

# Paws & PAWNS

*Exploring*

Animal Chess Sets



Artists have taken inspiration from the natural world to reinterpret familiar chess pieces for centuries. Some draw on an animal's reputation to reimagine it as a chess piece—regal lions and powerful Tyrannosaurus Rexes, known as the kings of the jungle and dinosaurs respectively, appear as rulers in some sets. In other cases, artists subvert expectations, elevating meek or delicate creatures like mice or frogs to powerful players when they step—or hop—onto the chess board.

Though the animal kingdom is known for conflict between predator and prey, many of the sets feature a humorous perspective, showcasing pieces inspired by beloved pets or cartoon-like versions of beasts of the wild. Other sets serve as splendid reminders of the beautiful diversity of wildlife in a specific location like the ocean or a jungle.

*Paws and Pawns: Exploring Animal Chess Sets* displays a menagerie of animal-themed chess sets from around the world, demonstrating the enduring appeal of the animal kingdom to chess artists. Many of these are from the collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, while others are on loan from artists, members of Chess Collectors International, and local collectors.

– Emily Allred, Curator

Fig [A]



Fig [B]



Fig [C]



## Pandas' World

Maker  
Jordan

Year[s]  
c. late 1990s or  
early 2000s

King Size  
3 ½ in.

Material[s]  
Clay

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, formerly collection of Israel and Remi Raphaeli, Garden State Chess, NJ USA

With their black and white coloring, which helps them camouflage themselves in the wild, giant pandas are the perfect animals for chess pieces. In this set, they clutch pieces of bamboo, climbing to different heights. Bamboo makes up 99% of a panda's diet, and they can eat 26–84 pounds of bamboo in one day. Only a little over 1800 pandas remain in the wild in their home habitat in China. EA

# Dogs vs. Cats Chess Set

Maker  
S.I.A.B. UK

Year[s]  
c. 2010–2024

King Size  
4 ½ in.

Material[s]  
Ceramic

Collection of the  
World Chess Hall of Fame

Fig [B]



Fig [A]



Fig [C]



Fig [D]



Fig [E]



Fig [F]



Fig [G]



Fig [H]



Fig [I]



# Dinosaurs Chess Set

Maker  
**Maggie Dickmann**

Year[s]  
**2024**

King Size  
**2 in.**

Material[s]  
**Clay**

Collection of the  
World Chess Hall of Fame

Fig [B]



Fig [A]



Fig [C]



Green and purple dinosaurs battle in this Jurassic chess set. The Tyrannosaurus rex kings and queens rule over their Brontosaurus bishops, Pterodactyl knights, Triceratops rooks, and egg pawns. The creator, Maggie Dickmann, explains, "As adults, it's so easy to get caught up in the stress and the monotony of the daily grind. It's really important to our well-being to have a creative outlet of some sort, and often, the best option is to return to what brought us joy as children," writing that returning to her love of the polymer clay figurines of her childhood has allowed her to create this dino-mite chess set. *CH*

Fig [D]



# Animalier Chess Set

Maker  
**Artist unknown**

Year[s]  
**Early to mid-20th century**

King Size  
**2 ½ in.**

Material[s]  
**Ivory**

Collection of Jon Crumiller

Posed on ivory pedestals, the lions rule over giraffes, kangaroos, elephants, and monkeys. Each prepares to test the strength of its competitors. In early chess sets created in India, artists depicted the rooks as elephants. This set does the same, paying homage to that tradition. The title animalier refers to an artist specializing in creating realistic animal art. *CH*

Fig [E]



Fig [F]



Fig [G]



Fig [H]



Fig [A]



Fig [B]



Fig [C]



Fig [D]



Fig [E]



Fig [F]



# Chess Set, No. 27 of 200

Maker[s]

Ronzan Giuseppe  
and Figaro Jungla

Year[s]

c. 1932–1942

King Size

5 ½ in.

Material[s]

Ceramic

Collection of Mary Scannell

Enjoy a safari at home with this savannah-inspired chess set! Look out for the king of the jungle and his lioness queen ruling over the cheetahs, zebras, elephants, and monkeys vying for space on this wild board. Artist Giuseppe Ronzan designed and produced the set in Bassano del Grappa, a place in northern Italy known for its beautiful ceramics. In 1939, Ronzan was one of three brothers who established the ceramics company Ronzan & Sons in Bassano. *CH*

# Sea Life Chess Set

Maker  
Rachel Brennan

Year[s]  
2024

King Size  
2  $\frac{1}{8}$  in.

Board Size  
10 x 10 in.

