

Neural Notations

Curated by Donna Leigh Schumacher

Elliot W. Anderson, Cheryl Coon, Jennifer Gwirtz, horea, Elliot Ross, Donna Leigh Schumacher, Susan Schwartzberg, Gail Wright : 17 January – 10 February

Strange things, our brains. When the brain runs amok it often does so in a spectacular fashion: a tumor, a paranoid episode, a manic high, a desperate low. The link between creativity and neurology has been made, and continues to be made, the artist as madman proposition having been explored and exploited since kingdom come and Van Gogh chopped his ear off. Sometimes I think this premise is as limiting as illness itself.

There must, however, be ways of talking about such ideas which allow for empowerment, understanding and exploration, without reducing everything to clichés of crazy geniuses and mad painters. The best works in *Neural Notations* danced a beautifully fine line between the personal and the political, being communicative rather than introspective, close without navel gazing. Their power was in a lightness of touch, as much what the works didn't say as what they did. A dark edgy humour was a feature of the show, notably in Gail Wight's work *The First Evolutionary Occurrence of Pain* (1999), a diagram of a snail's primitive pain receptors wired directly into a tiny model diorama of a car crash - funny, not funny. And again, in the sad/funny *Brain Dolls* of Donna Leigh Schumacher, who danced a brave, wobbly dance atop a plinth, their composition equal parts rag doll and serotonin boosters.

Cheryl Coon's work was both beautiful and terrifying, a sprawling constellation of flower or star-like objects, each created from tacks wound into a ball of thread, and thrown as hard as possible at the wall, to protrude precariously from the gibbed wall. Its rhizomic construction was largely random, constrained by the limits of the wall space, and the installing gallery workers ability to throw. Each tiny object contained dozens of piercingly sharp metal tacks which dug into the edge of the wall, shimmering with palatable danger.

Jennifer Gwirtz and her partner John Bauman performed live at the exhibition's opening, against a backdrop of Gwirtz's framed graphs and notes. Their intensely personal compositions were based on transforming ECG scanner readouts into musical scores, utilizing their voices as instruments, bending notes into sounds and shapes rather than 'singing' in the strictest sense. Jennifer's diminutive body stretched and moved against the sound, in one solo performance she performed quirky cute wee hand movements like a chirpy little bird. But cuteness aside, this was both charming and moving, and was the moment in the show which hit me powerfully.

Emma Bugden