

picture making by Apes and its evolutionary significance

by A. L. Rand
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THE PICTURE MAKING ABILITY of chimpanzees first received recognition in 1957 when Betsy and Congo had a two-chimp exhibit at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. In the same year, the work of Zippy was exhibited in the Senate House Museum, Kingston, New York. Eight paintings by these chimps are now on exhibit here at Field Museum. The paintings, the gift of the late Mrs. Emily Crane Chadbourne, are now a part of the study collection of the Zoology Department, as an illustration of the behavior of great apes in a field considered restricted to man.

Congo, an experimental animal studied by Mr. Desmond Morris of London, was a television personality who made 384 pictures between 1956 and 1959 when he was two to four years old. Much of his color work was done with a brush. At his London show, some pictures sold well at inflated prices, after which the others were withdrawn from the market and filed for documentation and study. Much of what we know about the biology of chimpanzee art comes from Morris' studies at the London Zoo. His book, *The Biology of Art*, deals with these studies.

Betsy of Baltimore, also a zoo animal and television personality, is best known for her finger paintings, the sale of which helped fill the coffers of the Baltimore Zoo. Zippy is a less well-known figure. She worked in a Washington department store painting pictures for sale, some of which Mrs. Chadbourne purchased.

It could be argued that this material belongs to the study of art, or that since it throws light on certain aspects of the innate behavior of man, it belongs in anthropology. True, it can be used in either of these. But here, we view it in the wider context of the whole evolutionary process, making it properly zoological material.

One must accept that real and important ideas can emerge from the study of this ape picture making. Because it is so easy to burlesque picture making by non-human primates, the main point may be missed—that though these ape artists offer an obvious opportunity to deflate some pomposities of the art world, their picture making is not at all a zoological joke. It takes a discerning eye and a receptive mind to see them for what they are: documents and records of a biological approach to art.

The show in London was opened by the noted British biologist, Sir Julian Huxley, who maintained that the pictures by Congo and Betsy showed that chimpanzees had artistic potential. By inference, our ape-like ancestors had this primitive artistic potential to which man has added his unique capacity for symbol making.

Morris shows that the chimp-painted pictures have basic artistic qualities. They show composition control, calligraphic development, and aesthetic variation. These characteristics appear only at a minimal level, it is true, but they are there, the basic fundamentals of aesthetic creativity.

From the point of view of evolutionary studies in biology, the intricacies of art need not concern us beyond establishing, as Morris has done, that the aesthetic potential of *Homo sapiens* has its roots in a similar open-pattern instinct of a pre-human ancestor, and that traces of it can be found in present-day sub-human species. (An open-pattern instinct is one which is susceptible to modification by experience and in some forms is capable of being codified into traditional behavior. A closed-pattern instinct is one not modifiable by experience.)

The investigation into animal behavior in terms of open and closed instinctive patterns is in its infancy. It is a study that promises a much richer understanding of animal behavior and its evolution, from lowest to highest forms.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Museum open 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. weekdays,
until 5 p.m. weekends.

through February 28 Winter Journey:

WHO'S WHO IN THE PREHISTORIC ZOO

A self-guided tour of the prehistoric animals hall; direction sheets available at the Information Desk and at both entrances.

January 1-31 EXHIBIT:

PAINTINGS BY CHIMPANZEES

An exhibit of eight paintings by three chimpanzees, and photos of the animals at work. In Stanley Field Hall.

January 15 MOVIE: Sponsored by ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

GONE WITH THE WILDERNESS

Karl Maslowski's film features a mink and a moth. In James Simpson Theatre at 2:30 p.m.

MEETINGS:

CHICAGO SHELL CLUB

January 8 at 2 p.m.

CHICAGO NATURE CAMERA CLUB

January 10 at 7:45 p.m.

February 5 at 2:30 p.m.

ILLINOIS ORCHID SOCIETY

January 15 at 2 p.m.

This month's cover shows Duncan Foley, an Antioch College "co-op," working among the hundreds of cases of mineral specimens in our Department of Geology.

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