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Apertures & Anxieties: Artists Celebrate 300 years of TCD's School of Medicine, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 16 November - 21 December 2011

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Medicine only became 'scientific' in the early twentieth century with the transfer of diagnosis and treatment from the privacy of the home to the public space of the hospital. There was also a shift in perception of the doctor. To distance themselves from possible charges of quackery, doctors adopted the scientist's white coat, a metaphor for the serious pursuit of knowledge but also a symbol of the cleanliness then lacking in public institutions. Throughout the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century, science dominated medical curricula, diagnosis, and treatment regimens. This has undoubtedly been of immense benefit to the patient, but perhaps the pendulum has swung too much in the direction of rationalism and the scientific method so that the art of medicine has become less valued. C.P. Snow's lament at the widening gulf between the fields of art and science in the late 1950s has proven accurate. But for a variety of reasons including methodology, perhaps the gulf has been more from science's perspective. Art, on the other hand, has frequently absorbed the discoveries of science into its practice and thinking. Yet there are signs of a rapprochement as scientists increasingly find that their discoveries on memory and vision, for example, have often been anticipated through observation and experience by artists like Proust and Cézanne.

Medical schools in recent decades have also become aware of the dangers of an overly scientific approach to patient experience and care and are increasingly turning to the arts and humanities in the training of medical students. The School of Medicine, Trinity College Dublin, is one of these. In 2009, eleven humanities modules were introduced as part of the core curriculum for first-year medical students in the hope of producing more rounded and empathetic doctors in the future. It is not surprising therefore that the School of Medicine, in its Tercentenary Year, approached the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) to create an exhibition giving artists direct contact

with current scientific research. What emerged in *Apertures and Anxieties* is a dynamic and exciting interaction with a diverse body of work, media, and themes.

Comprised of eleven of Ireland's leading contemporary artists, it is a relatively small show that does not overwhelm and therefore induces a more leisurely kind of viewing and listening experience that these multi-layered works require. A notable aspect of contemporary art evident here is the time spent in research prior to material realisation of the work. Not surprisingly, many artists were drawn to the Anatomy School and the Institute of Neuroscience, others to Psychology, Philosophy, Ethics and Global Health departments. Curated by Patrick T. Murphy, the exhibition is installed mainly on the first floor of the gallery, with Garrett Phelan's *Known in Part Only* located on the ground floor.



Garrett Phelan: *Facies Hippocratica*, ink and pen on paper, 42 x 295cm

Phelan's installation draws, at one level, on the science of electromagnetic wave frequencies, so that it becomes in effect a radio station on FM 99 - 103 MHz where a physicist gives a lecture on modern scientific concepts of space, time, colour and light, and electromagnetic energy. At another level, a

series of black-and-white pen, ink and collage drawings point to an aspect of human experience that even science cannot prevent: death. Only one drawing, *Facies Hippocratica* is shown; the rest are in a Zine booklet with research interview notes that can be purchased for a modest price. The reality of death and the altruistic donation of bodies to science become the central dialectic underpinning Phelan's installation. Observation, in spite of marked scientific advances, remains a primary tool for the twenty-first-century doctor. In *Facies Hippocratica* Phelan couples this tradition with death by referring to the ability of Hippocratic doctors to tell whether death was imminent by observing facial features. The component parts of *Known in Part Only* gradually coalesce to become a meditation on areas of human experience that continue to be contradictory, formless and resistant to the certainties of science.

Grace Weir, like the majority of work in the exhibition, presented a constellation of pieces in the form of an installation. The video *If A, then B*, two sets of paper stacks with stones, and another small video, *Déjà Vu*, all probed mental models of how we think, reason, imagine and act, based on the theory that imaginative and rational thoughts are based on the same principles.



Abigail O'Brien: *Sic Juro*, machine- and hand-embroidered hospital blanket (detail of work in progress), 165 x 230cm

Abigail O'Brien, like Phelan, looked back to the Hippocratic Oath. The Oath, although modernized in 1964 by Professor Louis Lasagna of Tufts University, is not taken by graduating doctors in Ireland, so O'Brien made her own audiovisual version, *Sic Juro (I Swear)*. Derived from a popular song, she embroidered the words in Latin onto a hospital blanket, "a symbol of protection and care" hung on the gallery wall. A hidden sensor beneath the blanket initiates with passing movement the song with the recurring refrain: "I'll be there." Like other works in this exhibition, the artist's personal experience of illness is literally, in this case, woven into the artwork. While the Hippocratic Oath promised to do no harm, O'Brien's version implies that in our technologically driven times patients require more than ever to be treated in a way that recognises them not as a disease, but as individuals *with* a disease.



