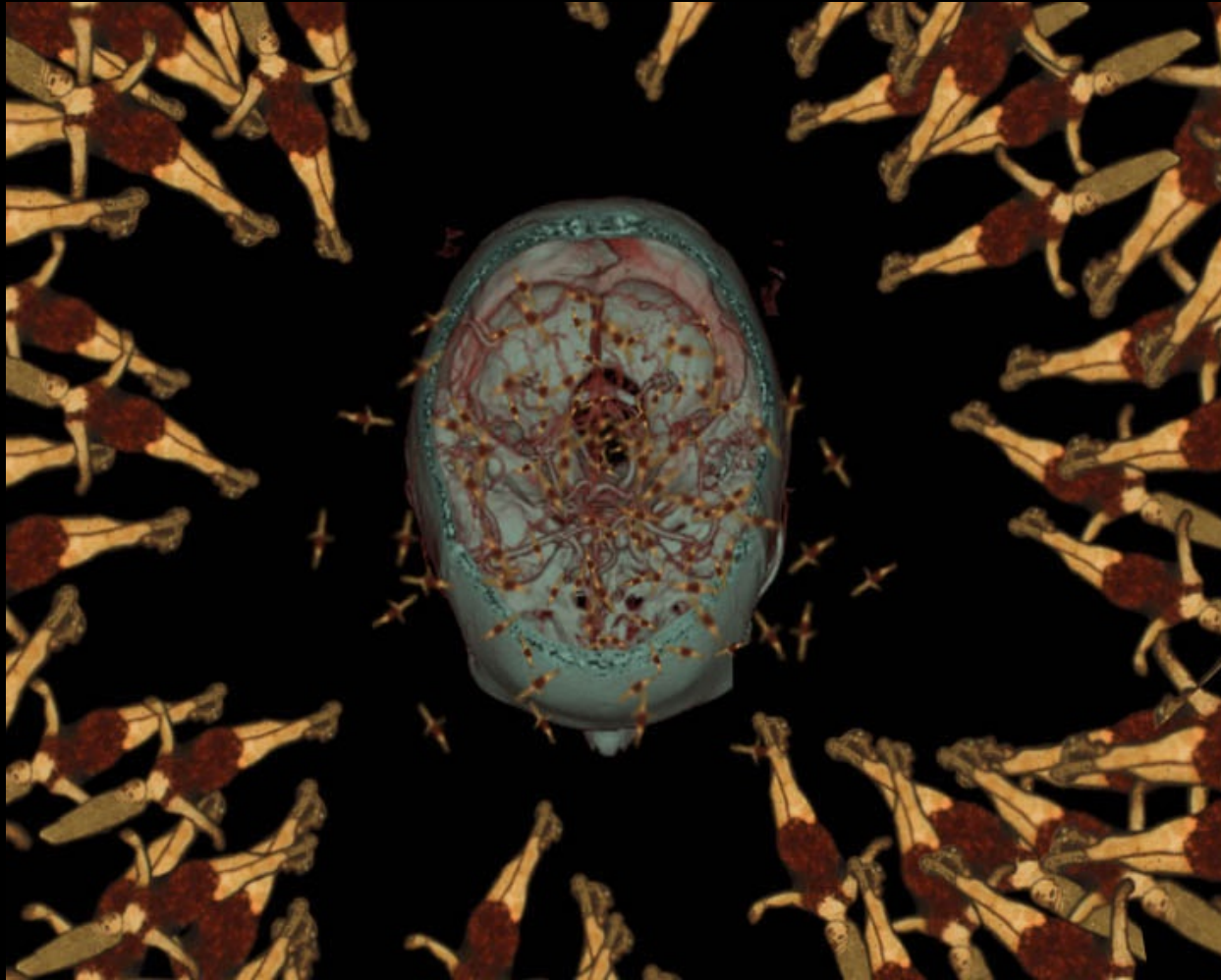


What is Visual Imagination?



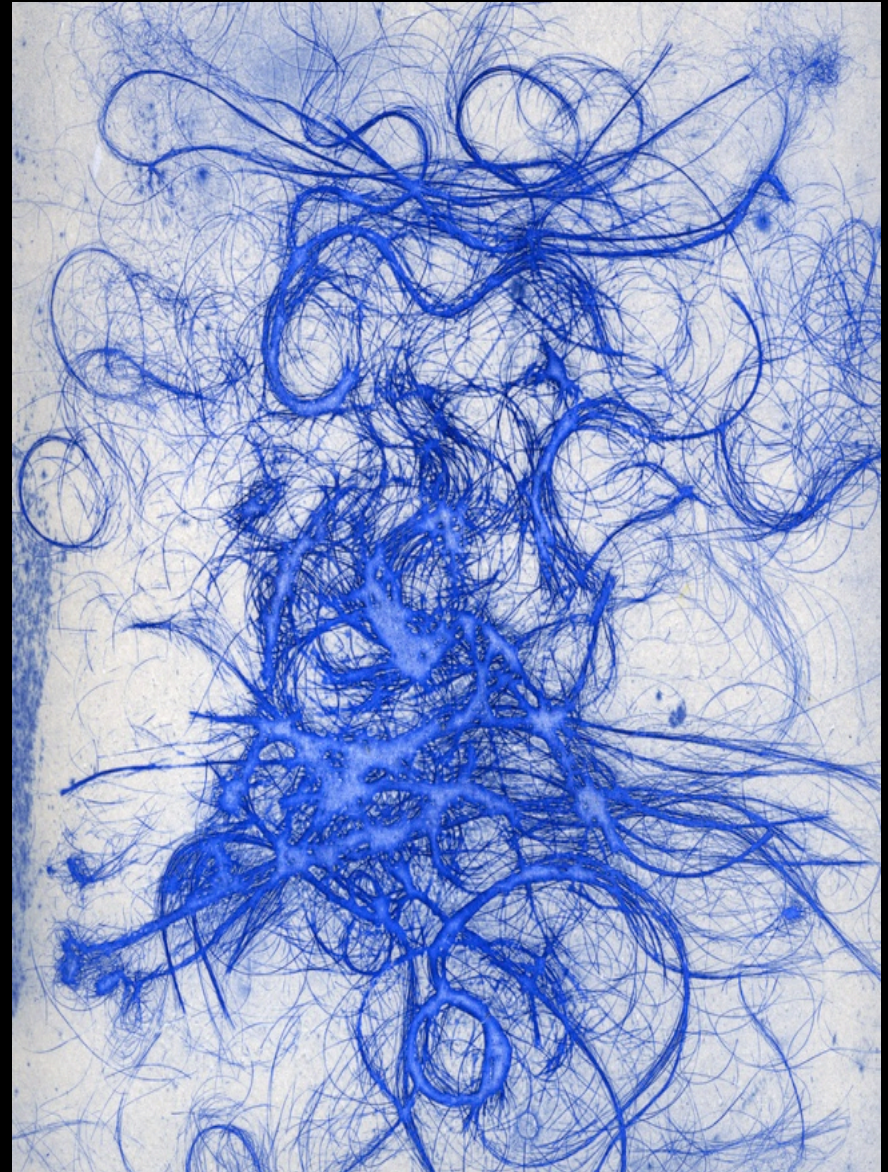
14 artists filled in both my artists' visual imagination questionnaire and the VVIQ form.