Material  
Acrylic

Courtesy of Rachel Brennan

Rachel Brennan's work as a volunteer in the Sea Turtle Care Center at the South Carolina Aquarium inspired this marine chess set. The Sea Turtle Care Center rehabilitates sick and injured sea turtles, and Brennan created this set as a fundraiser for the non-profit organization. She modeled each piece after sea life with sea turtles as the kings. Brennan has created these boards with many designs on their bases, including sea turtles, dolphins, and manatees. Around the border of the board, she included a quote from marine ecologist and author Carl Safina celebrating the inspiring nature of the sea. EA



Fig [A]



Fig [B]



Fig [C]



Fig [D]



Fig [E]

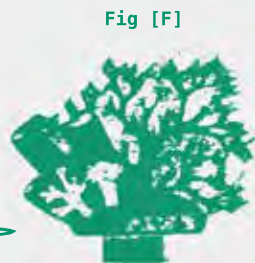


Fig [F]



Rachel Brennan, *Sea Life Chess Set*, 2024, King size: 2  $\frac{1}{8}$  in., Board: 10 x 10 in., Acrylic, Courtesy of Rachel Brennan; Rachel Brennan, *Chess Board*, 2024, 10 x 10 in., Acrylic, Courtesy of Rachel Brennan; Rachel Brennan, *Chess Board*, 2024, 10 x 10 in., Acrylic, Courtesy of Rachel Brennan

"For each of us, then, the challenge and opportunity is to cherish all life as the gift it is, envision it whole, seek to know it truly, and undertake—with our minds, hearts, and hands—to restore its abundance. It is said that where there's life there's hope, and so no place can inspire us with more hopefulness than that great, life-making sea—that singular, wondrous ocean covering the blue planet."

— Carl Safina



# Etched Chess Set

Maker  
**Sophie Binder**

Year[s]  
**2019**

King Size  
**1  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.**

Board Size  
**2 x 12 x 12 in.**

Material[s]  
**Wood**

Courtesy of Sophie Binder

Of her chess set, Binder states, *"Since I started working on pyrography art pieces, I always thought it would be interesting to transfer this technique to a chess board. I liked the idea of focusing on the board first, and to create the contrast between the colors on the board and the pieces, just with burned lines. African art was a great inspiration to create these stylized animals within tight squares. I have always liked its bold lines, and somewhat whimsical translation of reality. The piece of maple I chose to burn the board was not 'perfect' (not totally square), which is exactly what fitted this artistic style. And African Padauk became an obvious choice as a mounting board for the set."*



# Regency Penwork Chess Board

Maker  
**Unknown British artist**

Year[s]  
**c. late-18th-early-19th century**

Board Size  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.**

Material[s]  
**Wood**

Collection of Tom Gallegos



Surrounded by a lush floral border, each square on this chess board is a miniature work of art. Some show views of faraway lands, while others portray pastoral scenes close to home. Animals, real and fantastic, roam across some squares. The board is a beautiful example of penwork, an artistic technique popular in the late 18th and early 19th century. At that time, a growing middle class in Great Britain became a new audience for decorative art, and the nation's trade connections with India and China led to an enthusiasm for artwork depicting those regions. *EA*



From top-left clockwise: Maggie Dickmann, **Dinosaurs Chess Set**, 2024, King size: 2 in., Clay, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame; Frank Kneller, **Porcelain Mouse Chess Set**, Mid-20th century, King size: 3 ½ in., Ceramic and glass, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn; S.I.A.B. UK, **Dogs vs. Cats Chess Set**, c. 2010-2024, King size: 4 ½ in., Ceramic, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame; Unknown Israeli artist, **Dogs vs. Cats**, c. late 20th century-early 21st century, King size: 3 in., Ceramic, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, formerly collection of Israel and Remi Raphaelli, Garden State Chess, NJ USA; Christine Y Reyes of Ycceramics, **Ceramic Animal Chess Set**, 2024, King size: white: 2 ½ in, black: 2 ½ in., Ceramic, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame





Ronzan Giuseppe and Figaro Jungla, Chess Set, No. 27 of 200, c. 1932-1942, King size: 5 ½ in., Board: 26 x 26 in., Ceramic and wood, Collection of Mary Scannell

# Dogs vs. Cats

Maker  
**Unknown Israeli  
artist**

Year[s]  
**c. late 20th century  
– early 21st century**

King Size  
**3 in.**

Material[s]  
**Ceramic**

Collection of the World  
Chess Hall of Fame, formerly  
collection of Israel and  
Remi Raphaelli, Garden State  
Chess, NJ USA

Are you a cat person or a dog person? This artist reimagines the perennial debate about what makes a superior pet in a playful set featuring cartoonish versions of cats and dogs. Perhaps this game will end in a stalemate. Chess Collectors International members Israel Raphaelli and Remi Raphaelli of Garden State Chess purchased this set from an artist at an art festival in Ness Ziona, Israel. EA

