

26 FEBRUARY — 2 APRIL 2016

HEART BEAT

LISA ROET

HUMANNESS / Australian artist Lisa Roet's dynamic practice exists on the periphery of a multitude of disciplinary spheres. Conflating empirical studies from anthropology, to zoology and linguistics, her work is defined by the ways it operates simultaneously within and outside the art world. Such plurality is also located in Roet's ability to adapt and experiment across a range of media and new technologies. Spanning a career of over two decades, artworks have taken the form of drawing, photography, sculpture, lithography and film.

At the very centre of her artistic enquiry, Roet aims to investigate the notion of 'humanness'. Given the ape's genetic proximity to humans, Roet utilises the exploration of simians as a tool to explore and understand ourselves. Here, creative expression inhabits science laboratories, museological archives, and field studies. Having worked alongside some of the world's leading primatologists, taxonomists, ape language researchers and genetic scientists, Roet's insights into primate behaviour directly inform her work. The documentation and creative interpretation of her findings enlivens a fresh perspective that, according to the artist, allows the "essence of humanity to be shown in another light in order to be objective about ourselves as a species". The innate tendency to 'humanise' primates is a recurrent motif within her practice that probes "what it means to be human and what makes us different to other animals."

Roet's installation at Australian Experimental Art Foundation (AEAF) for *Adelaide Festival of Arts 2016* continues this trajectory by means of an immersive installation across two rooms. Her large-scale, theatrical projection *Heart Beat* (2014-16) confronts audiences with an enlarged three-dimensional projection of a human heart. The mesmerising accompanying soundtrack—a collaboration with musician Charlie Owen—echoes the pulsating beat of the heart, drawing gallery visitors into the depths of a simulated corporeal cavity.

Heart Beat is an example of Roet's fascination with ideas of isolation and comparison. The animated heart, created with cutting-edge Mursion technology—a three-dimensional holographic technology—is in fact a simulation of a hybrid heart. Animated by science animator Drew Berry, the image itself, derived from echocardiogram and MRI footage of the artist's own heart, is imperceptibly amalgamated with imagery from a gorilla's heart. Part animal, part human. The gorilla footage was sourced from a research team studying heart health as part of the International Primate Heart Project at Cardiff University in Wales. Such comparative exploration relates directly to Roet's previous examination of the 'humanzee'; a hypothetical interspecies human-chimpanzee hybrid.

This process of self-reflection is also firmly located in the second part of Roet's presentation in a single channel video. The film *We Are Animal* (2015-16), is part of the result of the artist's ongoing collaboration with leading Chinese artist Shen Shaomin. The highly successful artistic pairing has resulted in a project that explores subliminal links in the human psyche with a primal past. Filmed in Beijing, the footage from *We Are Animal* is taken from a live hypnosis session with American stage hypnotist Tom Silver. Aimed at experimenting with language and communication, the film advances concepts of likeness and distinction.

Within an intimate, dark room audiences are met with a small group of hypnotised participants on a stage, each embodying the persona of a monkey. The goal of the exercise: To reach a primal source of language and tap into the human subconscious. Without inhibition, the cast sit in squatted and crouched positions on the ground, playing their role. With closed eyes, they engage in physical and aural communication, displaying submissive and dominant behaviour. Primal inarticulate noises, such as cooing, guttural grunting, whining and whimpering are voiced. At times haptic, the participants perform incomprehensible gestures that appear rhythmic. In one instance, the group stroke each other's hands in unison and repetitively pound them on the floor while participating in communal noises. A seemingly shaman-like scenario.

In this intense and extremely demanding piece, Roet, with Shaomin, offers viewers a reversal of the common tendency to endow primates with human qualities. Hypnosis thus becomes an enabler. Through this interface the artists push the boundaries of interspecies intersections.

RACHAEL VANCE — BERLIN, 2016



LISA ROET Since 1992, Roet has been represented by galleries in Australia, New Zealand, Belgium and USA, has held over thirty solo exhibitions and participated in more than fifty group exhibitions nationally and internationally including Indonesia, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, The Netherlands, China, Germany and Luxemburg. Her works have attracted numerous prestigious art awards, and her practice has featured in *Australian Art Collector* '50 Most Collectible Artists' (2001, 2003, 2007), the ABC documentary *Ape Lady* (2010) produced by Klaus Toft, and the monograph *Lisa Roet: Uncommon Observations* by Alexie Glass (2004).

RACHAEL VANCE is a Berlin-based Australian freelance writer and curator with over ten years' experience working in art galleries and museums. She completed a Masters of Art Theory & Design at Monash University, Melbourne. Vance currently holds the position of European correspondent for *Ocula Magazine* and Gallery Manager at ARNDT gallery in Berlin. In addition to writing exhibition catalogue essays for public museums and commercial galleries, she has contributed to art publications and periodicals that include: *Broadsheet: Contemporary Visual Art and Culture*, *Art & Australia*, *Art Monthly*, *Art New Zealand*, *Artist Profile*, *Objektiv*, and *Sleek*.

