

Nicky Coutts: *man stupid*



Nicky Coutts, *See Nature*, 2018, charcoal on paper, 297 x 420 mm

15 September - 13 October 2018

Private view: Friday 14 September 6 - 9pm

In 2015 Koko the gorilla addressed the Paris United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) using sign language. Taught from infancy by US researcher Dr Penny Patterson Koko 'understood' over 2000 spoken English words and the equivalent in signs before her recent death in June 2018 aged 46. Her grasp of language was comparable to a 5-year old human child. At COP 21 she 'spoke' with her hands and arms, as 'the voice of nature'. She said, 'man stupid', 'nature see you', 'fix nature'.

Koko's case demonstrates that the cognitive difference between humans and animals is far smaller than is often assumed. In their collection of essays, *The Great Ape Project: Equality beyond Humanity* (1994), editors Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer remind us: 'We are human, and we are also great apes.' Yet despite our genetic closeness with gorillas, orangutans and chimpanzees, it is only recently, that the possibility of extending basic legal protective rights to all the Great Apes, with the intention of forming 'a community of equals' is becoming a possibility.

Coutts' exhibition of drawings, writings and other multimedia artworks, operates as though this 'community of equals' has already become a reality. The artist draws on five of the signed phrases Koko used during her address to look at what happens with 'language' when we attempt to form greater

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Opening times: Thursday to Saturday 2-6 pm and by appointment

intimacies with neighbouring species. Each work considers the message humankind asked Koko to convey and questions whether we have the facility to understand it or act on it ourselves. Through interspecies connections and experimental practices of making, it rethinks what language might be if we allowed our fellow apes closer.

Nicky Coutts is an artist, writer and MRes pathway leader in the School of Arts and Humanities at the Royal College of Art. Her work looks at animals and how it might yet be possible to enter meaningful exchanges with them. Interspecies encounters, and explorations of the knowledge they contain, feature strongly in both her visual work and writing. Also key are the principals of mimicry and imitation that reach across and reconfigure definitions of the animal, the non-human animal and the inanimate worlds.

Coutts has contributed texts to a range of publications including academic journals and experimental writing platforms. Recent texts include a journal article considering collaboration as an interspecies form, written with Vanessa Ewan, Senior Lecturer in Actor Movement at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. (Coutts, N. & Ewan V., (2018) *Giraffe Time*, Journal of Photography and Culture, London: Taylor and Francis) and forthcoming is the book chapter 'Animal, Print, Suicide' in *Print matters: an anthology of critical texts on contemporary prints and printmaking since 1986* to be published by Manchester University Press later in 2018.

Her work has been shown internationally at venues including: Kunsthalle Mainz, Germany, Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen, Youkobo Artspace, Tokyo, China Academy of Art, Hangzhou and as part of 'Rencontres Internationales: New Cinema and Contemporary Art', at Centre Pompidou, Paris; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin and Reina Sofia National Museum, Madrid. Over the past few years Coutts has been working on a joint project with Emscherkunst, Germany, Oriel Davies Gallery and Canal and River Trust, Wales through which she produced the video work 'Canal Opera' (2017) involving a performance filmed live along the length of canals in both countries.

NEXT:

Annie Whiles

Private view: Friday 9 November 6 - 9pm

10 November - 8 December 2018

For more information and images please contact us.

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