

ABOUT LOVE

8 october 2019 - 30 august 2020

Palais de la découverte

“About love at the Palais de la découverte: this exhibition, like its subject, is unpredictable, unexpected, and full of surprises. About love will examine this mysterious sentiment with the help of current research in biology, neuroscience, psychology, sociology and anthropology as well as artistic works. It will be occasion as well for us to make a declaration of love to our visitors.”

Bruno Maquart, president of Universcience.

What subject of interest is more universal than love! Enigmatic, fragile, the driving force of so many stories, it seems to be particularly difficult to define. The exhibition *About love* has two galleries: the gallery of attachments and the gallery of science. Visitors will be invited to explore territories of love, in perpetual motion and now attended by new technologies, through a series of participatory games, multimedia exhibits and spectacular installations.

The gallery of attachments

The gallery of attachments features objects, situations, poems, quotes, images and more, approached through the prism of the four Greek words for love: *eros*, desire, carnal passion; *storge*, familial love; *agape*, selfless love; and *philia*, friendship, the social bond.

These four conceptions of love also echo recent findings in science – in particular, affective science that has undertaken to probe the mysteries of this sentiment by integrating the perspectives of various disciplines. The subject then becomes even vaster since love and attachment can only be explained by thousands of converging causes, which may or not produce an effect.

What is love? Empathy? Attachment? The goal here is to reveal the entanglement of relations engendered by love: emotion, desire, connection, intimacy, sexuality, etc. One can experience love for individuals, other living beings, objects, places and ideas. And its exploration ranges from the most extreme attachment to the most extreme detachment, and even a sense of complete rootlessness.

The gallery of science

There is no global scientific theory of love. Yet, affection, attachment, sexuality and empathy are carried by the same molecules, trigger the secretion of the same hormones, and travel the same neural circuits. The gallery of science presents seven eclectic subjects examined by neuroscientists, sociologists, sexologists, psychoanalysts and philosophers:

- What is love?
- Attachment, a bond that protects, a tie that liberates
- Online affairs
- How does the body express itself?
- The art of loving others
- Proofs of love
- How does sexuality develop?

The exhibition features in this way different fragments of a scientific discourse, in a nod to Roland Barthes’s *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (translated in English as *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*) – a book that resembles a network whose points of entry are notions as diverse as “absence,” “ravishment,” and “jealousy.”



Trilingual (French, English, Spanish).
Age 15 and up.

This exhibition is part of the programming series: **“Fresh Science.”**

The series features exhibitions that showcase advances in science and their impacts, whether they concern the physical world or living organisms. The focus is on scientific subjects that further knowledge in new and interesting ways.

In partnership with the Swiss Centre for Affective Sciences (CISA), University of Geneva

In collaboration with the National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED)

For 60 years, the Ministry of Culture protects and promotes the national heritage, stimulates creation, fosters cultural diversity, and encourages access to the arts and culture.

- **What is love?**

In recent years a number of researchers have been focusing their attention of the question of love. In a film, philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists, among others, give their point of view on the subject and answer the crucial question: “What is love?”

- **Attachment, a bond that protects, a tie that liberates**

Attachment, a system for regulating fear essential to child development, was theorized by John Bowlby (1907-1990) after World War II. Attachment theory posits that the bond with the adult enables the child to acquire the necessary confidence to explore the world. For newborns, proximity to a comforting adult is a vital need. This need for attachment is present throughout life and comes into play in relationships to others and to oneself, especially when it comes to trusting others, having a sense of personal worth and the ability to persist when difficulties arise.

- **Online affairs**

A data visualization of social networks provides visitors with a grasp of the phenomenon of “online affairs.” Digital practices permeate romantic and sexual encounters. Today it is easier to meet a partner outside of one’s network of friends and professional circle, out of sight of one’s entourage, which explains the success of dating sites and apps. But does this mean that the choice of a partner is freer, untrammelled by social constraints? It seems that the selection factors at work in other modes of encounter are present in online dating and are dependent on visual and textual self-presentation.

- **How does the body express itself?**

A series of exhibits address this question. Racing heartbeat, sweaty palms, a cold sensation in the belly – all these are common physical symptoms of anxiety and yet it is the nascent love. Love finds expression in the body, but it is in the brain that it all starts. Love or sexual desire are complex affective states that involve different areas of the brain which are engaged in other higher brain functions, such as memory, body image, self-image, language or abstract thinking. In terms of chemistry, among the many molecules that intervene in the plural emotions associated with love, one in particular holds the attention of researchers: oxytocin. Yet despite the growing number of studies on the biological, cerebral and psychological mechanisms of love and sexuality, the mystery remains intact.