A U S T R A L I A N E X P E R I M E N T A L A R T F O U N D A T I O N

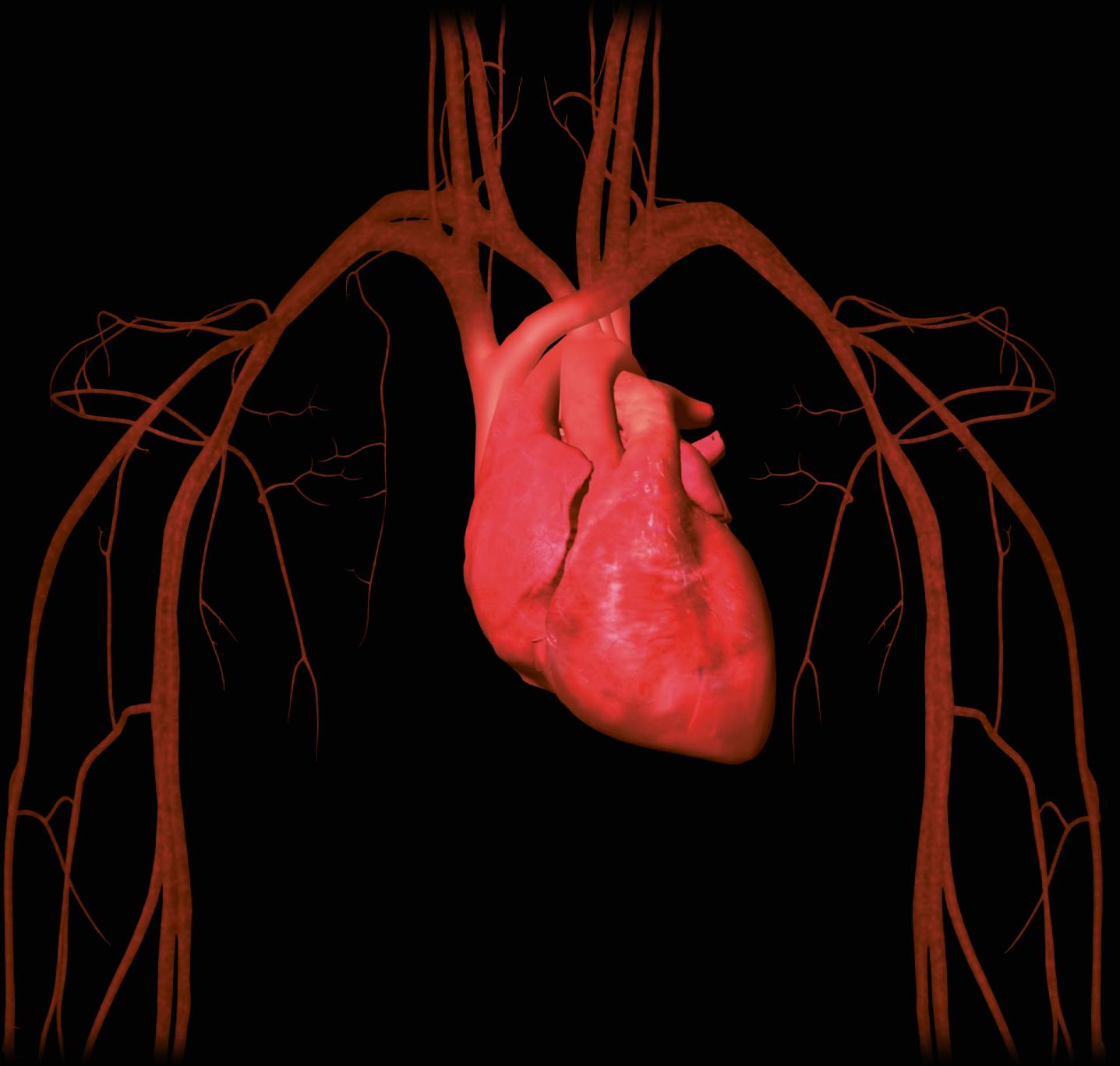
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Images: (front) Lisa Roet and Shen Shaomin *We are Animal* (video stills) 2015-16, video 5.32min. (back) *Heart Beat* (video still) 2014-16

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Science animation: Drew Berry

Sound design: Charlie Owen

Supported by: The International Primate Heart Project based at Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK; Arts Victoria; Melbourne Heart Care; Walter and Eliza Institute; and Adelaide Festival of Arts.

WE ARE ANIMAL

Collaborator: Shen Shaomin

Translator: Veronica Shen

Hypnotist: Tom Silver

Camera: Sascha Schobel

Supported by the Australia Council for the Arts and Creative Partnerships with Asia

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The artist is represented by Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide.

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