10 artists thought they had vivid visual imagination.

1 artist was not sure his imagination was vivid but is good at being able to rotate objects 3 –dimensionally in his mind. 3 artists thought they had normal imagination.

6 artists are keen to have an fMRI scan to try and map visual imagination in the brain.

3 artists(20%) questioned whether we have a proper definition of what we mean by the term Visual Imagination.



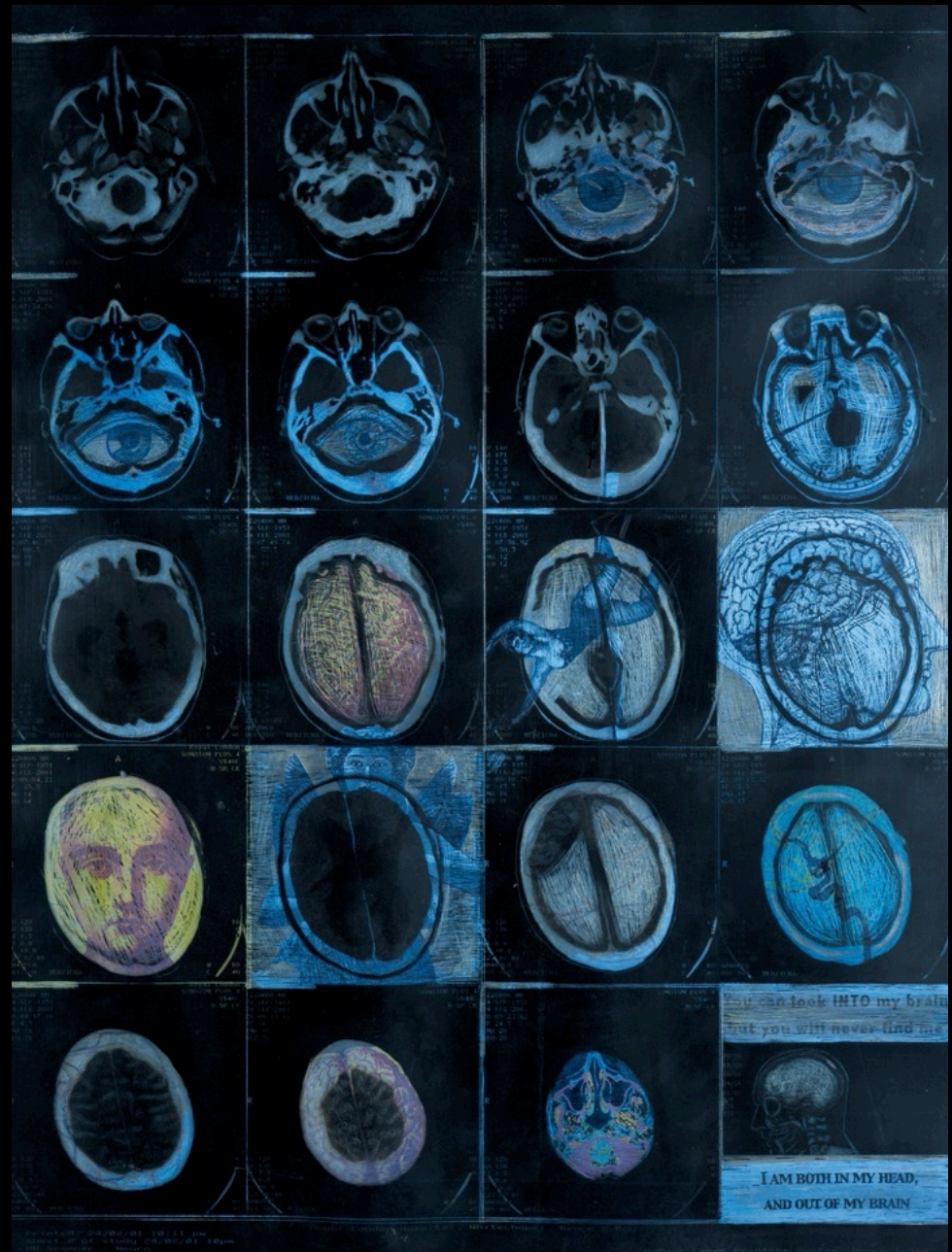
Do you have a vivid visual imagination?

I am not sure how to measure this. What exactly is a visual imagination and what is the norm so that I can determine if mine is vivid or not? The next question - How does it manifest itself? - pinpoints the problem I have with these questions. These processes of imagining seem interlinked, not discreet separate occurrences. Sometimes one does shut ones' eyes as it were and see things in the mind's eye. Mostly though I think it is a fluid process between imagining, creating, revisualising and back again at which point the process is not separable into component parts. The questions seem reductive, like delegating the process of walking to the feet, or knees. MK, artist



The simple but revolutionary truth presented to us by neuroscience over the last century or so is the affirmation that we are not looking out of windows in our heads at the material world. It becomes obvious after only a moment's thought that what we are living through, every nanosecond of our lives, is a brain-made experience. It would seem then that we are in effect 'dreaming' the world into existence, the inventions of the brain only being kept in some kind of equilibrium with our environment by a constant flow of changing information delivered by our senses. We only know that we are in the world by, as it were, tripping over pieces of matter and constantly altering and updating the 'dream'.

