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Pattern Completion: Trust-funded installation explores how brain cells recall memories

18 May 2010



An evocative installation exploring the ways in which brain cells recall memories debuts at Gimpel Fils this month. Created by an artist, sound designer and neuroscientist, 'Pattern Completion' is the outcome of a collaborative research project funded by the Wellcome Trust.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a short 'in conversation' event where the collaborators - artist Michaela Nettell, sound designer Tom Simmons and scientist Hugo Spiers - will be joined by philosophy lecturer Dr M Peg Rawes, artist Helen Maurer and poet Andrew McDonnell. The group will discuss how artists, scientists, philosophers and creative writers study themes of memory and the ways in which our brain pieces together past information of places and events.

'Pattern Completion': 20-22 May 2010
 Press preview: 19 May, 18.00-20.00
 Artists, philosopher, scientist and poet in conversation: 22 May, 16.00-18.00, followed by refreshments
 Venue: Gimpel Fils, 30 Davies Street, London W1K 4NB
 T 020 7493 2488
 E info@gimpelfils.com
 Mon-Fri 10.00-17.30; Sat 11.00-16.00

When a memory is created, patterns of activity inside brain cells become inscribed in their connections, leaving a trace known as an engram. When the memory is recalled, it is thought that this trace is restored and the original activity pattern re-established.

At first, the activity of the cells is incoherent. But during the pattern completion process, the activity pattern is pieced together with repeated activation until the original pattern is complete. Sometimes it fails, leaving us unable to bring elements of the past to mind.

'Pattern Completion' echoes this process using sound recordings and photographic sequences captured in forests. The sequences are fragmented, shuffled and projected into constellations of suspended glass spheres.

The forest scenes, based on pathways, clearings and walking are purposefully empty of people and objects. The images and sounds provide cues for viewers to complete, or interpret, these landscapes with recollections of their own.

Dr Hugo Spiers commented: "Computer models of the brain are incredible tools for understanding what is going on, but are generally quite poor at conveying this information visually and don't use sound at all. This project not only does that, but explores deeper hidden themes of memory and its link to space and place".

Michaela Nettell said: "It has been fascinating to discover what actually happens inside our brain when a memory is pieced together, and to observe some of Hugo's experiments in the labs. By using neuroscientific theory to inform our approach to sound and image production we have pushed our creative practice in new and exciting directions."

The installation exposes the complex nature of memory, the ambiguities between remembered and imagined places and events, the transient qualities of our memories, and the ways we use our memories to define ourselves.

'Pattern Completion' will be on display at Gimpel Fils in London between Thursday 20 and Saturday 22 May 2010.

Image: Pattern Completion (installation view), 2009, video projections onto suspended glass spheres © Michaela Nettell and Tom Simmons.

Contact

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Notes to editors

Website: [Pattern Completion](#)
Images: [Download a selection of images](#)

Biographies

Michaela Nettell

Michaela combines video and film projections with glass, water and mirrors to create short films and sculptural installations that describe fleeting experiences of memory and perception. Her work has been exhibited in galleries throughout Europe and is regularly screened at international festivals and events.

Tom Simmons collaborates with artists, musicians and scientists to create films, installations, performances and texts that explore ways in which we perceive and experience sounds and animated moving images. He is a Senior Lecturer and Research Coordinator at Norwich University College of the Arts.

Dr Hugo Spiers is a neuroscientist at University College London. His research explores how we navigate space and remember the past. Currently his research group are examining how small constellations of brain cells contribute to mapping space and guiding behaviour.

Dr M Peg Rawes is a Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of Diploma History and Theory at the Bartlett, University College London. Her research on architecture, art and philosophy explores theories of embodiment, materiality and spatiotemporality. She is a regular speaker at London galleries.

Helen Maurer uses combined mediums such as glass and light to create installations that evoke remembered places. She likens the process of making to 'reconstruction' and a search for something familiar, as though the pieces already exist and the work is to find them. She won the Jerwood Glass Prize in 2003.

Andrew McDonnell is a poet who usually performs his work with the multi-instrumental group My Dark Aunt. He is currently studying for a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of East Anglia, writing poems based around the psychogenic fugue state. He lives in Norwich, where he teaches creative writing.

About the Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is a global charity dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. It supports the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. The Trust's breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. It is independent of both political and commercial interests. www.wellcome.ac.uk

About Gimpel Fils

[Gimpel Fils](#) prides itself on exhibiting contemporary art that is thoughtful and challenging. Founded in 1946 the gallery immediately played an important role in bringing international and British art to post-war London. During the 1950s and '60s Gimpel Fils gave solo exhibitions to artists such as Anthony Caro, Marcel Duchamp and Barbara Hepworth. Gimpel Fils continues to balance its commitment to an older generation of artists whilst supporting emerging talents such as Steven Gontarski, Hannah Maybank and Lucy Stein.