

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

■ ART & SCIENCE

The Gallery as Brain

A new show at the Hayward explores the architecture of the mind.

by **Brian Dillon**





The subject of “Walking in My Mind” is the art installation as expression of inner space.

description of the Hayward as a vast humming cranium. Thomas Hirschhorn's elaborately happenstantial installations suggest thought processes of baroque profusion and provisionality. Yayoi Kusama's vast, spotted globular sculptures might be products of a garish mind or the corpuscles that keep that mind aerated and inventive. Chiharu Shiota's wool-wrapped objects, their halos of black webbing reaching out eerily toward the walls of the gallery or the surface of a vitrine, seem a sort of tangible melancholia, thoughts turned stringy and intransigent. All of this seems to propose a more allegorical than neurological approach to the gallery as a space with ideas of its own. ♦

“Walking in My Mind” is on view at the Hayward Gallery, London, June 23–Sept. 9.

FACING PAGE: Yayoi Kusama, *Dots Obsession*, 2004. Mixed-media installation.

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: Pipilotti Rist, still from *Extremes (smooth)*, 1999. Detail from audio-video installation.

Chiharu Shiota, *In Silence*, 2008. Piano, chairs, wool.

At first glance, the central premise of the Hayward's summer show seems to court too eagerly the tedious controversy around neuroaesthetics. “Walking in My Mind” aims to “transform the gallery's unique spaces into a giant brain by bringing together large-scale installations that explore the workings of the mind in different ways ... while at the same time inviting visitors to explore their own thought processes.” It's potentially a clunky conceit, and it risks the sort of interdisciplinary pratfalls that have made for such bathetic reading in recent attempts to bring together art and brain science. It's as yet unclear exactly what, if anything, is to be gained from the neurologist Semir Zeki's assertion that artists “are unknowingly exploiting the organization of the brain”; nor does John Onians's book *Neuroarthistory* (2007) really convince with its claim that art critics like Ruskin and Pater were actually neurologists in disguise all along. Fortunately, Stephanie Rosenthal, the Hayward's chief curator, and Mami Kataoka, its international curator, seem to have spotted the limitations of the field early on, and deliver instead a more expansive sense of an exhibition that thinks.

“Walking in My Mind” is in part an extension of the metaphors of architectural immersion that the Hayward's director, Ralph Rugoff, broached in his 2008 exhibition *Psycho Buildings*—a similar ambition to exploit the psychological potential of the gallery's rigid but resonant Brutalist spaces seems in evidence. But whereas *Psycho Buildings* (which included work by Mike Nelson, Rachel Whiteread, and Atelier Bow-Wow) was very much a show about artists' perversions of architecture itself, the subject of “Walking in My Mind” is rather the installation as expression of inner space. In fact, perhaps that's how Rosenthal and Kataoka have neatly sidestepped the problem of mapping art onto anatomy and neurology: by conceiving (in a somewhat old-fashioned way) of the mind as a sort of space, not the fantasmic effect of neurobiology. There is something unashamedly literal about the idea of the gallery as brain.

In practice, much of the work in “Walking in My Mind” is really about the act of artistic invention, rather than the rigors of thought as such: Behind the gallery-as-brain is the brain-as-studio. Charles Avery's ongoing elaboration of an imaginary island, populated with fantastical hybrid beasts, monstrous gods, and philosophically inclined natives, is both an homage to certain literary precursors (Borges, Calvino, H. G. Wells) and a pursuit of the question of how close installation can come to mapping a fictive world before it turns into pure whimsy. Mark Manders, too, elaborates a fictional realm in *Self-Portrait as a Building* (1986–), his series of sculptures and architectural plans that concern one “Mark Manders,” a “neurotic, sensitive individual who can only exist in an artificial world.”

Others among the artists in “Walking in My Mind” seem to fit more readily, in their transformation of the space itself, the notional