GK, artist



So - you could say that we live in our visual imagination all day and every day. I could go on . . .

...I have had a good look at your questionnaire and, as I find in all of these cases without exception, I can't answer any of the questions. Whatever the question, the response in me is so complex, so intertwined with possibilities and variations, ifs and buts, with a thousand other questions arising from the first, that I find it impossible to make a sensible answer. As I read down I find I could only answer each question with any meaningful response by writing each its own individual essay of a thousand words or so.

GK, artist



How frequently do you use your visual imagination?

BS: I use my visual Imagination all the time – I am not aware of not using it, of turning it off at any time. I am always looking and this taps into memory and triggers my visual imagination.

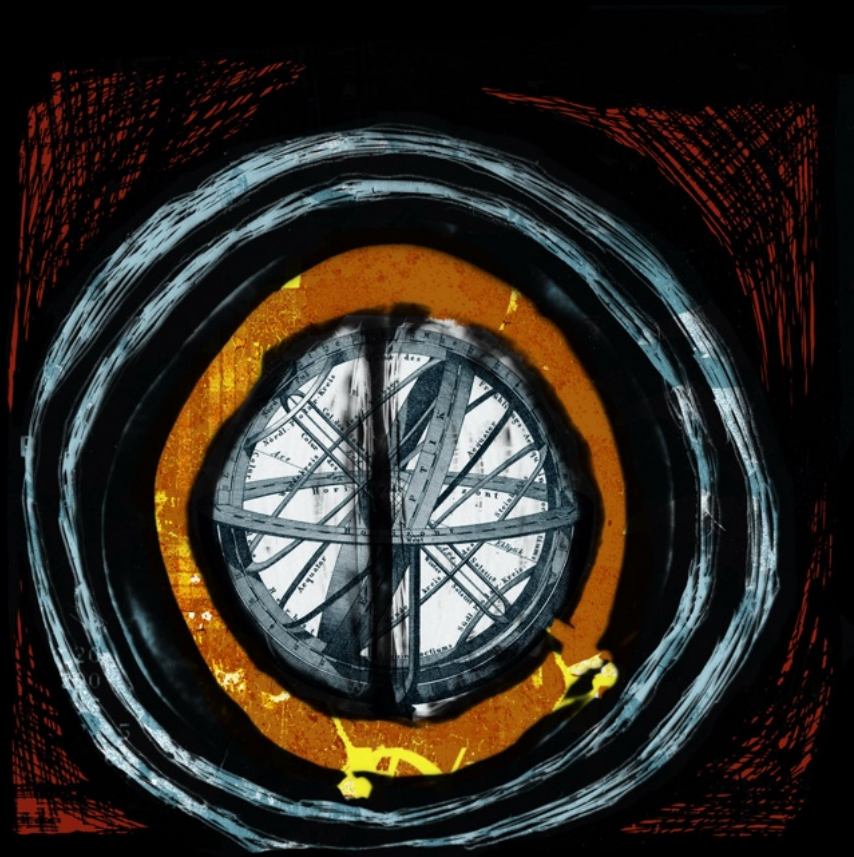
SH: I can use it at will, but it's there constantly – it is rarely absent .

CDP: My work is most often based on visual ideas in my head, and occasionally on images from my dreams.

DV: Imagination is how you perceive and work with ideas, so I use it everyday. Like an operating system.

MF: Whenever I create my work I have to visualize what I want my outcome to be.

AC: Quite a lot. Well when I have something I am working on I feed my brain with ideas, and then wait.



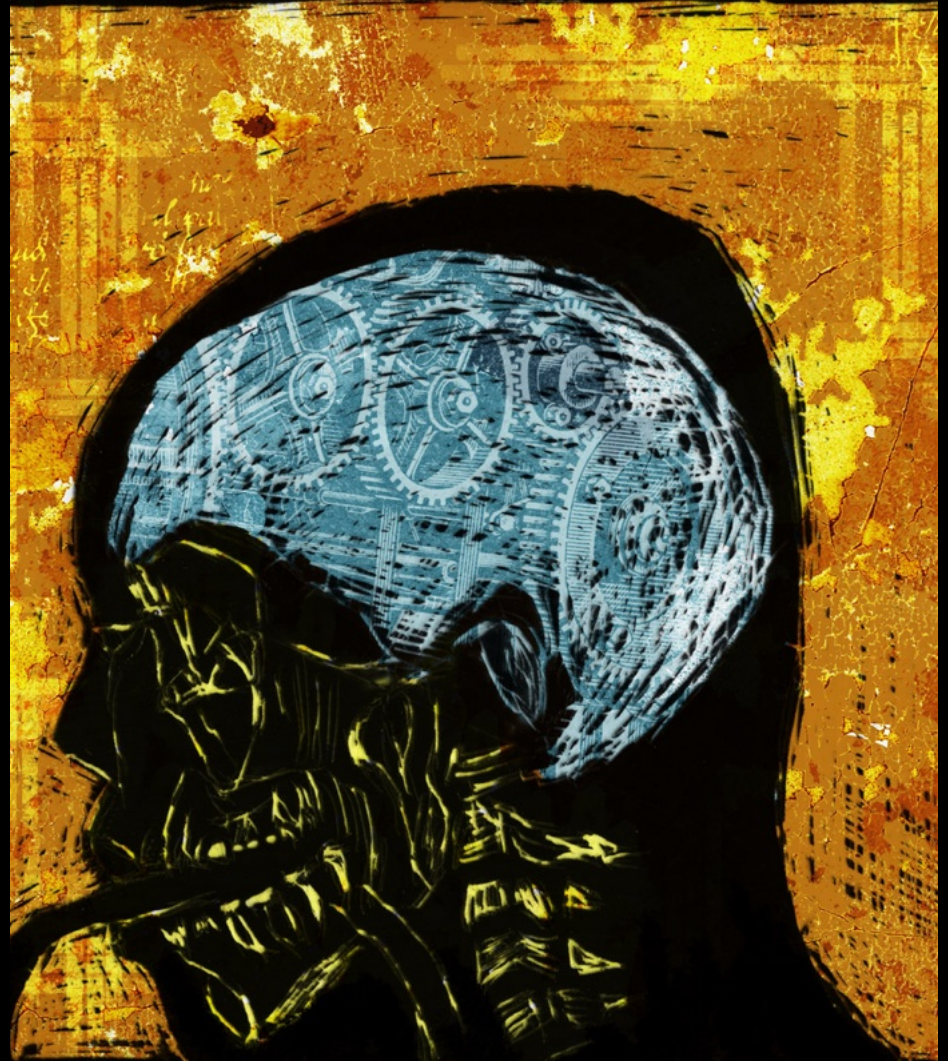
How does it manifest itself?

