

# N NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM



AFTER DARWIN

# contemporary expressions

Gautier Deblonde, Jeremy Deller and  
Matthew Killip in collaboration with Richard  
Wiseman, Tina Gonsalves, Mark Haddon,  
Ruth Padel, Diana Thater, Bill Viola

*After Darwin: Contemporary Expressions* is the latest in the Natural History Museum's contemporary arts programme. It was inspired by Darwin's book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), and is part of the 200-year celebrations of Darwin's birth. Newly commissioned and pre-existing video, film and writing were brought together to explore Darwin's theory that expressing emotion is not unique to humans, but is shared with all animals, and that this is more proof of a common ancestry.

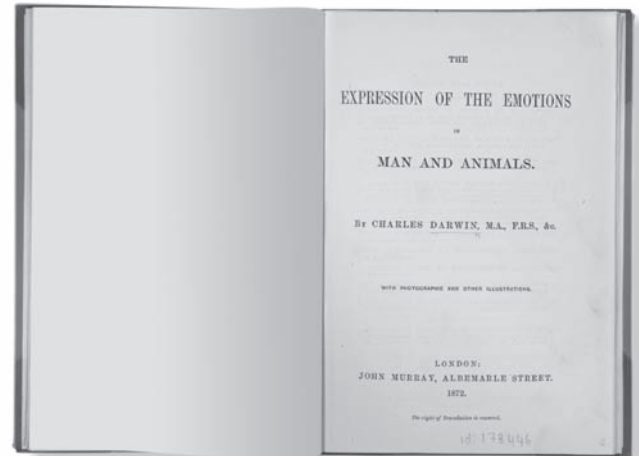
Previous contemporary arts exhibitions at the Museum include *Mark Dion: Systema Metropolis* (2007), a look at classification by the American artist. In 2006 artists such as Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, Antony Gormley and Ian McEwan travelled to the Arctic with Cape Farewell to interpret the effects of climate change and created *The Ship: The Art of Climate Change*.

The book *Expressions: From Darwin to Contemporary Arts* accompanies the exhibition and is available at the Museum or online.

For related events, please visit [www.nhm.ac.uk/naturelive](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/naturelive)

*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* took Darwin more than 30 years to research. It was originally a chapter about racial unity, in his earlier book *The Descent of Man*, and is one of Darwin's most readable publications.

Although *Expression* considers the emotional expressions of animals as varied as baboons, snakes and hens, Darwin aimed to understand just one – humans. All around him he watched how people expressed their emotions, from a sad-looking woman in his train carriage to his children laughing and playing at home. He sent questionnaires on emotional expression around the world, studied paintings and literature, and collected photographs. Some were quite shocking, very personal images of unhappy, crying or disturbed people. By showing that humans everywhere expressed the same emotions in roughly the same way, Darwin argued that with this in common we were all equal and should treat each other accordingly.



A first edition of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*

### Exhibition design

The exhibition was designed by London architects Carmody Groarke, who also designed the 7 July memorial in Hyde Park, Antony Gormley's *Blind Light* at the Hayward Gallery and Carsten Höller's Double Club in Islington.

## Bergit Arends

Curator of Contemporary Arts at the Natural History Museum

Thinking about Charles Darwin and his writings on the theory of evolution – largely an evolution of form – it seems a surprise that in the last years of his life, at the age of 63, he wrote a book entitled *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. It was his last radical idea. For this exhibition, contemporary writers and artists were invited to create new and present existing work and research connected to Darwin's book, and his ideas about human relationships with each other and other animals. Their works reflect modern cultural perspectives on the subject. They aim for contemporary views into the research of emotional states, the relation between thoughts and feelings, and the capturing of facial and bodily expressions in motion. By asking the same questions as Darwin did, we hoped to provoke productive clashes in methodology between the arts and sciences.

*Expression* was one of the earliest books to use photography for illustration and scientific evidence. Darwin used the latest technology at the time – as today we use the latest technology to research expression of emotions. The accompanying exhibition publication further contextualises *Expression* and modern research into expressions through commissioned essays

by art historian Julia Voss, writers Jonah Lehrer and Aris Fioretos and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio.

