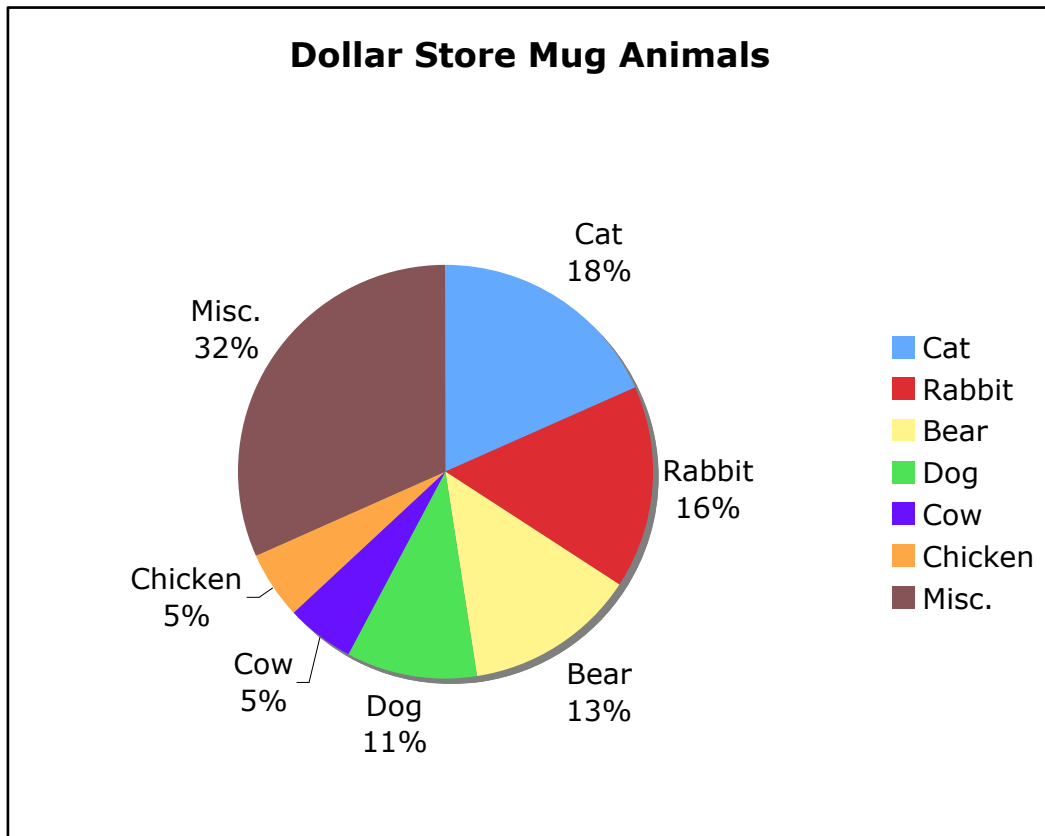
Animal	# of Mugs
Cat	7
Rabbit	6
Bear	5
Dog	4
Cow	2
Chicken	2
Duck	1
Dragonfly	1
Deer	1
Fish	1

Sheep	1
Scorpion	1
Monkey	1
Pig	1
Dolphin	1
Mouse	1
Bat	1
Bee	1

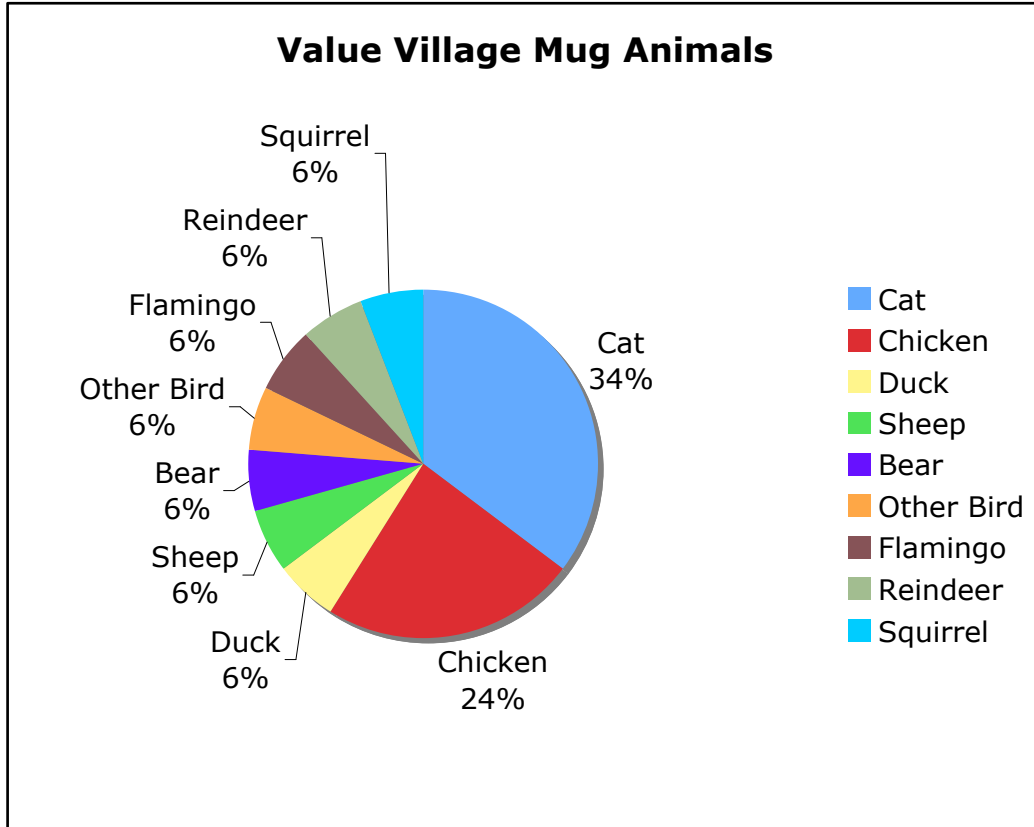
**Figure 3: Number of mugs per animal at dollar stores**