AC: Well when I have something I am working on I feed my brain with ideas, and then wait. I then tend to sit and draw using the drawings to prompt further ideas out onto the paper.

MF: It feels like I zoom into my head and explore all my thoughts visually, this could be scenarios with conversations or ideas for pieces of work, it manifests by a sort of film screen coming down in front of my eyes or a bubble in my head of ideas.

BQ: I sometimes see the music in my mind. You need an imagination for ideas when working in film, you need to visualize as much of it as possible.

BS: . I use my visual imagination when I am drawing to sort out where I am going with a picture. I use my visual imagination to explore colour. I use my visual imagination to explore ideas, and to play around with ideas for work in my head. These are not intellectual processes



To what extent do you control your imagery, and to what extent is it spontaneous?

SH: I can use it at will, but it's there constantly – it is rarely absent.

CPD: I tend to control the imagery unless the medium takes over and makes a contribution.

RD: I don't think it is spontaneous unless dreaming.

BS: SB: My visual imagination is tied up with my self. It is not spontaneously triggered, it feels under my control. It is simply a part of who I am, how I deal with the world. I cannot separate it out as something intrinsically different from "being me".

AC: Well I control the input and then like to be spontaneous with out put but always framing the output through a critical filter. A filter based on the knowledge of what I am trying to do and the context at that time, art world and social context, a critical context.



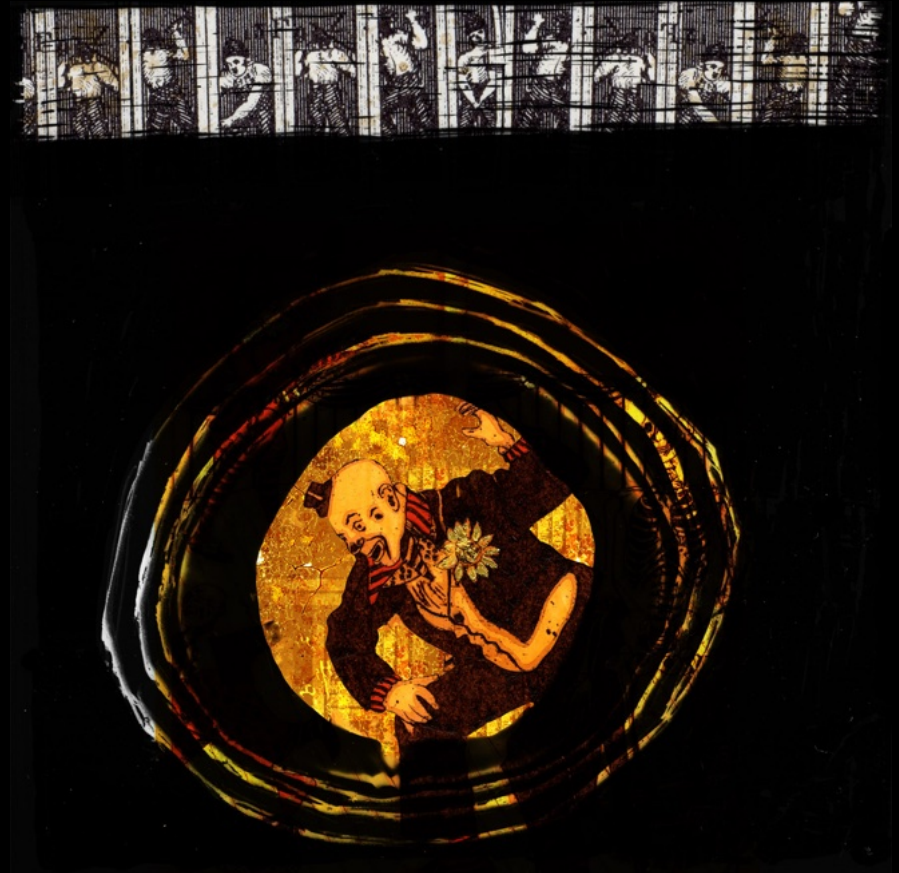
Is having a vivid visual imagination important to you?

TS: Yes. For me, images are completely intertwined with memory, which in itself is the basis of personality. On a practical level I rely on having a visual imagination to be able to organize and ultimately communicate ideas . I wonder whether visual imagination might not be a method of organization and control, a way to make sense of myself and my surroundings.

DV: Very, It is a very big part of me. I have always thought about imagination as being the ultimate instrument for play, art, escape etc.

BS: I see the world and think about the world visually. That is my first response – seeing things in the world. It is as if my eyes scan the world first, taking in colour, shape, size, place... and it seems to happen before I think about it.

AC: My creativity, problem solving is most important to me, its core to how I think and am. I am always reimagining things, trying to revision things.



Can you describe how you use this visual imagination in your practice?

CDP: My ideas manifest in visual form, even if the work is going to be performance based. I do tend to 'see' solutions to problems.

BQ: Nearly every time I create something artistic I use my imagination. It will used from start to finish on a film or piece of music.

BS: I do a great deal of research before I start work . But as I soon as I get in the studio, a place where I make the works, then I go into visual imagination mode. It is here that my imagination takes off, where new connections are made... where everything I have seen and know about as an artist comes in to play.

My studio is the place where the stuff happens.

AC: A filter based on the knowledge of what I am trying to do and the context at that time, art world and social context, a critical context.



Does visual imagination ever inform the solution to an artwork?

SH: Yes, I think it does. For example I might be referencing drawings or photographs while making a painting, but at some point I will depart from those references, contemplate what I have done so far, and start to see what the painting might become as it develops its own qualities. This might initiate by a development “hovering” in front of the work-in-progress, or by apparently (intuitively?) proceeding out of the technique as though created in real-time in my visual imagination.

