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"THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN TWO DISCIPLINES DOES NOT TAKE PLACE WHERE ONE BEGINS TO REFLECT ON THE OTHER, BUT WHERE ONE REALIZES IT HAS TO RESOLVE FOR ITSELF, BY ITS OWN MEANS, A PROBLEM SIMILAR TO THE ONE CONFRONTED BY THE OTHER." – DELEUZE

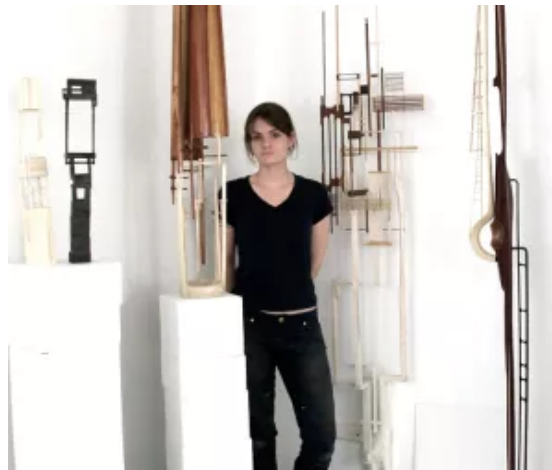
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GALLERY + INTERVIEW: MEGAN MCGLYNN

📅 SEPTEMBER 9, 2013 👤 BY NOAH HUTTON ([HTTP://THEBEAUTIFULBRAIN.COM/AUTHOR/NOAH/](http://thebeautifulbrain.com/author/noah/)) ⌚ 7 MIN READ

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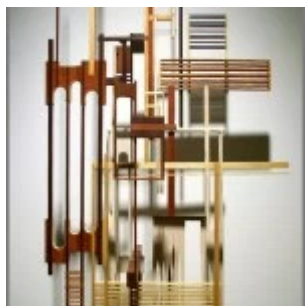


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Megan McGlynn

Megan McGlynn (<http://meganmcglynn.com/>)'s sculptures might not immediately strike you as brain-inspired, or brain-related. But look at them closely: inside their intricate worlds, there are hints at the complexity, functionality, and organizational principles of minds; these seem to be the thematic reservoirs for the artist's architectural explorations. The results of these explorations have formed an impressive body of work by McGlynn, who seems particularly adept at navigating the delicate balance between the intuitive and the explicit, speaking about her work with clarity, yet remaining sensitive to its mystery.

GALLERY



(http://i1.wp.com/thebeautifulbrain.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SQ_Neural_Network02.jpg)



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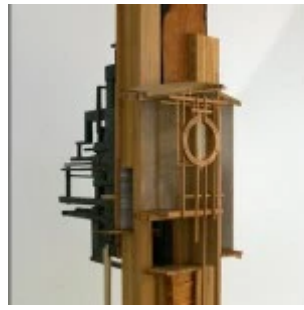
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INTERVIEW

You write in your artist's statement that you are interested in the "architecture of human perception." Looking at your wood sculptures, which have titles like "Mirror Neurons" and "Neural Network 005," I'm struck by how architectural they are, how you've created microcosmic worlds within these structures. Do you think about the brain in a very architectural way? What's your conceptual process of translating findings on mirror neurons, for example, to a built structure?

I think architecture is a powerful way to visualize neuroscience concepts because it's one of the most ancient of ways that humans organized themselves and their thoughts. In that way it helps illustrate our evolution, but also consistent patterns in our thinking. It's difficult for me to look at a built structure without having a visceral response, there's so much information to take in about the people involved with it, their skills, their access to materials, their needs and aspirations. Also, as a visual thinker and craftsman, I tend to think about most aspects of life through building processes – I always have to think about what materials, tools, steps you would need to create a certain structure or effect. In that same vein I end up visualizing the brain and the things it creates – personalities, memories, emotions – as emergent structures made from anatomical "building blocks."

For your example, several studies show that mirror neurons may be what allows humans and animals to transfer knowledge through imitation. This could be a major reason for how organisms make connections and can organize themselves, and even a foundation for the beginnings of culture. In my work, I take these kinds of concepts, experiment with materials, and try to create my own simplified architectural language to express them. The structures in *Mirror Neurons* are less about anatomy and more representative of what they enable – the acquisition of knowledge (the stacking of pieces upward), the alteration of that knowledge as it's passed from one individual to another (the differences between each structure), and their lasting connection (their facing toward one another).

How did you originally become interested in neuroscience? What was it that hooked you, and what continues to be at the core of your interest in this area?