- **The art of loving others**

We are social beings. Our brains, structured from birth for life in society, learn to think of others and to be touched by them. Empathy, especially, plays a crucial role in human relations. It’s a word we know well, but it is often confused with sympathy, compassion or altruism. Empathy is the ability to feel and understand the experience of others (emotional, motor, etc.) and their mental state by putting ourselves in their place, while maintaining the distinction between ourselves and others, unlike sympathy. This concern for others can give rise to mutual aid. Empathy is a state that varies over the course of life and even in a given day. And, like altruism, empathy can be cultivated.

- **Proofs of love**

Love is not just an emotion or a sentiment, it manifests itself in practices, in words and in objects. These practices are gifts and counter-gifts: confiding, declaring love, giving one’s time, sharing a circle of friends, and giving one’s body are all manifestations that call for reciprocity. Love is also revealed by less visible manifestations: missing the other, heartbreak and jealousy. From a sociological standpoint, love takes the form of shared activities (cinema, restaurant, walks, trips, shows, etc.). Sexuality can also be interpreted as a relationship which involves exchange, compensation and negotiation.

- **How does sexuality develop?**

Human sexuality is not just a matter of instinct and self-control, it is also the result of learning. For a situation to give rise to an act, the actors must recognize signs specific to their culture and their experience. Individuals develop their sexuality from the information they glean here or there, from confrontations, sometimes accidental, with the sexuality of other individuals or displayed in erotic or pornographic productions. As for the relationship between sex and love, there is nothing self-evident about it: one can desire without loving and love without desire.



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In connection with the exhibition

■ Publication

De l'amour, fragments d'un discours scientifique

Co-published by Palais de la découverte and Actes Sud; illustrations by Pooya Abbasian

Co-authors: Marie Bergström, Francesco Bianchi-Demicheli, Philippe Brenot, Nicole Guedeney, Francis Wolff

The book published in connection with the exhibition *About love* at the Palais de la découverte is a unique journey into a state that, more than any other, characterizes the human condition. Five scientists present their views on love and its complex pathways in neurobiological, anthropological, sociological and psychoanalytic terms. Francesco Bianchi-Demicheli takes us on a journey into the brain in love; Marie Bergström considers love in relation to apps and websites; Philippe Brenot examines the history of sexuality; Nicole Guedeney explores the notion of attachment; and Francis Wolff outlines the complexity of the feeling's components. An insert in the middle of book features texts by Henry Bauchau, Joel Pommerat, Sophie Calle, and others along with love messages by text, emblematic of the Map of Tendre in the digital age. These texts speak to us of what we know already, and help us define the contours and understand the subtlety of these feelings.

Format 18 x 28 cm, 96 pages, including a 16-page insert, 24.90€ / on sale at the bookstore and boutique at Palais de la découverte.

Publication date: October 2019

■ Live science presentations

The sciences of love

The exhibition *About love* presents a multidisciplinary discipline in which the various branches of social science and fundamental science converse freely. The live science presentations give visitors the opportunity to delve deeper into a particular facet of the biology of love. The subject is vast and touches on many different areas. Depending on the expertise of the presenter, different topics will be explored – emotions, sexuality, the brain, hormones and more – all in surprising ways!

General public / Age 14 and up / Duration: 30 min to 1h / Starting 19 October 2019

Classes / Secondary school / Duration: 30 min to 1h / Starting 5 November 2019.

■ Conferences

What is left of our loves?

By examining the history of the body, feminism, sexual practices and the codes of the young on the internet, or the very definition of the sentiment of love, historians, sociologists and philosophers will attempt to answer the question, "What is left of our loves?" Saturdays, 16 and 30 November, and 7 December at 4pm.



Practical information

Palais de la découverte

avenue Franklin-Roosevelt - 75008 Paris
M Franklin Roosevelt or Champs-Élysées Clemenceau

Information

01 56 43 20 20

Hours

Open Tuesday to Saturday 9:30am to 6pm
and Sunday 10am to 7pm, closed Monday.

Admission

12€, Reduced price: 9€ (65 and over, teachers, 25 and under, familles nombreuses, students).
Extra 3€ for the planetarium.

→ Free for children 2 years and under, the unemployed, disabled persons and their companions.

www.palais-decouverte.fr

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