Animal	# of Mugs
Cat	6
Chicken	4
Duck	1
Sheep	1
Bear	1
Other Bird	1
Flamingo	1
Reindeer	1
Squirrel	1

**Figure 4: Number of mugs per animal at Value Village**



**Figure 5: Frequency of animal mugs at dollar stores.** 38 animal mugs = 7 cats, 6 rabbits, 5 bears, 4 dogs, 2 cows, 2 chickens, 12 miscellaneous animals (duck, dragonfly, deer, fish, sheep, scorpion, monkey, pig, dolphin, mouse, bat, and bee) 1 mug each.



**Figure 6: Frequency of animal mugs at Value Village.** 16 mugs = 6 cats, 4 chickens, 1 for duck, sheep, bear, black bird, flamingo, reindeer, and squirrel.

Site	Animal Mugs	Total Collected Mugs	Percentage
A	2	21	9.5
B	5	20	25
C	4	20	20
D	2	20	10
E	1	20	5
F	9	21	<b>42.9</b>
G	0	4	0
H	0	6	0
I	4	20	20
J	3	20	15
K	2	20	10
L	6	16	37.5
M	0	20	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>16.7</b>
N*	17	61	27.9

(most animal mugs of any store)

\*Value Village collection (non-dollarware)

**Figure 7: Number of animal mugs found at each store**



Figure 8: Example of a photographed animal image on specimen C-06. animal image. (<http://www.dollarware.org/C-06-big.JPG>)



Figure 9: Example of a non-photographed animal image on specimen I-17. (<http://www.dollarware.org/I-17-big.JPG>).

## **Discussion**

Cats are the most commonly depicted animals out of the entire collection of mugs featuring animals (13 out of 54 mugs). On dollar store mugs a high frequency of rabbit mugs (6 mugs) is also present. From the Value Village collection, chickens (4 mugs) are the second most commonly depicted animals after cats. This may be evidence of a hierarchy of animals and important aspects of human relationships with animals represented in dollarware.

Demand for mugs featuring cats may also represent the close social proximity between humans and cats, and the association of cats with domesticity. The high frequency of cat mugs does not show that cats exist more often than any other nonhuman animal on Earth. Instead, the special relationship cats share with humans and cats' status in human society compared to other animals' describes the high demand for cat mugs. Often considered as family members, cats and other domesticated companion animals can be involved in intense interpersonal relationships with humans. The comfort many humans find in relationships with cats or other companion animals is expressed in the popularity of these comfort mugs.

Edmund Leach describes the significance of social distance between humans and animals: "The more remote animals are the more edible, and the homonym meaning of the associated words become less taboo loaded as the social distance is increased...Moreover, as remoteness is increased, we finally reach, as in English, a category of unknown and therefore inedible creatures, and the pattern is then reversed." (p.60). Social distance between humans and cats is not wide. This reality can be represented in dollarware based on the popularity of cat mugs at dollar stores. However, the more edible chicken and cow, while still represented on mugs, are not represented as often as cats in society, and humans have fewer personal interactions with these animals.

Least commonly depicted animals (and those not once depicted) are those humans interact with the least. Animals featured only once on dollar store mugs are ducks, dragonflies, deer, fish, sheep, scorpions, monkeys, pigs, dolphins, mice, bats, and bees. Other animals that could be included in this list are rats, alligators, ostrich, eel, octopus, and prairie dogs. It is likely that social distance between these animals and humans has caused fewer mugs to be made featuring these animals. In none of these mugs are humans also depicted. This contrasts to 6 of the 13 cat mugs that also feature humans in the same image. This reinforces the association of cats with domesticity and interpersonal relationships humans have with cats.

