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The Animal Gaze Returned

Following the success of the first **Animal Gaze** symposium three years ago, London Metropolitan University presents **The Animal Gaze Returned** - a second symposium on contemporary art and animal-human studies to take place **27-28 October 2011** at the university's School of Fine Art, Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Media & Design, in Whitechapel, London (UK).

[To book a place at the symposium, please click here.](#)

The symposium is accompanied by an exhibition of contemporary art at the Faculty's gallery space in Central House, directly opposite the world-famous Whitechapel Art Gallery.

The focus of the 2011 event is on contemporary art and animal-human studies, drawing its impetus and remit from the original symposium held here at the Cass in 2008. The speaker programme and panels are drawn from artists and academics. We expect an international gathering, timed as this event is to partner others taking place in Europe and Canada this autumn.

The Animal Gaze Returned's theme of artistic engagement with animality takes its cue from the current economic climate affecting UK universities - a through-route attempt by contemporary artists, curators, academics and arts administrators to engage with professional art practice in ways that directly intersect with the academic arena of animal-human studies.

Speakers include Professor Steve Baker (UCLAN), Rikke Hansen (London Metropolitan), Lucy Kimbell (Oxford), Suky Best (RCA), Professor David Wood (Vanderbilt), Kira O'Reilly, Dr Johanna Hallsten (Loughborough), Professor Mysoon Risz (Toledo) and Professor Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir (Valand). Two panels will discuss recent video and photography work concerning animals.

Contributions will include papers on art collaborations with animals and pedagogy; art and industrial farming; bird flight and the invention of cinema; a night with rats in the service of art; animal architects in the Ganges-Brahmaputra river delta; the vanishing point at which species meet; censorship over animal issues in art's so-called 'zone of freedom'; the urban soundscape and the relationships we form with our animal cohabitants.

Catering on both days of the symposium **The Animal Gaze Returned** is meat-free. Vegan and special diets will also be catered for.

The Animal Gaze Returned is proud to partner [Minding Animals 2012](#) and [Interactive Futures '11: Animal Influences](#).



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The Animal Gaze Returned

DAY 1 Oct 27th, 2011

10.00 Professor Malcolm Gillies, Vice-Chancellor of London Metropolitan University

10.15 Lucy Kimbell (Oxford), artist and designer

One Night with Rats in the Service of Art

10.40 Audience Discussion

11.00 Coffee

11.35 Keynote: Professor Steve Baker (UCLAN)

Animal as Medium

12.20 Audience Discussion

12.45 Lunch

14.00 Professor Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir (Valand), artist

Vanishing Point: Where Species Meet

14.30 Suky Best (RCA)

The Observation of Flight: Birds and the Invention of Cinema

15.00 Audience Discussion

15.30 Tea

16.00 Professor Olivier Richon (RCA), artist

The Animal, Mimicry and the Mouth

16.30 Audience discussion

17.30 Private View of The Animal Gaze Returned exhibition in the Central House Gallery

DAY 2 Oct 28th, 2011

10.00 Keynote: Professor David Wood (Vanderbilt), artist

Animal Architects: The Bangladeshi Sand Crab

10.45 Audience Discussion

11.00 Coffee

11.30 Professor Mysoon Rizk (Toledo)

Screen Play: Ants and Other Animals in David Wojnarowicz's 'A Fire in My Belly'

12.00 Rikke Hansen (London Met)

The "Absent Presence" of Animals in Modernist Aesthetics

12.30 Audience Discussion

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Kira O'Reilly, artist

Contingent and partial bodies within and without the laboratory

14.30 Dr Johanna Hallsten (Loughborough), artist

Chirp, Tweet, Tweet, Chirp, Tweet: On Communing with Others

15.00 Audience Discussion

15.20 Tea

16.00 Dr Anat Pick (UEL)

Attention and Observation in the Video Works of Chen Sheinberg

16.30 Audience discussion

17.00 End of symposium.

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The Animal Gaze Returned

Speakers at the symposium include the following. Abstracts of all papers will appear here as and when received.

[Professor Steve Baker](#), University of Central Lancashire *Animal as Medium*

What is the nature of contemporary artists' interest in animals? Might that interest, at least to a certain degree, be in the animal as medium? To put this a little more clearly, is the animal the medium in which these artists are working?