DV: Not really and also yes totally. When I write stories, my visual imagination is in control. I end up doing things like describing how I think I am thinking. I often think of hanging constellation things like motes of dust swirling. Do you see what I mean? I just write down what occurs to me.

JW: My sketchbook is full of visual imagery, which I use to prompt my own creativity. I use very little written work, just the odd anecdote. A collage of imagery is my kind of heaven.



Can you describe how you use this visual imagination in the day-to-day world?

BS: Memory, bringing disparate things together, being inspired creatively by what I see in the world. I have a very developed visual imagination. It started as a child, was enhanced by art school, and then it is a way of life.

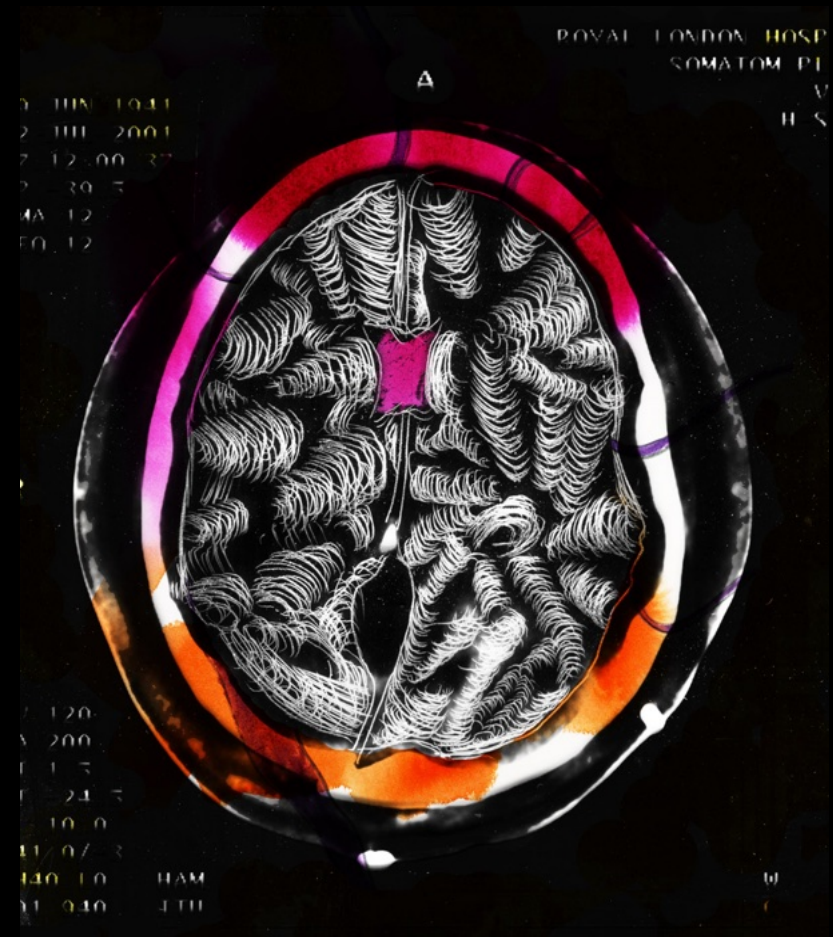
MRH: **I often transform spoken words into images.**

SH: At will, to summon absent phenomena, persons, situations, experiences, artworks if I want to think about them. The most welcome use is to create in my mind's eye an image for one-point meditation or relaxation.

MF: If I'm day-dreaming on the underground I sometimes imagine myself or others doing something funny.

BQ: There is a moment of inspiration, you try and express it the best you can, the better you express it and the more experienced you are as an artist, the better the results, or rather the more you feel pleased with it.

AC: For mapping getting to one place to another, I like trying to recall routes.



Do you a photographic memory?

SH: Somewhat – eg I can ‘see’ a page wherein words are written, but more as shapes than typed entities. Enough to jog my memory. I can easily visualize scenes from my childhood but this has been massively augmented by my father’s many cine films.

CDP: I never forget a face, or an artwork, but I am terrible with names.

JW: Yes I remember as a very young child loving the image memory game and the games at parties where there was a tray of objects where something had been taken away.

BQ: Yes, but only daily. My memory is now some bad that 2 days ago are a bit hazy.

TS: I’ve always wondered about this phrase. It seems to assume that a visual imagination is one that manifests itself in some sort of photograph, a still image of a particular moment. I don’t think like that. I remember things in terms of spatial arrangements and situations. Where I might have been sitting in a room, where the light was coming from or who was with me when a particular event took place. This isn’t so much a photograph as an imaginary maquette.



How much of your mental life is occupied by visual imagery as opposed to the verbal or 'propositional'.

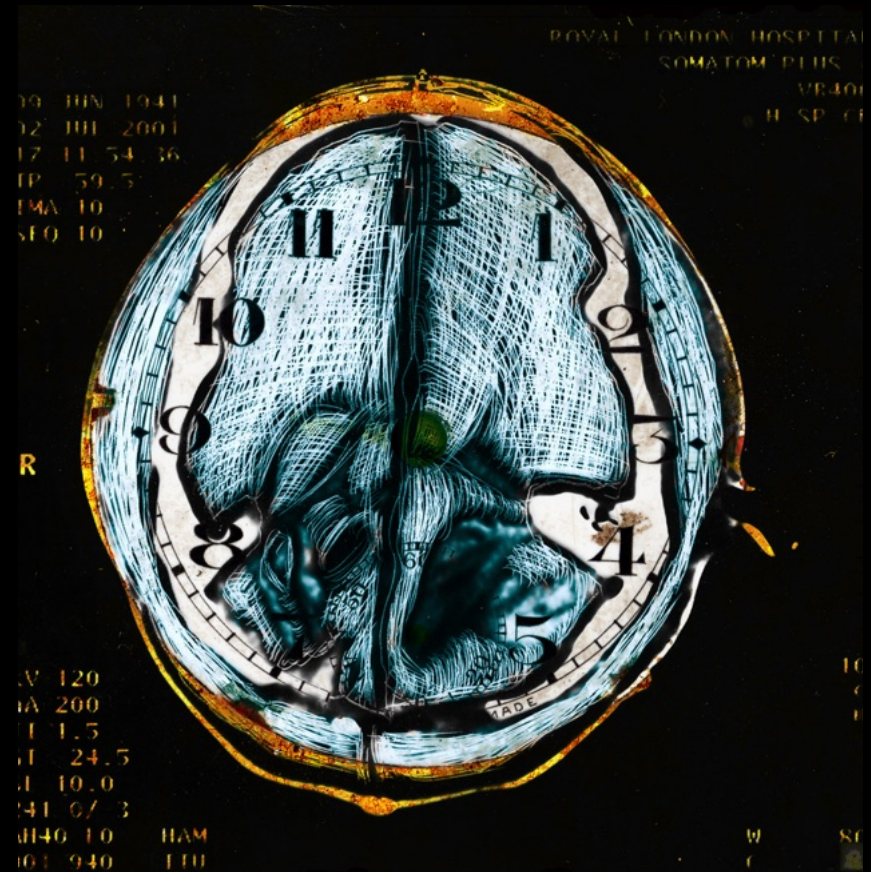
SH: Most of my mental life is occupied by visual imagery. I tend to convert most experiences into visual traces.