Fig [A]



Fig [B]



Fig [C]



Fig [D]



Fig [E]



Fig [F]



Fig [G]



Fig [H]



Fig [I]



Fig [J]



Fig [K]



Fig [L]



# Dog Chess Set

Maker  
**Franz Bergman**

Year[s]  
**Late 19th or early  
20th century**

King Size  
**3 ½ in.**

Material[s]  
**Cold-painted bronze**

Collection of Jon Crumiller

Though small in stature, dachshunds rule in this charming set produced by Franz Bergman. The breed, whose long bodies and short stubby legs enabled them to hunt badgers and other prey in burrows, was common in Europe during the late 19th century as working dogs and pets. Even royalty like Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of England owned dachshunds. Their newfound popularity may have made them a natural subject for this humorous chess set. EA

# Porcelain Mouse Chess Set

Maker  
**Frank Kneller**

Year[s]  
**Mid-20th century**

King Size  
**3  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.**

Material[s]  
**Ceramic and glass**

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn

Fig [A]



Fig [B]



Fig [C]



Mischievous mice comprise the pieces of this porcelain chess set created by Frank Kneller. Kneller, who lived in London, was an amateur painter of horses who later created abstract paintings. He also began designing mouse-themed porcelain chess sets after visiting the Chelsea Pottery, a studio in London where people could learn to make ceramics. Kneller's fascination with creating rodent-themed chess sets earned him the nickname "Frank Mouse." His sets feature inlaid glass for the eyes, and while this one includes shades of white, black, and gold, he adorned others with brilliant colors. EA

# Owls' World

Maker  
**Unknown Belgian artist**

Year[s]  
**c. late 20th century**

King Size  
**1  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.**

Material[s]  
**Ceramic**

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, formerly collection of Israel and Remi Raphaelli, Garden State Chess, NJ USA

Owls are sophisticated predators associated with the concepts of wisdom and intelligence, making them natural fits as subjects for chess pieces. However, these pieces are much more comical than their wild counterparts—the bishops have mugs on their heads as armor, and owls peek out of the tops of the trees as rooks. EA

Fig [D]



Fig [E]



Fig [F]



Fig [G]



Fig [H]



Fig [I]



# Pig Chess Set

Maker  
**Franz Bergman**

Year[s]  
**Late 19th or early 20th century**

King Size  
**3  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.**

Material[s]  
**Cold-painted bronze**

Collection of Jon Crumiller

In the mid-19th century, Vienna, Austria, became a center for creating bronze sculptures. Franz Bergman, the producer of this set, owned a small factory there. Animal subjects, like the pig and dog-themed chess sets in this case, proved highly popular with consumers. Bergman's son continued the tradition of bronze-making, taking over the factory after his father's death. EA

Fig [A]



Fig [B]



Fig [C]



Fig [D]



Fig [E]



Fig [F]



# Ceramic Animal Chess Set

Maker  
**Christine Y Reyes**

Year[s]  
**c. 2024**

King Size  
**white: 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  in.  
black: 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.**

Material[s]  
**Ceramic**

Collection of the  
World Chess Hall of Fame

Fig [G]



Fig [H]



Fig [I]



*"As a ceramic artist, animals have always been a major inspiration for my work. Their beauty and uniqueness, combined with my childhood love for chess, sparked the idea to merge these two passions into a whimsical and artistic chess set."*

Artist Christine Y Reyes of Ycceramics states

# Paws & Pawns

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Animal Chess Sets

CURATED BY

**EMILY ALLRED**

CURATOR, WORLD CHESS HALL OF FAME

ON VIEW

**JANUARY 30**

THROUGH

**AUGUST 31, 2025**

Front cover: Franz Bergman, **Pig Set**, Late 19th or early 20th century, Collection of Jon Crumiller; Unknown Japanese artist, **Bird Set**, c. 1900, Collection of Jon Crumiller; Franz Bergman, **Dog Chess Set**, Late 19th or early 20th century, Collection of Jon Crumiller; Jordan, **Pandas' World**, c. late 1990s or early 2000s, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, formerly collection of Israel and Remi Raphaelli, Garden State Chess, NJ USA; Artist unknown, **Animalier Chess Set**, Early to mid-20th century, Collection of Jon Crumiller; Artist unknown, **Dogs vs. Cats**, Date unknown, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame; Rachel Brennan, **Sea Life Chess Set**, 2024, Courtesy of Rachel Brennan

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The World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) acknowledges Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefield and Rex Sinquefield, whose generous support have made all of our exhibitions possible.

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All photos by Austin Fuller

The WCHOF sincerely apologizes if anyone was omitted from the acknowledgments. We will update any further printings.

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