the childhood memorabilia of Galton includes a worn copy of the *Iliad* and a letter to a relative, in which the four-year-old brags about being able to read "any English book" and recite "all the Latin substantives". Galton's slant on identity was all about phenotype: on display are the composite photographs with which he tried to distil the facial essence of particular groups: criminals, asylum patients, Baptist ministers — even scientists. Further parallels are introduced in the room devoted to physiologist Franz Joseph Gall, which is full of the trappings of phrenology — moulds of crania and masks of faces, including those of Voltaire and Isaac Newton. These are juxtaposed with videos of scans using magnetic resonance imaging, which show areas of the brain lighting up during difficult decision-making or jazz improvisation — the sort of modern phrenology of which Gall might have approved.

Other rooms explore the perceptions of self from a less scientific vantage. One displays diaries, including that of Samuel Pepys and of Clive Wearing, a pianist with anterograde amnesia whose inability to form new memories means that every line reflects perfect immediacy, as if recording the first moment of his life. Visitors are invited to sit down in the actual *Big Brother* chair and mingle with traces of D-list celebrity sweat. There is a room about twins. In it, two identical twins struggle to distinguish themselves as they age, but the series of photos culminates in an adult pose that is unconsciously mirror-image: the result, we are told, of an egg that split early on in development.

The genetics of gender is addressed in a room about April Ashley, one of the first people in Britain to have a complete sex-change operation. A succession of press clippings charts not the transformation of someone from male to female, but rather the relentless battle of someone who always thought she was a woman. This paper trail ends in a retrospective change of gender on Ashley's birth certificate — a reinventing of biological history that might feel vaguely uncomfortable to the average visitor. Yet the recent public outrage on behalf of Caster Semenya, the world-champion middle-distance runner whose gender is still in dispute, shows that many of us are prepared to define sex by means other than strictly genetic.

Co-curator James Peto admits that, at the beginning, he thought covering a topic such as identity was completely overwhelming. "You can only scratch away at little bits and hopefully raise enough questions for people to start finding answers for themselves." ■

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Mona Hatoum's *Hot Spot* globe.

K. WIGGLESWORTH/AP

Artistic dispatches on climate

Earth: Art of a Changing World
Royal Academy of Arts, London
Until 31 January 2010

Photographs of our blue planet, taken during the 1968 *Apollo 8* lunar mission, transformed our grasp of its fragile equilibrium. In 2009, we need similarly defining images to galvanize interventions to mitigate climate change. Aiming to provide just that is the exhibition *Earth: Art of a Changing World*, organized by the Royal Academy of Arts in London in collaboration with Cape Farewell, a charity that encourages artists to engage with the science of climate change. It examines how the global-warming debate has influenced the practice of more than 30 international contemporary artists, some of whom have participated in Cape Farewell expeditions to the Arctic.

On entering the exhibition — aptly on show in the building formerly occupied by the now defunct Museum of Mankind — visitors are confronted by the UK sculptor Antony Gormley's *Amazonian Field* (1992), which comprises 15,000 fired clay figures with questioning expressions. "I wanted to make a work about our collective future and our responsibility for it," Gormley has said of his sculpture, hand-modelled by people living in the Amazon basin. In contrast to this cooperative work, the Palestinian sculptor Mona Hatoum's *Hot Spot* (2006) alludes to human conflicts at contested borders. A skeletal globe is tilted at the same angle as Earth, its stainless steel latitudes and longitudes supporting continents outlined in glowing neon tubes. *Hot Spot* hints at the increasing global unrest that could be caused by water shortages resulting from climate change.

Also on show is the work of the UK artists Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, participants in several Cape Farewell expeditions. As part of their ongoing project, Beuys' Acorns (started in 2007), they have planted young oak saplings — grown from acorns collected from trees planted by the pioneering German ecological artist Joseph Beuys in 1982 — on the portico outside the exhibition. Growing more trees, rather than felling the world's forests, is their symbolic and optimistic act in the face of justifiable pessimism about climate change.

"We have come to this ship in a frozen fjord to think about the ways we might communicate our concerns about climate change to a wider public," said UK writer Ian McEwan of the purpose of his and other artists' 2005 Cape Farewell expedition. His latest novel, to be published next year, deals with climate change. For now, his text *The Hot Breath of Our Civilisation* (2005), is exhibited on the gallery wall as a scrolling display. It provides an epilogue to the exhibition: "Are we at the beginning of an unprecedented era of international cooperation, or are we living in an Edwardian summer of reckless denial? Is this the beginning, or the beginning of the end?" ■

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