Aideen Barry: *Deep in the Marrow, Instrument II*, 2011, surgical steel, 36 cm x 26 cm; courtesy © the artist, 2011

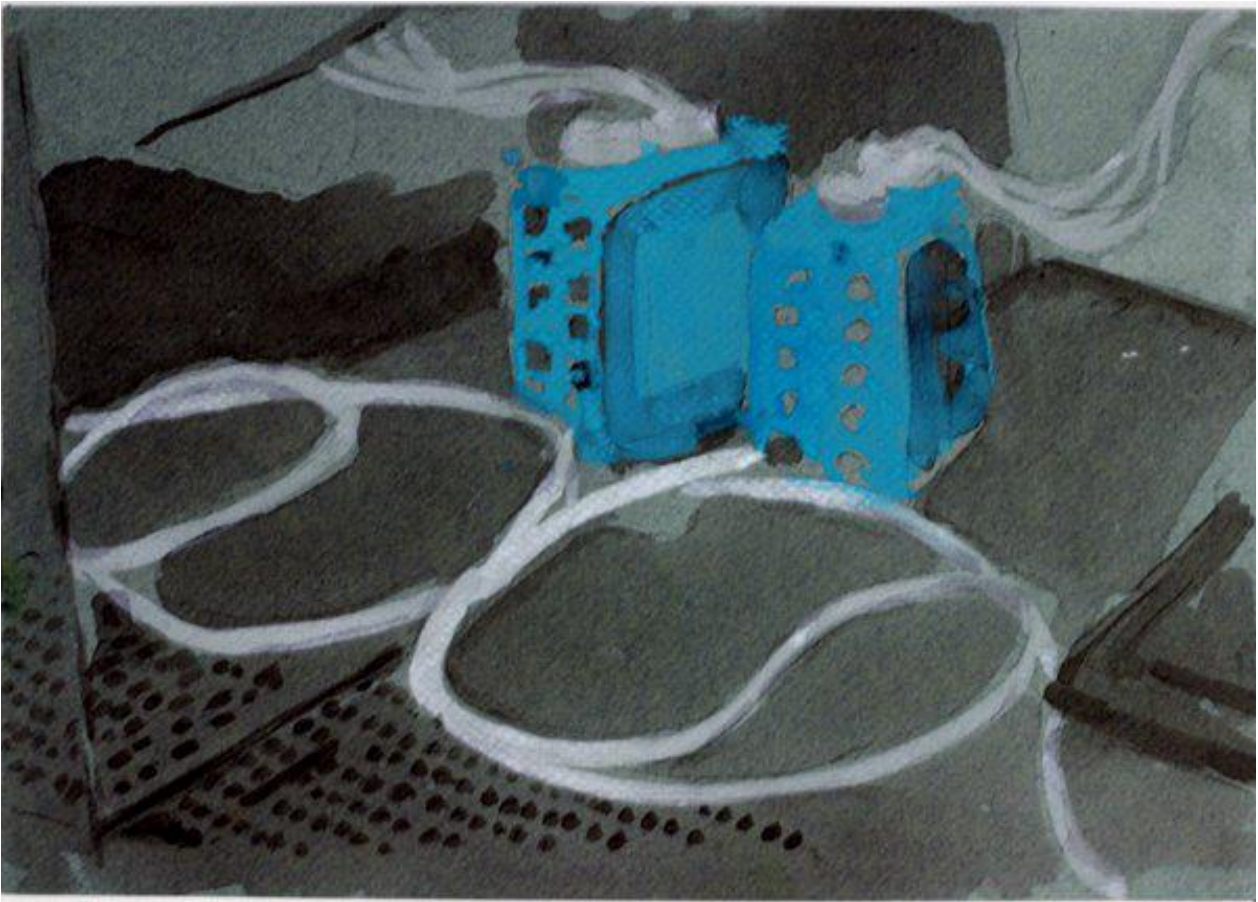
This theme of the loss of identity often felt in a hospital environment reappears in Aideen Barry's surreal, witty video installation, *Deep in the Marrow*, an angular boxed truncated body, each box with moving images of limbs, head and female trunk. Each 'dissected' part responds to the central 'dissection' of the abdomen that reveals internal organs that move and breathe, including a revolving pair of kidneys. The face looks down at this

with some apprehension and soft cries amid the gurgling sounds below. This interpretation of the anxieties patients experience in medical situations, including contemplation of their own mortality, is complemented by the nearby display of bizarre surgical instruments.