Through the varying spacial experiences of the exhibition – the distinct and enclosed work areas, for example, akin to our own inner spaces – visitors come to understand their own physical body as a receptacle of experiences, challenging feelings and physical sensations. Some works also encourage the visitor to experience afresh our kinship with nature, and in particular to our closest relatives: the great apes – a family of which we, *Homo sapiens*, are part.

Engaging artists – with scientists in some cases – to probe emotions through words and imagery creates another layer of human and cultural experience, making the study of emotions and feelings even more complex, but truer to life.

A full version of this essay is in the publication to accompany the exhibition.

**Clockwise from top right:** Tina Gonsalves, *The Chameleon Project*, 2008-10, video still; *Hatred* by O Rejlander, plate IV in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) by Charles Darwin; Diana Thater, *gorillagorillagorilla*, 2009, production still.



## **Mark Haddon**

### *24 Emotions*

Mark Haddon (1962) is an author, illustrator and screenwriter who has written 15 books for children and won two BAFTAs. His novels include *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003) and *A Spot of Bother* (2006). His poetry collection, *The Talking Horse and the Sad Girl and the Village Under the Sea*, was published in 2005.

## **Ruth Padel**

### *On Darwin and The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*

Ruth Padel (1946) is a London-born poet who has published seven collections of poetry, which between them have been shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize and the Whitbread Poetry Award. Her non-fiction includes bestselling books on reading poetry and in 2005 a nature-travel book, *Tigers in Red Weather*. In 2008 she became the first Resident Poet at Somerset House, London.

## **Diana Thater**

### *gorillagorillagorilla*

Diana Thater (1962) lives in Los Angeles. Recent major shows include *Delphine*, Vienna Secession (2000), *knots + surfaces* about the dance of the honeybee, at the Dia Centre for the Arts, New York (2001 to 2003), *Diana Thater. Keep the Faith. A Survey Exhibition*, Kunsthalle Bremen (2004) and *Off With Their Heads*, OSRAM Art Projects, Munich (2007).

## **Bill Viola**

### *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*

Bill Viola (1951) lives in California with his wife and collaborator Kira Perov. He has created video works and performances for more than 35 years, and represented the United States at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995. His production of Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* premiered at the Opéra National de Paris in 2005 and one of the largest exhibitions of his work *Bill Viola: Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)* opened at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo in 2006.

## **Tina Gonsalves**

### *The Chameleon Project*

Tina Gonsalves (1972) lives in Berlin and has for 10 years explored the intimacies and vulnerabilities of human emotions through film, mixed media and installations. Her work has shown at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. She is honorary artist in residence at the Institute of Neurology at UCL in London and visiting artist at Media Lab at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston.

## **Jeremy Deller and Matthew Killip in collaboration with Richard Wiseman**

### *Aping*

Jeremy Deller (1966) lives in London. Key works include *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001, the re-enactment of a battle between miners and police during the 1984/85 miner's strike. He won the Turner Prize in 2004 for his installation *Memory Bucket* and was one of the chosen designs for the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square, 2008. In 2008/9 he staged a group exhibition throughout the entire Musée de Tokyo in Paris and in 2009 presented *It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq*, at the New Museum in New York.

Matthew Killip (1977) is a documentary film-maker living and working in London. His subjects have included Congolese voodoo wrestlers, heavy metal fans with mental health issues, outsider artists and the strange museums of Texas. His documentaries have been shown at numerous festivals around the world, and he is currently working on four short films about monkeys and apes for Channel 4.

Richard Wiseman (1966) was an award-winning magician before becoming the first professor in the public understanding of psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. He has researched a range of unusual psychological topics, including luck, lying and love and has written several books including the bestselling *Luck Factor* and *Quirkology*. He has given talks at The Royal Institution, The Royal Society, and The Royal Television Society and features regularly on Radio 4.

## **Gautier Deblonde**

### *Untitled*

Gautier Deblonde's (1969) photographs have been exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery and Tate Britain in London, Maison de la Photographie in Lille and the French Institute of Warsaw. He photographed the creation of Ron Mueck's sculpture *Boy* and its subsequent installation into the Millennium Dome, which won a World Press Award. In November 2008, he exhibited at the Galerie du Jour during Paris Photo and the Month of Photography.

Open Monday to Sunday 10.00–17.50  
Last admission 17.30

26 June to 29 November 2009

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