I began training in drawing and color theory at a young age in a strict atelier program, and learned that there was a unique way of perceiving and portraying the visual world on a 2D surface. I learned to flatten objects into simple geometries and strategically pick out and replicate masses of ever-changing color. It wasn't intuitive but has become a kind of second vision that I can turn on and off, like being fluent in a second language. This never occurred to me as interesting until I read *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*, by Oliver Sacks, as a young teenager. I realized how amazing vision is – and then how amazing every sensation is, and that there is some quantitative mechanism underneath it all. I am still fascinated by vision, but my work now deals mainly with how images are altered by memory. Neuroscience is such a vast and unknown world, I feel genuinely lucky to observe its rapid growth and add my own little comments through artwork.

Looking back at the work you've made to date, how do you feel your conceptions of neural architecture have evolved since you first started making work? Do you feel the work has noticeably co-evolved as your own understanding of the neuroscience has developed?

My earlier work was mainly copies of CAT scans or illustrations of the limbic system interspersed with classically rendered still-life paintings of oranges. In other words, I copied things I saw. Slowly I became less interested in making a clear image and decided to use concepts I understood from studying neuropsychology: the mind will make sense of what it sees due to its own experiences. My philosophy now is that strange or unclear artwork is much more interesting to create and to view. It forces people to either reject it or figure it out. The allusions to architecture have become much greater since I've begun literally constructing sculptures. The building process can become all encompassing and make me start to see everything in a mechanically replicable way, even the protean nature of thought.

What do you hope to communicate to the casual viewer of your work, someone who doesn't know much about science?

With little formal education in the sciences, I often feel as though I don't know much about science... but I am a self-taught enthusiast and endlessly fascinated. I think my artwork is equally a reassurance to myself as it is a statement to others that expertise is not required to be curious, learn and talk about these things. Curiosity and exploration are so deeply human, and modern science is so incredible, I want everyone to find an exciting gateway into learning about the world around and within them. If a piece excites someone to look up the title and find out for themselves what mirror neurons or synapses are, that is wonderful. While I do make my work with some concrete ideas based on research, the rest is rather intuitive and responsive to materials. It leaves a lot for the viewer to pull apart, so I don't expect people to understand what they are about. Without looking at the title, people with any level of scientific background may see something with no connection to neuroscience or see something much more complex than I currently understand. It may be why I am an artist and not a scientist – there are no wrong answers in art.

Do you believe art that deals with the brain can reveal or communicate anything about the brain that science alone cannot?

This is a very tough question. I think it boils down to how you define art... which is also a never-ending question. I have a hard time finding the boundary between art and science, but I do believe there are a lot of things images can communicate that words cannot and visa versa – of course, science creates a lot of images, so this is not really a reflection on the powers of science versus art. These fields are very closely tied – psychologists use art to help explore mental health, and I already mentioned the ability of architecture to reveal a lot about thinking and needs. Are these more artistic approaches “better” at telling us about the brain than “science”? I don't know, it depends on what kinds of answers you're looking for. That said, contemporary art is also far from being just paintings and sculptures. As technology evolves with exponential speed and accessibility, it wouldn't surprise me to see artists push further into more traditionally scientific realms with revolutionary ideas. In terms of this question and my own work, I am experimenting with qualia, which may always remain an unknown and is the spirituality of science: the fact that the universe exists and we can experience, observe and reflect upon it.

See more at the artist's website (<http://meganmcglynn.com/>).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Noah Hutton

Noah Hutton is a film director and curator, and was named a 2015 Salzburg Global Fellow in Neuroscience and Art.

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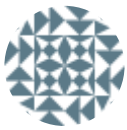


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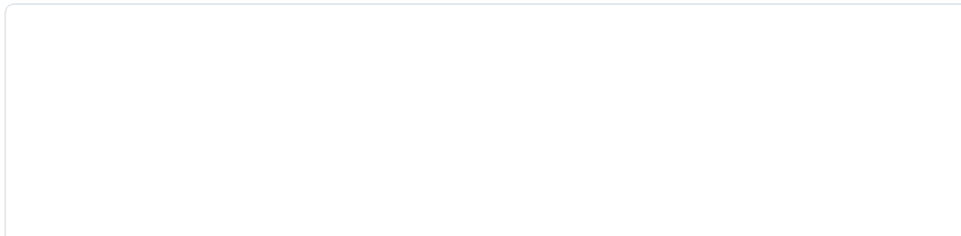
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