Many of the animals on mugs are anthropomorphized. One of the best examples is mug J-12: Minnie and Mickey mouse in a Valentine's Day scene, Mickey offering chocolate to Minnie. From the Value Village collection, mug N-52 shows a reindeer raising a glass and saying "Cheers" from a bathtub. Among images of cats, anthropomorphizing is not as obvious. On each mug featuring cats, the animals display characteristics commonly associated with them such as curiosity (N-60), playfulness (I-06), servitude (B-14), innocence (B-15), and balance (F-12). All of these characteristics can be found both in cats and in humans.

Anthropomorphizing is often considered negative since it supposedly imposes human characteristics onto animals – characteristics they would not have otherwise. While this is the case for a few mugs, the fact that humans impose these characteristics onto animals at all is intriguing. Humans drink in these images of animals as living, feeling beings yet still focus on differences between humans and animals rather than similarities in every day society. Compared to the coffee beans or flowers featured on other mugs, humans and animals share fundamental biological characteristics and consciousness.

Humans and animals are interconnected as a result of evolution. Humans are animals. Agustin Fuentes writes in *The Humanity of Animals and the Animality of Humans: A View from Biological Anthropology inspired by J.M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello*, "I suggest a broad definition of *personhood*, in which commonality between humans and some other animals arises from similar physiologies and shared sensory modalities." (126). Compared to the coffee beans or flowers, animals embody a personhood that

is not limited to humans. Drinking from animal mugs may remind us of our biological link to the animal kingdom, help us explore how we associate human emotions and comfort with animals, and acknowledge a heritage of relating to members of other species.

The depiction of animals as societal symbols is a tradition common in many cultures. Claude Levi-Strauss writes in *Totemism*, "...The Nuer speak about natural species by analogy with their own social segments such as lineages, and the relation between a lineage and a totemic species is conceptualized on the model of...the relationship between collateral lineages descended from a common ancestor. The animal world is thus thought of in terms of the social world." The possibility of animal society apart from humanity is not so radical. Recognition of animal society is subtly communicated on dollar store and Value Village mugs that feature animals.

Finally, of all site assemblages, Dollarama has the highest percentage of animal mugs. Being the only chain store in the entire assemblage, Dollarama has stores across Canada. The same mugs found at Dollarama in Montreal should also be found at Dollarama in Saskatchewan showing a nation-wide demand for animal mugs.

Future research examining animal images on other house ware, in entertainment and popular culture, in advertising, and animals as sports team mascots would build on information gathered from the Dollarware Project. Increasing research into the use of animals for commercial purposes is also relevant. Continued anthropological research of animals as persons building on Fuentes' article is hopeful, and the involvement of other academic fields in studying this phenomenon is necessary.

## **References**

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**Appendix A: Description of Animal Images**

<b>Specimen</b>	<b>Description of Imagery</b> (labelled if image is a photograph)
A-10	Fish (orange, blue, yellow) surrounded by clams, fishing net, "Chowder" in blue above image.
A-17	Beagle wearing a pair of gold, wire-rimmed glasses, looking down.
B-12	Sheep (yellow) wearing a green hat, red squiggles in fur, red flower in mouth, "Baa."
B-14	Cat (long-haired) sitting looking up at the drinker, yellow eyes, white chest, white paws, brown fur, purple background. (Photo)
B-15	Cat (yellow) looking over shoulder, blue eyes, black spots, red background, "Meow."
B-17	Deer in mountainous, treed environment, ambiguous antlers/ears, looking at drinker. (Photo)
B-19	Scorpion (gold), blue background, golden stars on scorpion's back, "Scorpion Oct. 23-Nov. 21."
C-06	Dogs standing on hind legs, fighting with each other, teeth shown. (Photo).
C-08	Dragonfly (pink and yellow), pink background, "Delightful as a Dragonfly."
C-10	Bear (yellow teddy bear) reclining on purple and blue pillows. Looking up with hands behind head. Red patch sewn onto belly.
C-11	Bear (yellow teddy bear) with thin moustache and ear raised, standing, holding a tray with two drinking glasses, a bottle of champagne, and a rose.
D-08	Four dogs (blue, green, yellow, pink) with spots. Two wearing beaded necklaces, two others wearing flat collars, eyes wandering.
D-13	Two ducks (yellow) with orange beaks, smiling, black eye dots. Blue sky, green grass, white clouds, red flowers in background.
E-12	Bear (brown teddy bear) inside lower corner of window looking on a winter holiday scene three carolling humans. Candle inside window with bear.
F-01	Monkey looking up with hand on forehead, painted green background, monkey as the handle.
F-02	Rabbit (brown) standing up, using a shovel to dig in garden, wearing blue shorts, yellow shirt, blue background.
F-05	Five chickens (yellow) looking at drinker, hatching from blue, green, orange eggs featuring geometric designs. Wings raised, orange feet.
F-11	Pig (pink) with large eyelashes, smiling, looking up from a barn/house, blue background, pig as the handle.
F-12	Cat (orange, darker stripes and spots), tail raised, looking toward drinker, image on right side of the mug only. (Photo).
F-13	Rabbit (white) face takes up entire height of mug, one eye winking, pink flower next to left ear.
F-17	Cat face among ambiguous animal faces on teacher's mug, quilt-like with variety of images. "A Teacher Opens the Window to Tomorrow."
F-18	Cow (white with black spots), horns, no udders, tongue out, cross-eyed, "Moo" written twice.
F-20	Hamburger being eaten by Homer Simpson. Homer holding a hot dog on a skewer, steaks and hot dogs faintly in the background.
I-06	Two kittens (grey) playing with green ball of yarn, purple background.
I-15	Two cats (black) standing on jack-o-lanterns, hair raised, tail raised, yellow eyes looking at drinker. Halloween theme. Large yellow moon behind cats.
I-17	Three dolphins (grey) one jumping, one diving, another with only tail above water, sequence from right to left, ocean waves, white clouds, blue sky.
I-18	Three dogs (beagle, two terriers), two in soapy bath, green background

