MIND FOUNDATION

The dialogue between art and neuroscience | MIND Blog

DATE PUBLISHED

3 August 2020



> Whether incidental or decisive, art in neuroscience is a tool for educating and inspiring, communicating and sharing, for artists and neuroscientists alike.

At the MIND Foundation's Symposium "Progress on Bewusstseinskultur," as well as the recent Members' Convention, guests may have noticed various artworks in MIND's new office space in Berlin Friedrichshain. Both in-person and online attendees also got to experience a meditative light and sound performance by OATS collective. In this blog post, we would like to share with you the motivation and story behind these, as well as our other work as EDGE.

EDGE came to life three years ago in Berlin, when all of us were pursuing neuroscience degrees (in neurobiology, medical neuroscience, and cognitive science). We soon realised that many of our fellow students were also talented artists, with no fitting platform to express themselves. "The greatest scientists are artists as well," Albert Einstein once said. We believed that the study of the brain and all the beauty that neuroscience research produces is worth sharing.

Soon we decided to curate an exhibition, held in July 2018 at >topLab in the heart of Neukölln, Berlin, accompanied by tours, talks, and Q&As with the artists. We considered the exhibition an excellent way to communicate scientific knowledge in an alternative style, to provide insight into the scientific process, and to humanise and individualise researchers in the eyes of the public. For four days, we displayed a dense variety of works: a dance performance, photography in both black & white and colour, water-colour and oil paintings, projections, a sound-scape, a hologram, graphite sketches, light-boxes, and more. Scientific themes were evident in many pieces, with microscopy images, magnified blow-ups of biological tissue, and lab equipment—but there was also a lot that was personal and human in the works on display. Many depicted

friends and colleagues at work, while others showed the human side of clinical neuroscience in artworks on mental diversity. Given the chance to express this through art, we opened up a space for communication between artists and visitors. What do the artists want to convey about neuroscience? Who are they? Why do they do research on? What is that like? What do they find beautiful about it?

During this exhibition, we received a lot of positive feedback from our fellow students about the chance to build on their creative expressions and connect with like-minded individuals. We had planted a seed: a demand for a community interested in the intersection of art and neuroscience, neuroscience communication, and the beauty of the brain. Thus, we continued and expanded the activities of the project. In 2019, we held our first workshop in our new series on "Neuroscience and Creativity" with the goal to evoke constructive synergies between artists and scientists, to share practical and conceptual knowledge, and to generate public outreach from academia. We are convinced that such an exchange of approaches and methods may benefit both the artistically and scientifically creative mind.

Later that year, we hosted our second summer exhibition. This time we set up an open call for artists, and we soon noticed how many artists out there are inspired by research in neuroscience, biology, and psychology. Their artworks depicted different topics in neuroscience, such as memory, mindfulness, and neurological diversity, and they even used neuroimaging techniques like EEG for interactive performances. For many of them art, too, is research: Artists are investigating similar questions to scientists and are also trying to understand themselves and the world around them. Art asks questions: how to communicate and conceptualise topics, and how to experience them.

Our exhibition travelled across two locations: the foyer of the CCO, Charité's research facility in Berlin Mitte, and a decommissioned power plant in Berlin Steglitz. These contrasting locations attracted people from different fields and recontextualised the works for new perspectives. What emerged was new access to typically secluded neuroscientific work. Artist and neuroscientist Dr. Mateusz Ambrozkiewicz said, "I think this project offers deep insight into the work of a neuroscientist, explains the concept of developmental diseases, and attracts people to promote discussions and thought." He continued: "I am thrilled that I can present my work in a different medium, reach a varied audience, and explain why basic research is of invaluable benefit to humankind."1

This summer we also established our collaboration with the MIND Foundation. In the visual arts exhibition accompanying the INSIGHT conference 2019, we curated video installations and paintings (examples can be found on pages 30-34 in the conference report). One year later, we had the great opportunity to decorate MIND's new office space in Berlin-Friedrichshain with artworks by eight different artists just before the start of the MIND Symposium on "Progress in Bewusstseinskultur."2 The day was accompanied by an arts performance from OATS collective Amsterdam, offering a direct experience of the connection between art and consciousness.

Ever since, we have solidified our mission: to initiate interdisciplinary collaborations between artists and neuroscientists, to facilitate sharing contemporary conceptual and practical knowledge, to support the completion of art projects, and to give artists a platform for exhibitions in Berlin and beyond. We hope that members of the public who come to our exhibitions learn about neuroscience in an interactive way in order to enrich public knowledge and make science relatable. Furthermore, we want to offer scientists and research institutes a way to reach out and communicate their insights in an approachable way. We hope that this dialogue between artists and scientists will continue to form a community of individuals across disciplines to discuss and collaborate, combining perspectives to create works for the public good.

At this point, we are delighted to announce that this year, the MIND Foundation will host us for the first part of our 2020 multimedia exhibition. For four days (October 15-18), we will welcome the neuro-curious to this interdisciplinary showcase of the beauty of the brain by international artists and neuroscientists. People can book two-hour long time slots to comply with COVID-19 safety measures (tickets are available here).