



## **PRESS RELEASE**

THE ARTS CATALYST & SHAPE present

**Specimens to Superhumans** - Science, disability and ethics in contemporary art

### **Labyrinth of Living Exhibits**

**12 May 2011, Hunterian Museum, London**

Artists: Katherine Araniello, Brian Catling, Sinéad O'Donnell, Aaron Williamson

Panellists: Dr Sam Alberti, Prof Brian Hurwitz. Chair: Richard Hollingham

### **Alternative Ways of Thinking**

**10 June 2011, The Times Cheltenham Science Festival**

#### ***Exploring the Autistic Mind***

Jon Adams, Prof Simon Baron-Cohen, Ben Connors and Gabriel Hardistry-Miller

#### ***3D Thinkers in a 2D World***

Benedict Phillips

*Specimens to Superhumans* is a new series of events curated by The Arts Catalyst and Shape exploring contemporary issues around biomedical science, disability and ethics, and how these are explored, represented and critiqued in art. *Labyrinth of Living Exhibits* and *Alternative Ways of Thinking* are the first two events, taking place at London's Hunterian Museum and The Times Cheltenham Science Festival, the series is supported by a Wellcome Trust People Award.

*Labyrinth of Living Exhibits* considers specimens and curiosities through infiltrating and responding to the exotic and disturbing collection of London's Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons. Disabled artists Aaron Williamson, Sinéad O'Donnell, Brian Catling and Katherine Araniello perform as 'living exhibits', commissioned to respond to the museum's collection of medical and surgical specimens and curiosities that reflect the lived history of disability and physical impairment. These performances are curated by Aron Williamson, who along with Araniello often performs as The Disabled Avant-Garde Today! using performance and contemporary art to boldly confront perceptions of disability.

Following the performance, there will be a panel discussion chaired by the BBC's Science Correspondent Richard Hollingham with artists Aaron Williamson and Katherine Araniello, Director of the Hunterian Museum, Dr Sam Alberti and Professor Brian Hurwitz D'Oyly Carte Chair of Medicine and the Arts, King's College, London. Their discussion will draw on the historical, political and artistic perspectives to explore how doctors are trained today and could be trained in the future. The panel will consider the role of disabled people in this process and how the arts and medical humanities can add a new dimension to medical training.

In *Alternative Ways of Thinking* at The Times Cheltenham Science Festival autism and dyslexia are the focus of two events; *Exploring the Autistic Mind* and *3D Thinkers in a 2D World*.

At a time when the media frequently feature stories about screening for or even 'curing' autism, presenting it as an affliction or disease, *Exploring the Autistic Mind* investigates how people with autism can lead full lives, often excelling at science, art or music. The panel, including Simon Baron-Cohen, Director of the Autism Research Centre and Professor of Psychiatry at Cambridge University, discusses aspects of creativity and the autistic mind with artist and geologist, Jon Adams who has Asperger's Syndrome; and artist-activist Ben Connors and Gabriel Hardistry-Miller, a non-verbal man with autism, who together are co-founders of Pig Pen, a regular night for artists, musicians and people on the autism spectrum.

*3D Thinkers in a 2D World* is a humorous and thought-provoking performance in which artist Benedict Phillips unleashes his dyslexic side highlighting our presumptions about intelligence, communication and perception, unravelling the numerous misconceptions surrounding dyslexia and presenting the unusual advantages it brings.

Later in 2011, *Specimens to Superhumans* will present two further events. Firstly, investigating the obvious but rarely explored connection between aging and disability, through representations of ageing in science, society and art. Then, as we lead up to the Olympics and Paralympics, an event focusing on the relationship between the use of technological enhancements (from performance-enhancing drugs to surgery, genetic modification, and super-prosthetics) to create "post human cyborgs" and the implications of this for disabled people.

*Specimens to Superhumans* is supported by a Wellcome Trust People Award, curated and produced by The Arts Catalyst and Shape in partnership with Hunterian Museum, London and The Times Cheltenham Science Festival.

**For further information, interviews or images please contact Janette Scott on [janettescottartspr@gmail.com](mailto:janettescottartspr@gmail.com), [press@artscatalyst.org](mailto:press@artscatalyst.org) or call 07966 486156.**

### **Notes to Editors**

**1. *Labyrinth of Living Exhibits*:** Thursday 12 May 2011. Performances: 6.15-7.30pm. Panel discussion: 7.45-9pm. Hunterian Museum, The Royal College of Surgeons of England, 35-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PE.

Free event but booking essential: [www.llehunterian.eventbrite.com](http://www.llehunterian.eventbrite.com). The panel discussion is British Sign Language interpreted and supported by a palantypist.

**2. *Alternative Ways of Thinking*** at The Times Cheltenham Science Festival. ***Exploring the Autistic Mind*** Friday 10 June 2011, 4.30-5.30pm, Town Hall, Cheltenham. Tickets: £7 (£6 concs). To book: 01242 505444. [www.cheltenhamfestivals.com](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com). Wheelchair access to entrance via a ramp.

**3D Thinkers in a 2D World** Friday 10 June 8-9pm, Town Hall, Cheltenham. Tickets £10 (concs £8). To book: 01242 505444 or [www.cheltenhamfestivals.com](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com)

**NOTE:** a limited number of special concession tickets at £5 for each event are available online [www.autisticmind.eventbrite.com](http://www.autisticmind.eventbrite.com)

**3. Hunterian Museum** John Hunter's collection was purchased by the government in 1799, and given to the Company (later The Royal College) of Surgeons.  
[www.rcseng.ac.uk/museums](http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/museums)

**4. The Times Cheltenham Science Festival 2011** now in its tenth year, the festival is one of the four Cheltenham Festivals. This year's festival promises to explore the wonders of science from the compelling to the controversial.  
[www.cheltenhamfestivals.com](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com)

**5. Shape** is a disability-led arts organisation, working to improve access to culture for disabled people. One of their key aims is to see more high quality practice by disabled artists. They do this by opening up opportunities to a diverse range of artists, while supporting them to develop their professional practice.  
[www.shapearts.org.uk](http://www.shapearts.org.uk)

**6. 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 direction and impact of science in society.  
[www.artscatalyst.org](http://www.artscatalyst.org)

**7. 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](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk)