Looking Within

Corpus, a Dutch museum that opened its doors last week on the road between Amsterdam and The Hague, offers visitors a 50-minute trip through a giant human body, starting in the mouth (above). Organs such as the brain and the womb serve as minitheaters in which three-dimensional videos and sound effects—such as a sucking sound in the lungs—help explain everything from pregnancy and wound healing to sneezing.

The creature sports both male and female reproductive organs but is definitely "human," says its creator and director, Henri Remmers, a self-described "concept developer" who also helped set up an archaeological theme park in the Netherlands.

After visits around head and guts, visitors exit from the brain and into an information center that promotes healthy lifestyles. Supported by corporations, medical groups, and the government, the €20 million building—which from the outside resembles a seated giant—doubles as a convention center.

Chimp Corridor Proposed

An Iowa conservation group hopes to salvage a tiny group of chimpanzees in Rwanda by creating a forest "corridor" to connect them with a larger population.

The Gishwati Forest used to cover 100,000 hectares, but logging and farming have shrunk it by 90%. A colony of up to 20 chimps has been hanging on in isolation for decades. The Great Ape Trust in Des Moines is now collaborating with Rwanda's forest authority to plant trees near the isolated chimps, collecting seeds from chimp feces to make sure they are trees that the animals like to use. They plan to cover 80 hectares this year and hope eventually to create a continuous stretch of forest that will allow the population to merge with some 800 chimps that live in two national parks about 50 kilometers away.

Such corridors are relatively untried. But the trust's conservation director, Benjamin Beck, cites a previous successful 10-year project in Brazil involving golden lion tamarins. Beck estimates the cost at a few million dollars, mostly to compensate landowners. Locals are somewhat skeptical right now, he acknowledges, but he hopes that continued meetings will help win them over.

Science Off the Air

Nearly half of Americans cannot name a "role model" scientist, living or dead. And only 11% can come up with the name of a living one, according to a survey released last week by the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois. And whom do they think of most often? Bill Gates and Al Gore. Each was named by 6% of the sample, on par with Albert Einstein. Most respondents also reported that citizens' ignorance of science is "a detriment to our nation."

America's best known scientist?

A possible source of the problem emerged from another study released last week by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. It found that for every 5 hours of U.S. cable television news, only 2 minutes are devoted to science or the environment. By contrast, the same period contains 10 minutes of celebrity news and nearly half an hour on crime.

Given the priorities in their major news outlets, "it's not surprising that in polls, few Americans rank climate change or the environment as a top political priority or even a major national problem," says Matthew Nisbet, a social scientist at American University in Washington, D.C.

MOTETS AND MORTAR

An architectural historian has taken a choir to Venice to determine how much Renaissance architects and composers shaped each other's work. Last spring, with acousticians and musicologists, Deborah Howard of Cambridge University in the U.K. led an experimental public concert tour on which the Choir of St. John's College, Cambridge, performed Renaissance works in 11 Venetian churches and monasteries, including the San Marco basilica.

Recordings, as well as audience reactions, indicated that complex polyphonic pieces reverberated too much throughout large spaces such as the basilica but sounded right in San Marco's smaller ducal chapel. Monastery chapels were the best settings for resonant but straightforward chants. And humbler parish churches adorned with sound-damping tapestries were suited to simple hymn singing. "Each church did generate the kind of acoustic that was appropriate" to its needs, says Howard, showing that architects designed with acoustics in mind.

Testing acoustics at the San Giacomo dall'Orio church in Venice.

Composers also probably tailored their work to specific buildings, says Howard, who presented her findings at this month's Cambridge Science Festival. For example, the team found compositions calling for a double choir that in a reverberating space such as San Marco would achieve a "surround sound" effect. "We suppose that many musicians compose their work having in mind a very particular kind of place," says applied physicist Francesco Martellotta of the Polytechnic University of Bari, "but in this case, it is clearly documented."

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