These questions are asked specifically with reference to Rosalind Krauss's influential discussion of "art in the age of the post-medium condition." Krauss locates the historical emergence of the post-medium condition in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a reaction by artists against the "militantly reductive modernism" associated with Clement Greenberg. The advent of practices such as video art, mixed-media installation and institutional critique at that time would "shatter the notion of medium-specificity," leaving Krauss in no doubt that "we now inhabit a post-medium age."

In a characteristically complex art-historical move, Krauss discusses the post-medium condition of contemporary art while maintaining the term medium to characterize its various new manifestations. She does not herself discuss the animal as medium, but her argument does not seem to preclude the idea. My own interest is to consider what might shift, or become thinkable, if the animal (and here, contra Derrida, it is very much "the animal" rather than "animals") could be thought of as medium rather than subject matter. How could this be articulated? How would it work, and what sense would it make, when applied to artists who still work with relatively conventional media as well as to those whose practices take less familiar forms? And how does the idea of animal-as-medium sit alongside other forms of thinking about animals?

[David Wood](#), W Alton Jones Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University (Nashville, USA) *Animal Architects: The Bangladeshi Sand Crab*

[Suky Best](#), artist, Royal College of Art *The Observation of Flight: Birds and the Invention of Cinema*

A brief history of the invention of cinema and how closely linked it is to technical advances created especially to observe the flight of birds. J E Marey and his advances in the capture of movement. How advances in technology continue to use bird flight to prove the veracity of the image. To show an animation made in response to these histories.

Kira O'Reilly, artist

Contingent and partial bodies within and without the laboratory

Interkingdoms, tinkering kingdoms and tinkering with kingdoms, the contemporary 'new' media of live and living materials within biological arts practice both explore and scrutinise through the matter of 'matter' the emergence of materials and knowledge systems from the life sciences and their attendant technologies. These tanglings and entanglings of techné and biomedica across, betwixt and between contexts of biological laboratories, domestic spaces, art spaces and outdoor spaces inform much of Kira O'Reilly's current art practice and research. These will be presented as modest provocations that unmoor living materials and biological practices from their defining disciplinary frameworks and render them mobile, articulating and performing. Citing key works from visual arts history, biotechnology history and current art practices, Kira will discuss her own practice of developing and participating in co-emerging contingent and partial bodies within and without the laboratory. These will include pigs and tails, raucous spiders, deeply unstable skeletal muscle cell cultures, filigree fungi, silken architectures, getting into the sterile hood and loitering at bus stops; gazing and peering, walking and falling and getting egg on her face.

Mysoon Rizk, Associate Professor of Art History, Contemporary Art,
University of Toledo (Ohio, USA)

Screen Play: Ants and Other Animals in David Wojnarowicz's 'A Fire in My Belly'

In late 2010, the world's largest museum complex, the Washington, DC-based Smithsonian Institution, censored David Wojnarowicz's *A Fire in My Belly* (1986-87). Nearly a quarter century before, the American artist explored the luxury of being able to "just saunter over" the border to Mexico and Mexico City, to shoot most of this unfinished Super-8 film, which includes footage of fire ants swarming a Catholic crucifix on the ancient grounds of Teotihuacan. Ostensibly an articulation of traumas involved in growing up "queer in america," as Wojnarowicz puts it, the work raises a broad range of ontological questions.

Apart from ants and humans, however, the debates responding to the censorship controversy mention no other species, despite the countless numbers on view, including: companies of horses and dogs (with cowboys), driving cattle, goats, sheep, and pigs to slaughter; roosters routinely sacrificed for cockfighting, bulls for the bullring, as well as captive animals in the name of circus entertainment; not to mention "wild" Mexican desert reptiles (e.g., lizards, snakes) and Mesoamerican serpent imagery. The purposeful voyeurism of *A Fire in My Belly* underscores political realities and economic disparities alongside a primitive and pervasive perpetration of latent, theatrical, and actual violence on mostly alienated bodies, especially those of animals.

Olivier Richon, Professor of Photography, Royal College of Art,
The Animal. Mimicry and the Mouth

Some animals, like the monkey or the parrot became allegories of representation, mimicry, repetition and depiction from the Classical age onwards. Yet what is the function of mimicry and how can we distinguish the allegorical use of an animal from the biological manifestations of mimetism?

