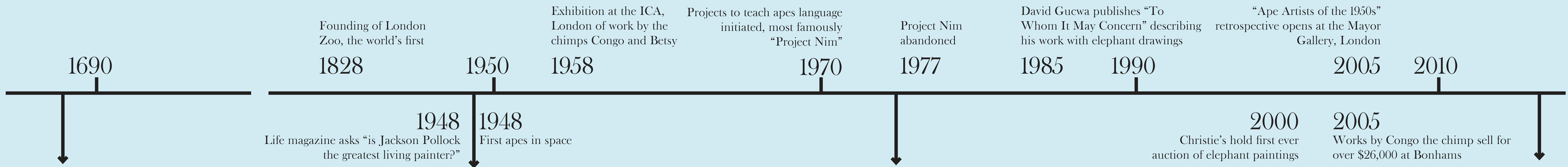


Art By Animals

Exhibited around the museum are paintings by apes and elephants. Are they artistic works or meaningless scrawls? In our urge to connect beyond our own kind, human characteristics have often been attributed to animals. The possibility of animals being creative remains the subject of human speculation.



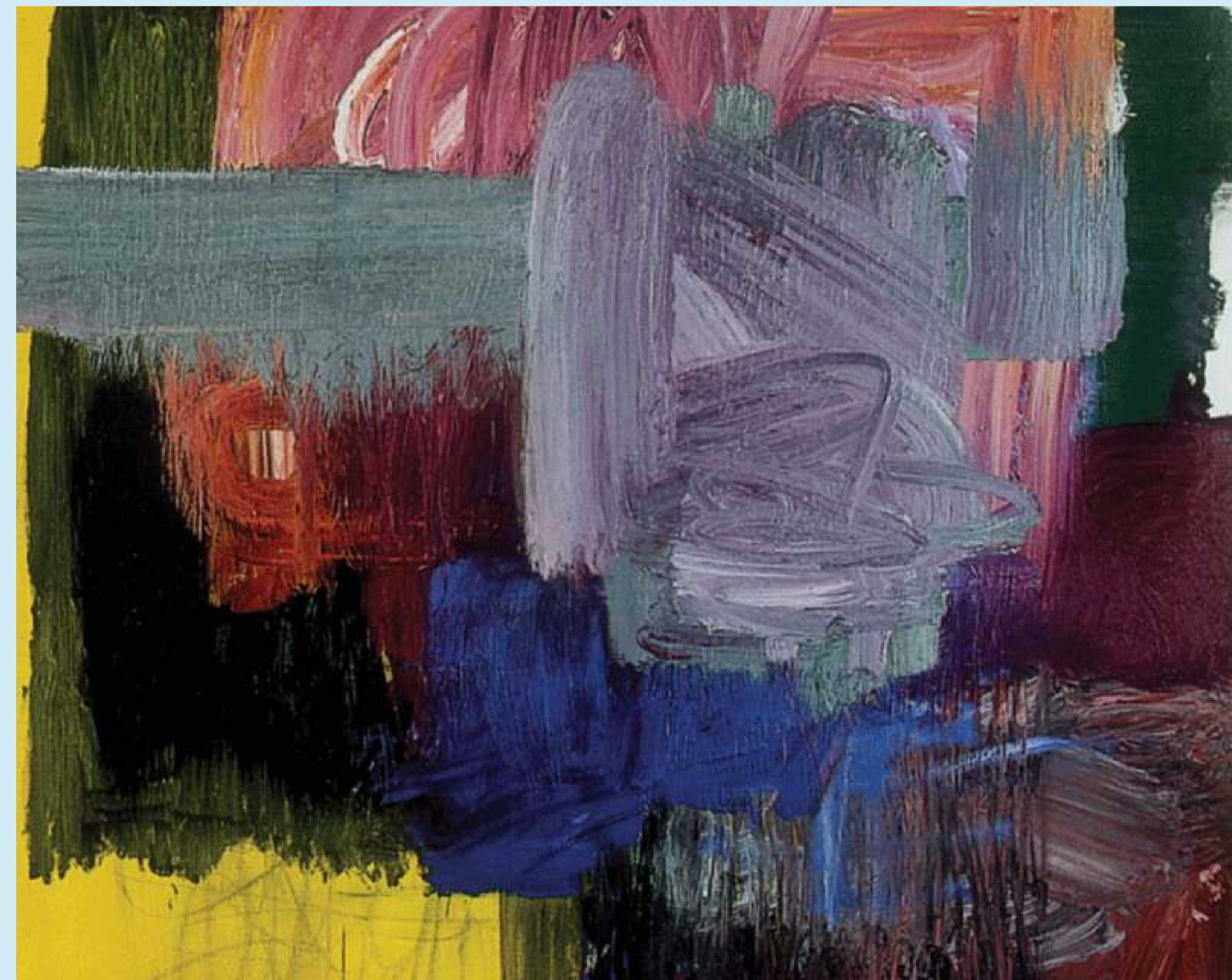
The "Monkey Painter"

The image of the animal as artist was popular as early as the 17th century.

The monkey depicted here seated at an easel and painting alludes to the idea that human artists are a type of creative ape.



David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690), *Monkeys' Masquerade* (Detail), 1625-1690 © The Trustees of the British Museum



Katharine Simpson, *Untitled (Detail)*, 2004 © The Artist

Freud and the Unconscious Self

In the late 1940's Abstract Expressionist artists began making gestural paintings that they believed expressed their unconscious self. This led to the gestures found in animal art being seen in a new context.

Abstract Expressionism has remained influential to many artists today who continue to explore these ideas.

Ape Language Learning Experiments

1970s studies into teaching apes to communicate using hand gestures, symbols and keyboards made art by animals a topic of serious consideration.

The experiments were largely abandoned in the 1980s and today their results are treated with caution.



Joyce Butler with Nim Chimpsky the chimpanzee, named after American linguist Noam Chomsky. Student teacher Joyce Butler of Columbia University is signing "Nim" and the famous chimpanzee is responding with a sign for "me". © Susan Kuklin Science Photo Library



Still from film of an Orangutan working on a painting at Eric Zoo, Pennsylvania © Eric Zoo, Pennsylvania

Art by Animals Today

Nowadays painting is used to stimulate captive animals, and the sale of paintings raises funds for conservation.

Although interest in animal language learning has waned, the urge to believe in a common language beyond our species remains strong.