DV: I have trained myself to be verbal and propositional because I told myself as a young boy that I was a writer. These prepositions always come with pictures that I see vividly (my actual eyesight isn't great at all).

TS: As an architect I'm not responsible for the final product. In communicating an idea that starts as a visual image in my mind I need to use a variety of media be they visual images, models, words or even things as mundane as emails and spreadsheets. Is it too ridiculous to say that I might be visualizing a place, the lighting or colour when I'm typing up a spreadsheet?

AC: Not sure, most mental life is hidden from us. When I do remember dreams they are very visual and quite extra ordinary. So maybe my mental life is very visual.

MF: A lot of my experience is occupied by visual imagery, being dyslexic as well, before I construct anything, I do it visually first.



How detailed is your imagery? Do you 'consult' it to answer questions about how things look which you wouldn't be able to answer without doing so?

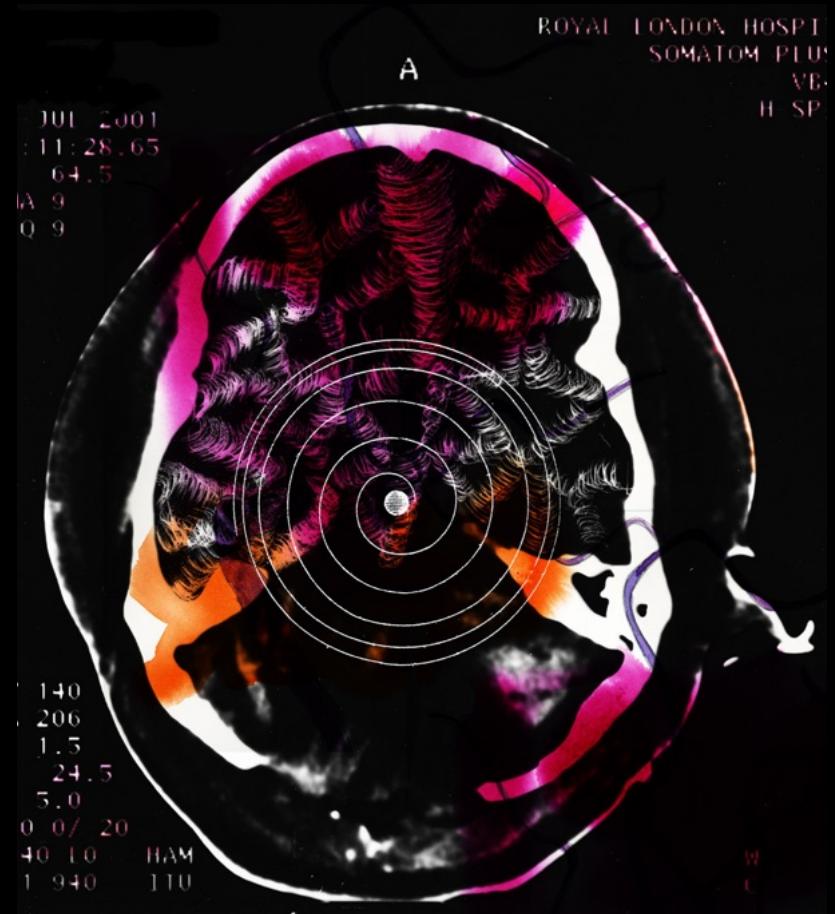
SH: That's an interesting question! (about consultation). I think it's very detailed, and yes I do ask it how things look, including from viewpoints that I haven't actually seen .

DV: Right now I am trying to imagine a horse with its mouth open. I'm really trying, but now I suddenly realise that for some reason I'm trying to make its mouth open like a sperm whale's / cayman's.

TS: For me visual imagery isn't a chaotic spontaneous exercise, it's like deliberately mixing ingredients in a cocktail even if I don't know how it's going to taste when I'm finished. In this way trying to visualize different elements of a problem and 'cocktailing' them together helps me to arrive at a solution.

BS: Yes I have a vivid mind's eye and remember detail. I have no memory for names, I never forget a face. I can recall places I have been, people I have met, artworks that I have seen.

AC: Yes I am always trying to problem solve and use the visualization to understand the world.

