

Rachel Mayeri, Primate Cinema: Apes as Family

2 August to 2 September 2012, open daily 10am-5pm

Edinburgh Art Festival, admission free

Sculpture Court, Edinburgh College of Art, 74 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9DF

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. Filmed 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 from Stirling University. They tested different styles and genres of film with Edinburgh’s chimps to gauge their responses and to explore issues around cognition and communication in research primates and the notion 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*. The leading electronic arts festival – Prix Ars Electronica – awarded *Primate Cinema: Apes as Family* an honorary mention in 2011.

Primate Cinema: Apes as Family was commissioned by The Arts Catalyst (www.artscatalyst.org) and is presented as part of Edinburgh Art Festival (<http://www.edinburghartfestival.com>) and made with financial support from a Wellcome Trust Arts Award, Arts Council England and the Aix-Marseille Institute of Advanced Studies.

Events:

5-6.30pm Friday 3 August 2012, Cinema as Primatology – panel discussion with artists Rachel Mayeri and Andrea Row, chaired by curator Rob La Frenais. Edinburgh College of Art, admission free, booking advised, <http://cinemaasprimatology.eventbrite.com>

6-10pm Thursday 23 August, Art Late South – a free evening of tour, late openings and events at Edinburgh Art Festival venues with live music and performances. Free to attend, booking advised <http://artlatesouth2012.eventbrite.co.uk/>

3.30-4pm Friday 24 August, Festival Detour with Gary McNair – one-off performance by theatre director and performer Gary MacNair in response to Rachel Mayeri's installation. Free event online booking essential <http://festivaldetoursgarymcnair.eventbrite.co.uk/>

For further information, images and interviews please contact Jo Fells 020 7251 8567 or jo.fells@artscatalyst.org

Notes to Editors

1. **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.

2. **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

3. **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

4. **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.