J-01	Cat (black) image among Halloween quilt icons. Bat and spider icons, too.
J-12	Two mice (similar to Mickey and Minnie mouse) outlined in a heart. Mickey offering Valentine's Day candy to surprised Minnie.
J-14	Bats flying in Halloween scene also featuring a ghost, mummy, and jack-o-lanterns.
K-08	Two roosters, one on each side of mug, green tails, red beaks, white necks, red and blue feathers, one foot raised, sunflowers around top of mug.
K-14	Five bees flying around one teapot and stacks of teacups. Black and white striped border along top of mug.
L-01	Bears (brown teddy bears) as part of Santa's Christmas sleigh. Flying in sleigh in blue night sky with lantern, golden horn, and wrapped gifts.
L-02	Bears (brown teddy bears) as part of Santa scene inside a home. Toy grey horse next to bear and Santa. Kids also in image.
L-03	Rabbit (white) standing inside pink tulip border, wearing a purple vest.
L-04	Rabbit (white) standing inside pink rose border, holding watering can, wearing blue dress.
L-05	Rabbit (white) standing inside yellow daisy border, wearing white dress
L-07	Rabbit (brown) wearing basket with eggs inside, looking around grass.
N-07	Four hens with twelve yellow chicks surrounding them, two bug flying.
N-10	Seven sheep (white) with bulging blue eyes standing next to each other, "I shopped and saved at the BRICK." "Friends & Family Sale." "Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies." <a href="http://www.thebrick.com">www.thebrick.com</a> . (Photo)
N-12	Five chicks (yellow) wearing tennis shoes flying around in light blue background. Stars with the number 10 inside them. "La Senza."
N-13	Two cats (red) in Christmas holiday scene with two humans.
N-14	Cat (white with black spots) lying down with four kittens looking from behind her. Red brick background.
N-15	Cat (grey and white) wearing red bow sitting outside of window looking into dining room. Cat looking at drinker. Red roses surround window.
N-20	Nine bears holding hands in Christmas scene. Three wearing Santa hats.
N-21	Flamingo (red and blue) in front of yellow sun with one foot raised. "Vallarta" written in ROYGB. Orange/green clouds.
N-28	Duck (yellow) smiling at drinker, orange wing, blue background with yellow hearts, purple flowers, and white swirls.
N-36	Three chicks (yellow). One hatching from an egg, two others watching an un-hatched egg.
N-37	Cat (white) lounging on red carpet inside an urban apartment. Woman with long red hair and sunglasses advertising "Lipton". Cityscape in background. Blue man looking out the window. (N-57 is the same mug).
N-47	Chicken body among onion, mushrooms, celery, and salt, "1 small chicken" written as part of "Chicken Soup" recipe.
N-48	Four squirrels (brown) seen from the side, red bellies, blue neck bows, paws in front, tail raised.
N-51	Four bird (black) flying over coastal scene with windmill, "Greece."
N-52	Reindeer (brown) with large antlers in bubble bath with fizzy drink in left hand. "Cheers" written in cursive on over side of mug.
N-57	Same mug as N-37.
N-60	Cat (black) looking outside from Christmas scene inside a house, girl decorating evergreen tree surrounded with gifts.