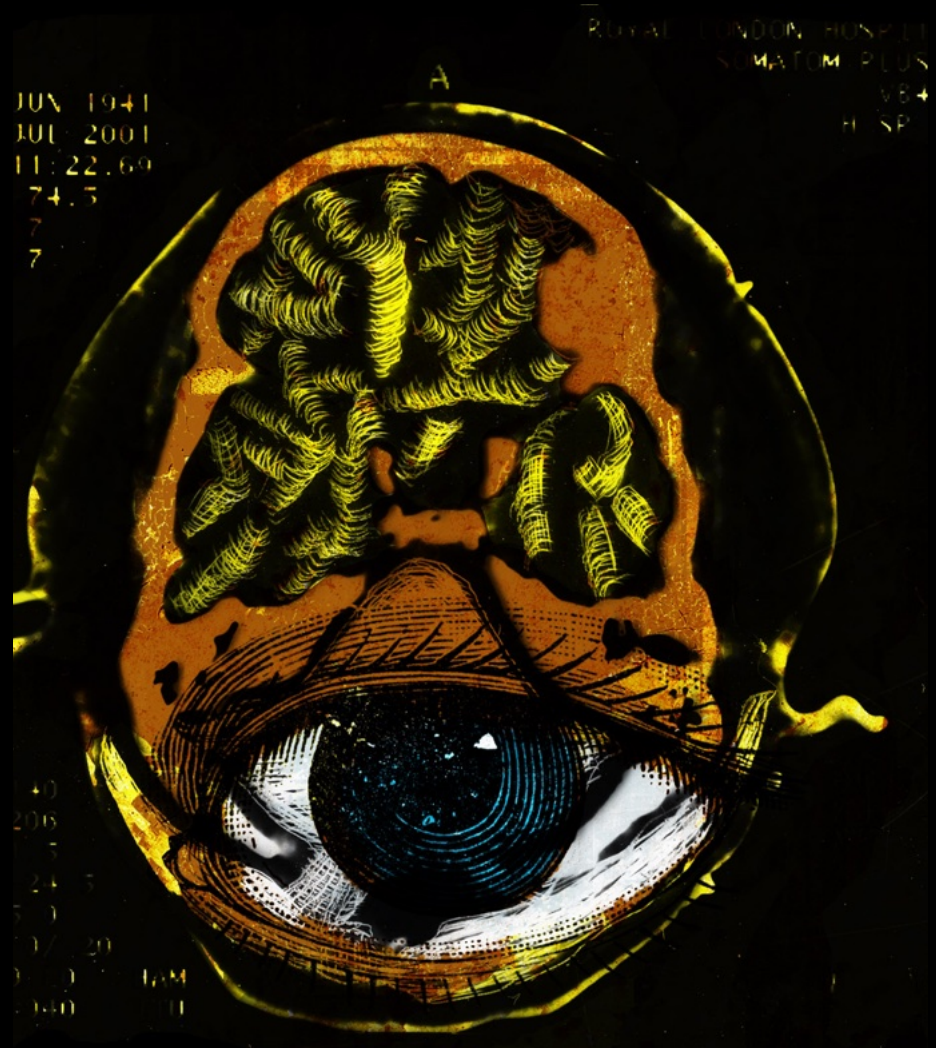


Do you use your visual imagination for problem solving in work?

BS: Yes, it is a method of finding a solution to a problem, but often involves putting things together which might not go together in the real world. I do lots of research – both intellectual and in terms of media. After so many years of working, I have many technical skills and visual tricks which also feed into my imagination. It is an imagination with knowledge. So, unlike the Abstract Expressionists, I do not think that my visual imagination provides a sudden moment of unique inspiration, it is more considered, more rooted in myself and my culture. But I do float visual solutions around in my mind.

SH: *Yes. I stop working and just look and cogitate, allowing free-association to roam around in while the mind thinks things for me. Usually or always visual.*

JW: *Yes, I refer to it when I sculpt my work, consider the effect forces, such as weight and temperature will have on the sculpture, especially when I am casting in glass. It will affect my decision making.*



How vividly and how frequently do you dream?

SH: Probably dream a lot most nights. Very vivid indeed.

CPD: I dream very vividly every night, have frequent nightmares, and have a very good memory for dreams. (I always dream in colour.)

TS: Vividly and frequently. Although often the dreams are tied to the things I've been imagining and trying to resolve during the day. Often the images, or rather situations, I've conjured up reappear in my dreams but as an entirely different combination of ideas.

RD: Almost daily and more often than not can remember dreams as I am waking up and if I speak out loud to describe them I am able to remember the sequence of images to tell a narrative.

AC: Very vividly on the rare occasions I recall dreams.



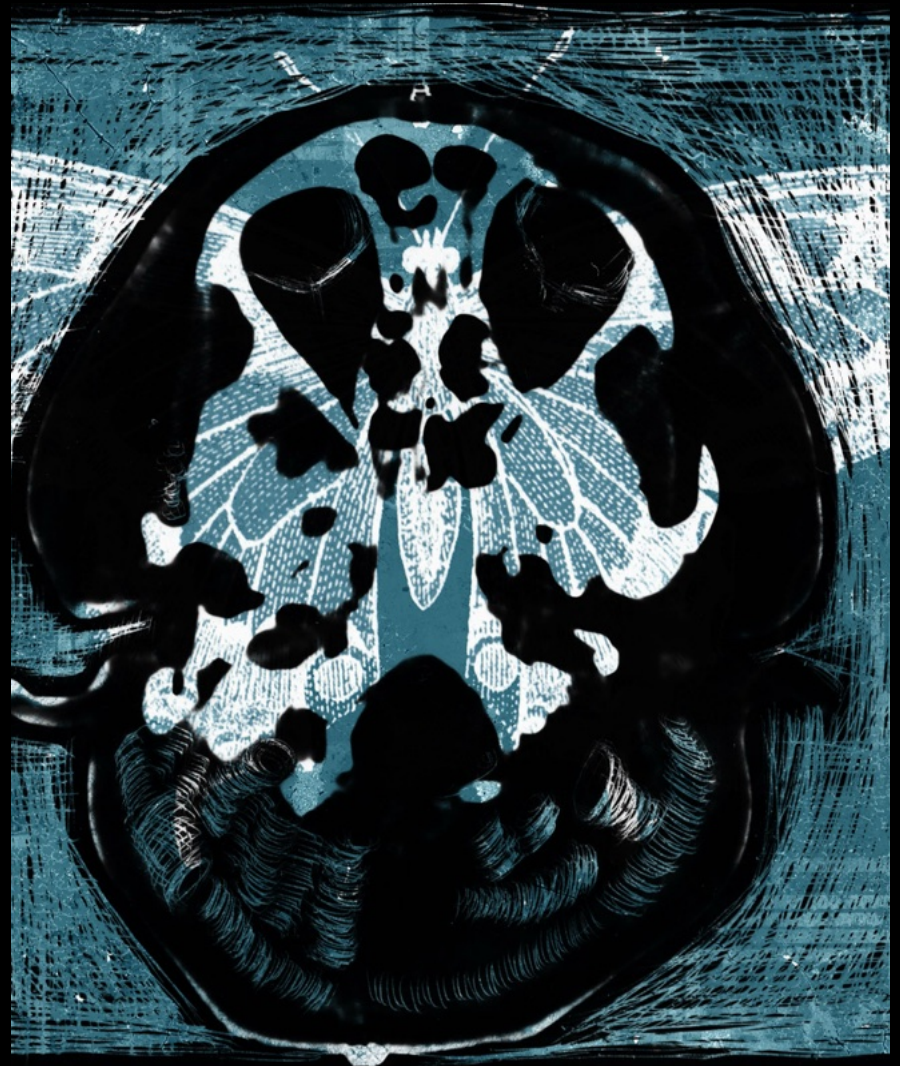
Have you ever experienced hallucinations? Can you describe them, and the circumstances?