Megan Eustace: *Donor Body Prepared for Spot Exam, Anatomy Department, TSM, 2010*, Conte on paper, 56 x 76cm; courtesy the artist

Megan Eustace takes drawing, the central teaching tool of both art and medicine, as the focus of her installation *In Remembrance*. Here the traditional drawing from the live model in art is transferred to bodies donated to science in the School of Anatomy. With historical references to drawing in art (Ruskin) and science (*Gray's Anatomy*), these beautiful pieces readily bring the anatomical drawings of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci to mind. The donated bodies, 'silent teachers' respected by generations of medical students, are treated with discretion in small intimate drawings that demand viewing at close range. Similarly, a large book of dissections has to be viewed privately by each spectator wearing protective gloves.



Ciarán Murphy: *Conduit*, 2011, watercolour and gouache on paper, 21 x 30 cm; courtesy the artist and Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam

Ciarán Murphy's understated series of paintings provides the material context of the Anatomy School where medical education takes place. Nick Miller's installation, a sculpture and a series of paintings, addresses the poignant reality of the 'lost' mind in Alzheimer's Disease. Taking the amygdala (the part of the brain associated with conditioning and emotional learning), paintings he had been working on for some time, and his notebooks dating back to 1984, Miller first explores the material matter of the brain in drawings in the School of Anatomy before turning to consciousness and the mind. The result is *Absent: Mind & Matter*, a mixed-media sculpture of the artist's disembodied coat containing a video projection of a brain, and a 'head' made of sealed notebooks, the repository of 28 years of thinking and imagining.



Nick Miller: *Absent-mind and matter*, mixed media installation and video projection, 164 x 80 x 50cm, 1984 - 2011; courtesy the artist and Rubicon Gallery, Dublin



Andrew Folan: *Plastic Memory*, inkjet satellite photography; courtesy the artist

Andrew Folan and Eilís O'Connell find sources of inspiration in neuroscientific research. Like Miller, Folan is interested in consciousness and how the brain changes physically with the transmission of information through synaptic gaps in the nervous system. Folan expands the idea to society "(which) is a macrocosm of cognition and is structured as an organic whole through its interconnectivity." Using satellite photographs, he mapped pathways and tracks left by people's random walks in the Phoenix Park, documented in book form. Recording changes of direction or intersections where tracks overlap and chance interactions occur, a mapping of consciousness became visualised. Other books with needle burns of varying depth through the paper represent different levels of memory recorded by the brain, while another wittily juxtaposes the spine of the book with images of the spinal column nervous system.



Eilís O'Connell, *Circuit _ Spine*, 2011, ink on handmade paper, 53 x 53 cm; courtesy the artist

O'Connell's installation also explores structures of the nervous system in a series of beautifully delicate ink drawings, and sculptures. Inspired by the drawings of Santiago Ramon y Cajal (1852 - 1934), a neuroscientist, O'Connell discovered the remarkable similarity between human neurological circuitry and natural forms which she utilises to great effect. The circular wall sculpture *Dendrites* (the fibres that receive information in the brain) is made from painted willow branches, while another smaller wall sculpture, *Purk Cell*, from coral. *Neuron*, a stainless-steel painted sculpture with a central 'body' and extensions that wander in all directions playfully refers to Purkinje cells at the base of the brain (cerebellum) that control movement.

Finally, Theresa Nanigian's three large pencil-and-charcoal drawings on black paper of the brain, *May Become Lost in the Model*, use image and text to look at different anatomical areas relating to memory, reasoning, personality traits and emotion. Maria McKinney's *Global Health* jigsaws (originally called

"dissected maps") of the world, graphically describe the appalling imbalance of world health in terms of death, war, famine and conquest.

This compelling exhibition demonstrates the fruitful ground to be explored and the common concerns of scientists and artists; both have much to offer each other. And we need both: scientists to research structural and functional aspects of the body and mind, and artists to explore areas of human experience that science has yet to reach.

1. These included: Perception in Art & Medicine; History of Medicine; Philosophy; Literature; Biomedical Ethics: Death & Dying & Representations of Insanity; Creative Writing; Advocacy; Arts & Health; Film & Medicine; Power & Its Applications

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