

The Arts Catalyst

PRESS RELEASE

Rachel Mayeri

Primate Cinema: Apes as Family

Abandon Normal Devices Festival, Liverpool, 29 September–2 October 2011

The Arts Catalyst, London, 19 October–13 November 2011

Nottingham Contemporary (screening), 7pm Wednesday 7 December 2011

In the Budongo Trail enclosure at Edinburgh Zoo three chimpanzees sit watching a video, engrossed in a chimp-centred drama made especially for them by video artist Rachel Mayeri, the first artist to make a film expressly for chimpanzees.

In *Primate Cinema: Apes as Family*, the artist imagines a primate social drama in a contemporary urban context and shows this to a chimpanzee audience. Her two-screen video installation juxtaposes the drama enacted by humans in the guise of apes (of a young female city ape befriending a group of outsiders) with mesmerising footage of the reactions of its ape audience at Edinburgh Zoo.

“As the watchers of the watching chimps, we perceive - or we imagine - fascination, puzzlement, and flashes of anger in their responses. Sited in different spaces in Los Angeles and Edinburgh we are never sure whether we are seeing a lab, zoo, wildlife park, rumpus room or post-apocalyptic landscape inhabited by half chimp/half humans,” explains The Arts Catalyst’s curator, Rob La Frenais. “Mayeri’s intriguing and amusing story-and-response structure contains dark undercurrents in its contemplation of the lives of our captive close relatives.”

Giving chimpanzees television to watch is not new: chimps in captivity all over the world are often shown TV as form of environmental enrichment. To make *Primate Cinema: Apes as Family*, artist Rachel Mayeri collaborated with comparative psychologist Dr Sarah-Jane Vick, testing different styles and genres of film to gauge chimps’ responses and discussing issues around cognition and communication in research primates. Mayeri and Vick also explored the idea of whether chimps ‘lose themselves’ in what they are watching as readily as humans.

Rachel Mayeri is a Los Angeles-based artist working at the intersection of art and science exploring subjects ranging from the history of special effects to the human animal. In 2009 her *Primate Cinema: Baboons as Friends* (2007), a film noir re-enactment of a baboon social drama with human actors, was presented by The Arts Catalyst as part of *Interspecies: artists collaborating with animals* in London and Manchester. The leading electronic arts festival – Prix Ars Electronica – awarded *Primate Cinema: Apes as Family* an honorary mention and a version of the video was previewed at O.K Cyberarts 11 in Linz, Austria, from 1–6 September 2011.

Primate Cinema: Apes as Family, a collaboration between Rachel Mayeri and Dr Sarah Jane Vick, has been commissioned by The Arts Catalyst and made with financial support from a Wellcome Trust Arts Award, Arts Council England and the Aix-Marseille Institute of Advanced Studies.

Events:

Simian Safari – an AND salon and bus tour hosted by Rob La Frenais with Rachel Mayeri and Sarah Jane Vick, 3-5pm Sunday **2 October** 2011, Knowsley Safari Park, Merseyside. Admission free, booking essential, www.andfestival.org.uk

Cinema as Primatology – symposium with Rachel Mayeri and Sarah Jane Vick, 4-6pm Tuesday **18 October** 2011, The Crypt, St James Church, Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0EA. Admission free, booking advised, <http://primatecinema.eventbrite.com>

Cinema for Primates: Apes as Family, screening and talk with curator Rob La Frenais, 7pm Wednesday **7 December** 2011, Nottingham Contemporary. Online booking www.nottinghamcontemporary.org

For further information, images and interviews please contact Janette Scott on janettescottartspr@gmail.com or +44 (0)7966 486156.

Notes to Editors

- 29 September–2 October 2011** AND Festival, 34 Slater Street, Liverpool L1 4BX, open 11am-6pm, admission free www.andfestival.org.uk

19 October–13 November 2011 The Arts Catalyst, 50-54 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1M 5PS, open 12noon-6pm Tuesday to Saturday, 12noon-8pm Thursdays, admission free

7pm 7 December 2011 Nottingham Contemporary, screening and curator talk, admission free, booking essential, www.nottinghamcontemporary.org

Spring / summer 2012 Edinburgh, venue tbc,
- Rachel Mayeri** is a Los Angeles-based artist working at the intersection of science and art. *Primate Cinema: Baboons as Friends*, produced in collaboration with primatologist Deborah Forster, received a semi-finalist honour for the International Science and Engineering Visualization Challenge (sponsored by NSF and The Journal Science) and showed at Cornerhouse, Manchester, A Foundation London and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark. *Stories from the Genome: An Animated History of Reproduction* was supported by Creative Capital Foundation and won an International Media Art Prize, sponsored by ZKM. Mayeri has programmed a DVD of videos by artists and scientists entitled *Soft Science* <<http://www.soft-science.org>>. As Guest Curator at the Museum of Jurassic Technology, she contributed to an exhibit on the history of special effects, *Miracles and Disasters in Renaissance and Baroque Theater Mechanics*. Her writing on artists' experiments with science documentary was published in *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience*, edited by Beatriz da Costa and Kavita Philip (MIT Press. 2008). Mayeri has also shown at Los Angeles Filmforum, The Center for Art and Media, Germany, and P.S.1/MoMA in New York. She is currently Associate Professor of Media Studies at Harvey Mudd College.
- The Arts Catalyst** commissions contemporary art that experimentally and critically engages with science. It produces provocative, playful, risk-taking artists' projects to spark dynamic conversations about our changing world and seeks new ways to involve artists, scientists and the wider public in a discourse about the impact of science in society. www.artscatalyst.org
- The Wellcome Trust** is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. It supports the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. The Trust's breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. It is independent of both political and commercial interests. www.wellcome.ac.uk

5. **Edinburgh Zoo's** Budongo Trail is a world-class chimp enclosure that sets new standards of animal husbandry; it results in more natural behaviour from the chimps and changes the way they are seen. It is also a living showcase for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's conservation work in the Budongo Forest, Uganda. The building has been designed to allow the chimpanzees to make choices, with different light and humidity levels to choose from, different nesting sites, the choice of being inside or outside, alone or in the group. Watching television is not normally part of the chimpanzee enrichment used by Edinburgh Zoo, more natural enrichment is normally preferred; however the RZSS was delighted to take part in this art/science project.
6. **Abandon Normal Devices** (AND) is an energetic festival of new cinema and digital culture. The festival takes place annually in Liverpool and Manchester with a regional programme that erupts across Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire. Abandon Normal Devices is a 2012 inspired festival, funded by Legacy Trust UK and part of WE PLAY, the Northwest cultural legacy programme for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. www.andfestival.org.uk
7. **Ars Electronica** represents a comprehensive approach to confronting techno-cultural phenomena <http://new.aec.at/prix/en/gewinner/>