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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 43(43)

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Publication Date

2021

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Peer reviewed

Comparative Aesthetics: A novel approach to investigate multimodal attractiveness in humans and animals

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Abstract

It has long been debated whether aesthetics is something uniquely human. Our ongoing project aims to empirically address comparative aesthetics in a collaboration between psychologists and biologists. Defining aesthetic responses as approach behaviour associated with sensory pleasure and corresponding physiological states, we are exploring whether humans and non-human animals share similar mechanisms in their evaluation of sexually attractive stimuli. Specifically, we compare humans and ring doves (*Streptopelia risoria*), a species whose courtship behaviour and physiology have been extensively investigated in behavioural and neuroendocrinology research. Both species form pair bonds, communicate using visual and auditory signals, and can be tested in laboratory conditions with conspecifics or using video and auditory stimuli. Truly comparative work involves using as similar an experimental approach as possible for both human and animal participants. Here we report our comparative methods and experimental paradigms, and some recent results.