

**Aspen Art Museum**  
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# Educator Notes



Installation view: Diana Thater, *gorillagorillagorilla*, 2009. Kunsthhaus Graz, Austria. Photo: Universalmuseum Joanneum/N.Lackner

## **Diana Thater: gorillagorillagorilla**

November 6, 2015–February 21, 2016

## About the artist

Diana Thater was born in 1962, in San Francisco, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. She holds a BA in Art History from New York University and an MFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. For more than two decades, she has been using film and video to push the boundaries of how media art is displayed.

## About the exhibition

Thater's Aspen Art Museum presentation of *gorillagorillagorilla* (2009) coincides with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition *Diana Thater: The Sympathetic Imagination*. The artwork on view at the AAM utilizes wall-sized projections of jungle brush, specifically, displaying Western Lowland gorillas of Cameroon's Mefou National Park. By using color filters and forest-green lights, Thater is able to reflect the intensity of the vegetation within the gallery walls, while the architectural features of the space create the impression of a disorienting jungle environment.

Thater has consistently used video and explored the possibilities of the moving image. During her twenty years of art making, she has remained fully committed to the medium throughout times of rapid technological advancements and in a typically male-dominated realm. For *gorillagorillagorilla*, one of her largest works, the video footage was filmed on Thater's camera from three different perspectives: the free animal (filmed from above), the caged animal (filmed through wire fencing), and the animal as seen through the lens of science (showing a biologist in the foreground of the frame). By using three different perspectives, Thater presents a more complete image of the captive animal as well as our relationship to gorillas, a creature to whom we are closely related.

The immersive experience of this artwork allows the audience to connect with the imagery and message of her work. By having the projections run floor to ceiling, the audience becomes part of the artwork when they walk into the gallery and in front of the projections, allowing viewers to contemplate their relationship with the issues presented.

## Questions for discussion

- I Why do you think the artist chose to show three different approaches to gorillas at the same time?
- I What are some of the pros and cons of each living environment for the gorilla?
- I What words can you use to express the kind of environment that Thater creates in *gorillagorillagorilla*?

## Suggested activity

### Nature Observations

Gather a pencil, pen, sheets of plain or colored paper, and tape.

Coordinate a visit to the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES) to see their birds of prey or visit a farm, zoo, or nature center in your area. How do the animals you see here live differently from animals living in the wild?

Invite students to use their critical thinking and observational skills to reflect on the different ways animals live with human interaction.

Create a triptych of student observations: on the first sheet of paper, have students draw free-roaming animals they can find in nature. On the second piece of paper, have students draw one of the birds of prey in their built environment at ACES or their local farm, zoo, or nature center. Lastly, on the third piece of paper, have students draw themselves in relation to the animals they see around them in nature.

Once the three drawings are completed, have students create an installation in the classroom of the three drawings together. Encourage students to share their observations and reflections on animals with classmates and parents.

For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email [education@aspenartmuseum.org](mailto:education@aspenartmuseum.org)

AAM exhibitions are made possible by the Marx Exhibition Fund. General exhibition support is provided by the Toby Devan Lewis Visiting Artist Fund. *gorillagorillagorilla* is supported by Erin Leider-Pariser and Paul Pariser, and funded in part by the AAM National Council.

AAM education programs are made possible by the Questrom Education Fund. Education Workshop support is provided by Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Leary and Mary and Patrick Scanlan. Scholarships for AAM Workshops are funded by Cari and Michael J. Sacks.