

Acropolis Cinema and Los Angeles Filmforum present
Collective Monologue (Monólogo Colectivo)
Tuesday July 8, 2025, 8:00 pm
At 2220 Arts + Archives

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2025 is our 50th year. www.lafilmforum.org
Acropolis Cinema, www.acropoliscinema.co

In person: Jessica Sarah Rinland

While most visitors to a zoo are assumed to leave with a greater understanding of the animals housed within, such spaces can reveal just as much about the humans who design and manage them. With *Collective Monologue*, Jessica Sarah Rinland, who was previously featured at Acropolis with *Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another* (2019), pursues her ongoing concerns with the relationship between humans and the natural world—particularly as mediated by institutions.

At the film's core are the animals and staff in various Argentinian zoos and shelters—including the Buenos Aires Ecopark, established as a zoo in the late 19th century—capturing not just tender moments of interspecies interaction but also administrative and infrastructural details. Zookeeper Maca provides around-the-clock dedication to the animals enclosed in one of these increasingly polemical spaces, a job she has held for over 20 years, while forming meaningful bonds transcendent of language and the imagined boundaries between humans and animals.

Beyond its fascinating portrayal of interspecies care, *Collective Monologue* features remarkable 16mm footage of the resident creatures—and some amazing surveillance camera glimpses of nocturnal anteaters—as well as archival detours, which reveal a parallel inquiry into questions of labour, gender, and colonial conquest over the natural world. With a form that is intricate and precise, while pleasingly fragmented and open in construction, Rinland's hypnotic approach invites questions about how we not only look at animals, but also share the world with them. (Andréa Picard, TIFF)

Argentine-British artist filmmaker, **Jessica Sarah Rinland** is a recipient of numerous prizes including Best International Film at Cinéma du Réel, and Documenta Madrid for *Collective Monologue*, Special Mention at Locarno Film Festival for *Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another*, and MIT's Schnitzer prize for excellence in the arts.

Her most recent solo exhibition was at Tabakalera, San Sebastian, Spain, subsequently traveling to Katoenhuysen, Rotterdam. She has had retrospectives of her films at Flaherty Film Seminar, Anthology Film Archives, Open City Documentary Film Festival, Doc's Kingdom, London Short Film Festival, among others. She has participated in residencies including Film Studies Center at Harvard University, Somerset House Studios, MacDowell, and Ikusmira Berriak. Her films are held at the British Film Institute.

Screening:

Collective Monologue (Monólogo Colectivo)

Directed by Jessica Sarah Rinland

Argentina, UK, 2024, digital, color, sound, 104 min.

Intimate and fragmented moments unfold in a community of zoos and animal rescue centers across Argentina. As histories of these institutions are uncovered, dedicated workers commit both day and night to caring for the remaining enclosed animals, fostering a mutual bond that transcends imagined boundaries between human and animal.

Collective Monologue

by Erika Balsom

The following is article was originally published by the Harvard Film Archive, January 2025

The cinema and the zoo stand together as nineteenth-century inventions, technologies of visibility that are intimately bound to histories of domination. Jessica Sarah Rinland's *Collective Monologue* uses the first to stage a sensory encounter with the second, claiming the innocence of neither. In her patient observation of zoo workers and the captive animals to which they minister, she does not condemn spaces such as the Jardín Zoológico of Buenos Aires, founded in 1888 and now aspirationally rebranded as an "ecopark"; nor does she celebrate them. Rinland shows that in the zoo, as in so much of the world outside it, care and cruelty can be inseparable, even indiscernible, from one another. Moving across multiple sites in Argentina, she creates a general portrait of a maligned institution in a moment of transformation, as zoos adopt mandates of rehabilitation and preservation that remake their mission for an age of ecocide. What happens to the spectacle of exoticism in which they once trafficked and, in many ways, still do? Such is the concern of *Collective Monologue*.