Imitation implies a merging with what is being imitated. I become what surrounds me and I become what I imitate. Mimetism is predicated upon a form of incorporation. It has an oral dimension where the mouth becomes an instrument for knowing and seeing. Is this animal seeing, and is there an oral drive at the heart of mimicry that brings to the fore a cannibalistic drive for images and representations?

Such questions will be discussed with reference to Roger Caillois's texts on mimetism, Salvador Dali's notion of cannibalism and early psychoanalytic investigations of the oral drive.

Dr Johanna Hällsten, artist, Loughborough University

Chirp, Tweet, Tweet, Chirp, Tweet: On Communing with Others

The paper stems from an interest in the perpetual cycle of translation taking place between us, and the environment we find ourselves within. We enter and exit communicative situations continuously from the moment we awake to the minute we fall asleep. They are mediated and shared and difficult to distinguish as separate events. Language plays a vital role in this relation and process of communication, however, what is of interest here is not language per se but the sound, the aural aspects of the relationship in the translation process.

This soundspace is shared with others, both human and animal. This paper will concentrate on the urban soundscape and the relationships we form with our animal cohabitants. As we move and inhabit non-places on a daily basis we could be said to trespass and occupy our animal neighbours spaces and pollute their homes. We share space, we regulate and orientate ourselves to their sonic behaviours without even realising, and so are they to our aural actions. There is a mutual interaction and crossing of sonic boundaries, which creates interesting interplays but also situations wherein dispute and disintegration can quickly occur.

This paper asks whether there are perceptual commons that allow for communing with the Other? Furthermore, whether in that sharing, there is intrinsically always a mistranslation, and only through that mistranslation can we mediate and share the space in a meaningful way.

Professor Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir, artist, Valand School of Art (Gothenburg, Sweden)

Vanishing Point: Where Species Meet

Vanishing Point: Where Species Meet is the title of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's most recent artwork, which will feature in the exhibition *The Animal Gaze Returned*. The title, which references Donna Haraway's book *When Species Meet*, pinpoints significant ambiguities in meetings between human and animal. The focus of this artwork is the attempt by the artist to share a meal with members of another species, namely seagulls, on camera. The three-screen video work sets out the conditions for a meeting but does not fetishize or document the act of species coming together. The talk will explore the thinking behind this artwork and the processes of its making. It will question the ambition of recording an equal meeting between human and animal, at least on camera and in the context of contemporary art, whilst avoiding either being sensationalist or prompting readings of domestication. It proposes that despite the impossibility of a visual exposition of this meeting, a meeting has nevertheless occurred which as a consequence, provides the basis for considering the nature and the possibilities of such a connection.

Rikke Hansen, lecturer, London Metropolitan University,
The "Absent Presence" of Animals in Modernist Aesthetics

This paper argues for the centrality of the animal aesthetic to modern art. According to the 20th century German philosopher, Theodor Adorno, non-human animals have a sort of 'absent presence' within modernist aesthetic thought that rubs on a wound caused by the marginalisation of them within modern, Western societies in general. In contrast to their current presence in contemporary art, animals are not directly representable in modern art; yet, they continue to haunt aesthetics from within. Here, rather than looking at examples of actual animal imagery (of which there are many), I argue for an "animal aesthetic" that in turn alters our approach to art and aesthetics in wider, historical terms.

Lucy Kimbell, designer and artist, Said Business School, University of Oxford

One Night with Rats in the Service of Art

An illustrated performance lecture in which Lucy Kimbell critically evaluates her aesthetic experiments with rats and assesses what she achieved against her original desire to create a Rat Evaluated Artwork. This project's development was supported by an AHRC creative and performing arts fellowship at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art and a sci-art Experiment Award from the Wellcome Trust. The project was created with help from curator Simon Gould, curator at the National Institute for Medical Research, experimental psychologist Dr Rob Deacon from Oxford University, and rat lover Sheila Sowter. IYRAA software created in collaboration with Something

and Herbie Mueller

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The Animal Gaze Returned: a London Metropolitan University event organised by Rosemarie McGoldrick