SH: *Once. Rather too complicated to write about. No drugs or alcohol were involved.*

CDP: Undergoing a general anesthetic, I 'saw' my lungs just before I lost consciousness.

BQ: Many times in my youth (on acid), and for 10 years after in the form of flashbacks, to when I was tripping . I will describe one. One time I went to a cinema (on LSD) and sat watching a film, when I got bored I looked to the person next to me who had previously looked normal, but this time had become a Robot, like in "The Day the Earth stood still". Then I hallucinated a giant spider with florescent green eyes on the ceiling looking at me.

BS: I can remember hallucinating twice. Once when I had a terrible ear infection and was on heavy-duty painkillers. An old lady was sitting knitting at the side of my bed, and talked to me all the time. The second time was when I was heavily pregnant. I saw a man in 17th century costume standing at the foot of our bed, who smiling benignly and then disappeared through the wall.

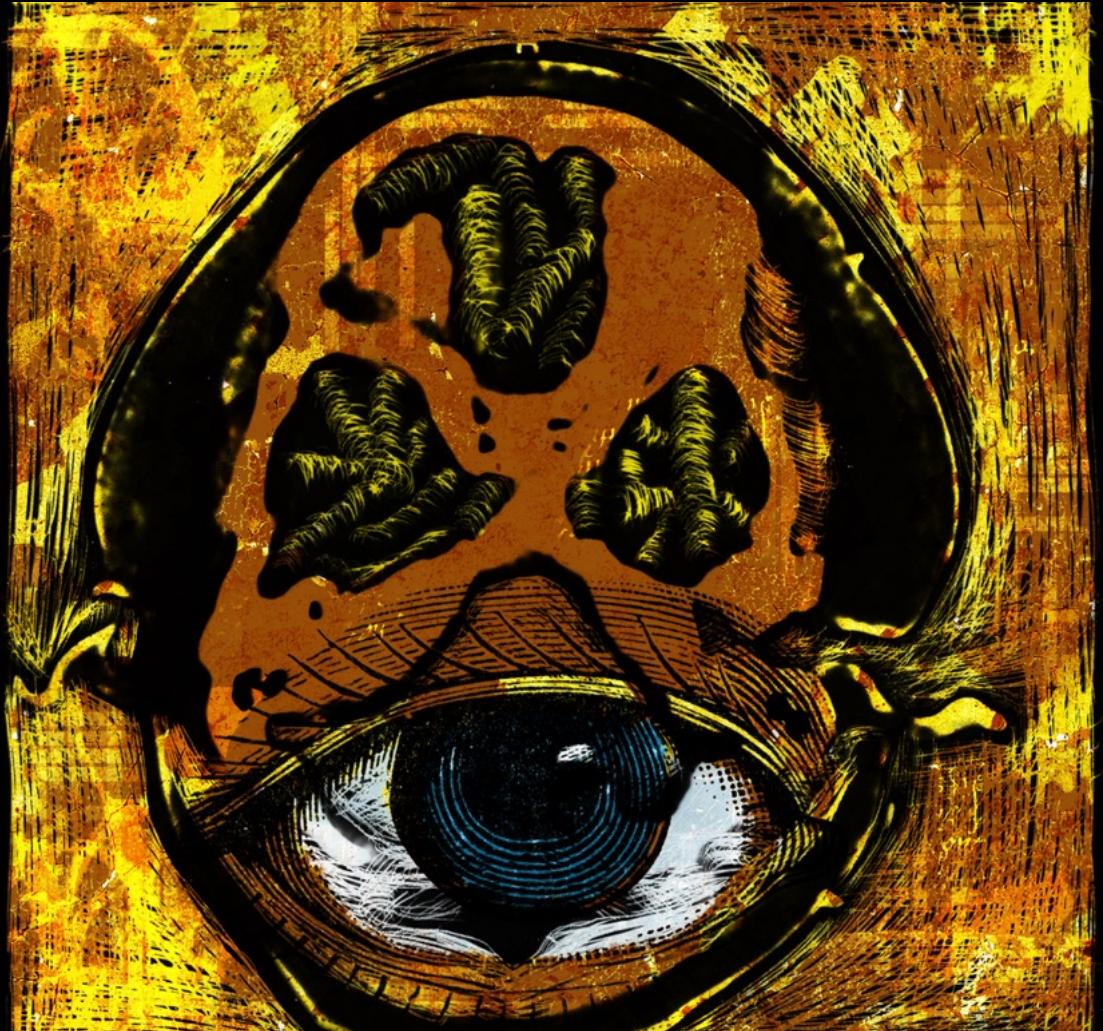


Any other thoughts or comments about your visual imagination?

MK: These processes of imagining seem interlinked, not discreet separate occurrences. Sometimes one does shut ones' eyes as it were and see things in the mind's eye.

AC: I probably use visual imagination more than I think in making work, but it is so automated I am not conscious of the person and for someone who has made a lot of visual work over 30 years it must have played a big part. Certainly colliding a visual of an old work and re working it in ones imagination is a large part of what I do, trying to move on.

TS: I'm not sure if this is off topic but answering these questions makes me wonder what exactly you mean by visual imagination. Somehow I think that this should mean images, like photographs and paintings, which are still and 2 dimensional. I think I have a visual imagination but this isn't how it works for me. It could be I'm describing something else but my visual images involve other more temporal and 3 dimensional ingredients: how old am I, where are we, who else is there, what do my surroundings feel like, what's the context.



I am still not clear exactly what visual imagination is. I don't think it is simply just being able to imagine something which is not in front of you. It is more like a process in the brain, described by many artists as important for their work.

I am not sure I know how one would be able to measure objectively or interestingly the nuances of the individual subjective experience of someone's visual imagination.

BS, artist