The zoo is a protective enclosure, and the zoo is a prison. Rinland holds both in hand, *Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another* (2019). Every so often, Rinland's cinematography is interrupted by surveillance footage, reminding us that as much as the look of the camera can be a caress, it can also be a policing force. Crucial information regarding the history of the Ecoparque is gleaned in sequences set in the institution's archives and during a guided tour of its grounds, but the bulk of *Collective Monologue* stays close to the drama of difference and similarity that plays out in our encounter with nonhuman animals—a drama of empathy, alterity and fascination. Rinland does not attempt to simulate how turtles or elephants or flamingoes experience the world, but she does seek to dislodge a dominant mode of thought and representation accords the human the privilege of being a subject while relegating the animal to the status of mere object. Something more horizontal emerges, without ever losing sight of profoundly unequal conditions of existence that prevail.

The film concludes with a quotation from developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, shedding light on what might have seemed a cryptic title: "Collective monologue is a period of egocentrism in a young child's life where they see the point of view of the listener as irrelevant. They believe that nature is created for them, and that they can control it." What does this have to do with the zoo? In the final sequence, a female carer cradles the howler monkey Juanita like a baby, in what one might call an interspecies pietà. She weeps for the infirm primate. Here, as throughout *Collective Monologue*, Rinland pays tribute to the

devotion of the workers, to their sincere commitment to their wards. And yet, in the citation of Piaget that follows, the specter of a different relationship to animal life emerges, one that has been equally present throughout the preceding one hundred minutes. Although animals are so often infantilized, perhaps the period of egocentrism never ends and it is we who are a species of tyrannical children, babbling on to ourselves, understanding the myriad forms of non-human life around us only on our terms. The workers speak incessantly to the animals, voicing words of praise, affection, encouragement and frustration. They seek an intersubjective connection. Sounds might be emitted in response, but a dialogue will always elude them.

Collective Monologue

by Muriel Del Don

The following article was originally published by Cineuropa, August 19, 2024

In her latest feature, *Collective Monologue*, presented in competition in the Cineasti del Presente section of the Locarno Film Festival – where her previous film, *Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another*, received a Special Mention in the Moving Ahead section – Argentinian-British artist-director Jessica Sarah Rinland offers up a series of intimate and fleeting portraits. These moments, filmed in various zoos and rescue centres for injured animals in Argentina, depict humans (with women as the central figures) achieving a deep sense of harmony with the animals.

These "stolen moments" reveal the importance of mutual empathy and tolerance in any form of contact, human or otherwise. What matters is the ability to listen to and accept others as they are, with all their merits and flaws, in an act of disinterested understanding based on tenderness and love. *Collective Monologue* gives a voice to those who lack one, shedding light on realities often overshadowed by the dominance of the Anthropocene. belongs to them. In Rinland's latest feature, this egocentric phase is metaphorically overcome and dismantled through encounters with the other party. The people who care for the animals in parks and zoos do not merely look after their basic needs; they treat them with the same respect and love they would have for fellow humans. The film invites us to closely observe these fleeting, intensely poignant moments, where the boundaries between species dissolve, and where only the act of listening and the immediacy of the present moment matter.

This visceral closeness between beings that society labels as different is beautifully captured by Rinland through powerful close-ups. The proximity of the camera to the bodies of the protagonists, both human and animal, highlights their similarities – such as the matching hair colour of a zookeeper and the monkey she holds close – and their emotional connections. Phrases like *reina mía* (lit. “my queen”), *te amo* (“I love you”) or *con amor* (“with love”), spoken by those who care for the animals, are transformed in the film into manifestos advocating for tolerance and empathy – qualities that are often overlooked in our self-centred world. "It's not the animals that don't understand; we are the ones who don't know what we're doing," one of the zoo's managers tells future employees, as if to remind us that the rules humanity has arrogantly created are not universally valid.

Collective Monologue is a film that encourages us to see the world from the animals' perspective, as if we were observing them for the first time. Through Rinland's lens, the audience can discover realities they may not have believed existed. The scenes where the attendants' arms and hands touch, caress and

massage the apes' limbs through the bars of their enclosures are especially touching and poetic. The physical distance between them becomes insignificant; what matters is the profound and intense nature of the contact, and the sincerity of a seemingly simple gesture that evolves into a moment of catharsis. The animals, often filmed in poetic, static shots, dictate their own rhythm, compelling us to observe what we would normally overlook.

The final scene, where one of the protagonists weeps while cradling the little monkey Juanita – who, crouched in a corner, seems too weak to move – encapsulates the essence of the entire film. It is an unclassifiable, breathtakingly beautiful work that challenges us to reconsider our place in the world. ♦

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