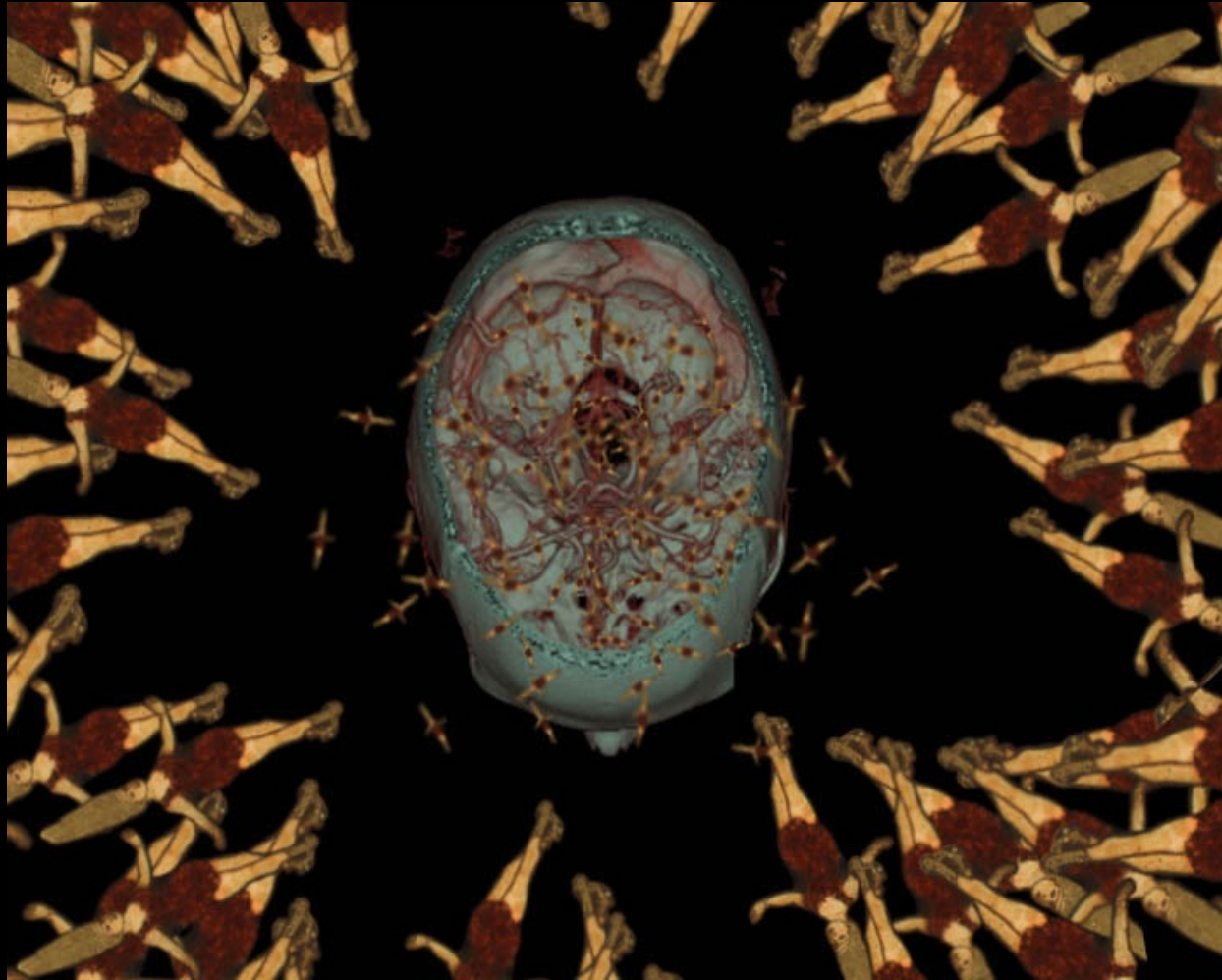


The Art of Imagination



5 artists with aphantasia

14 artists filled in both artists' visual imagination and VVIQ forms. Of these:

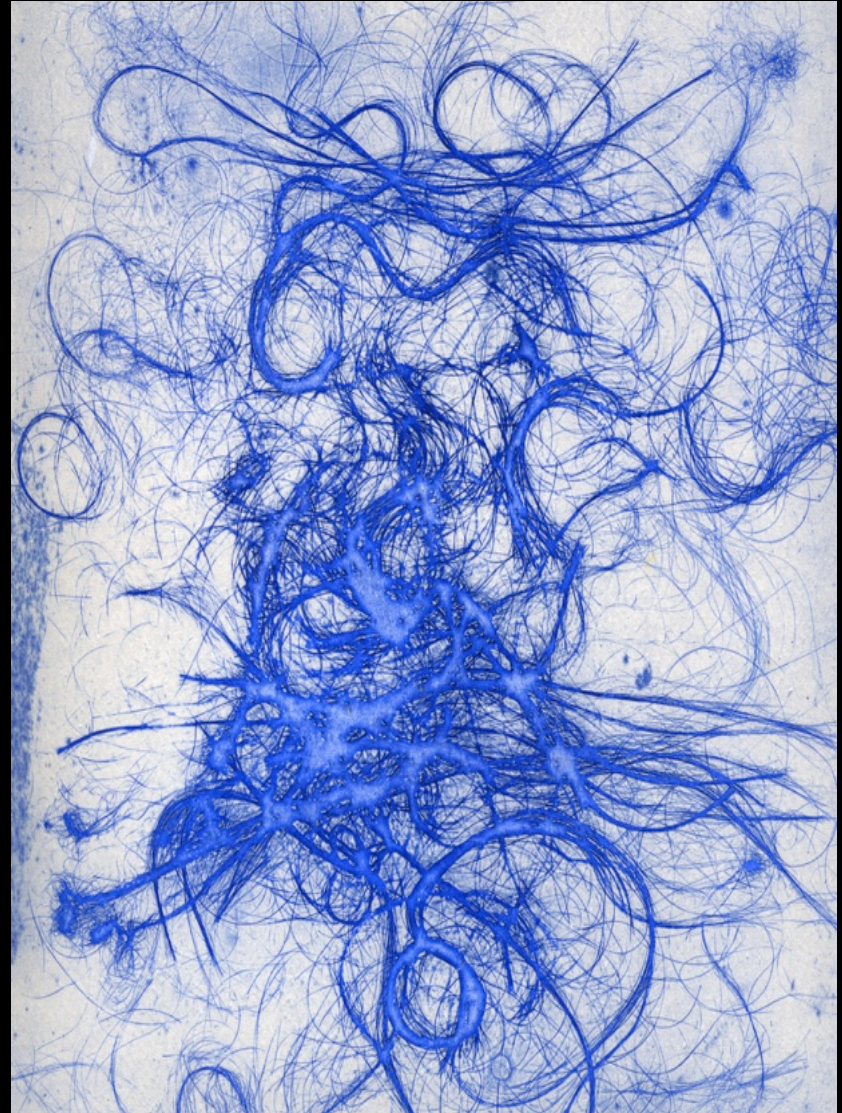
3 artists questioned whether we have a proper definition of what we mean by the term Visual Imagination.

10 artists thought they had a vivid visual imagination.

3 artists thought they had normal imagination.

1 artist unsure if his imagination was vivid but can rotate objects 3 dimensionally in his mind.

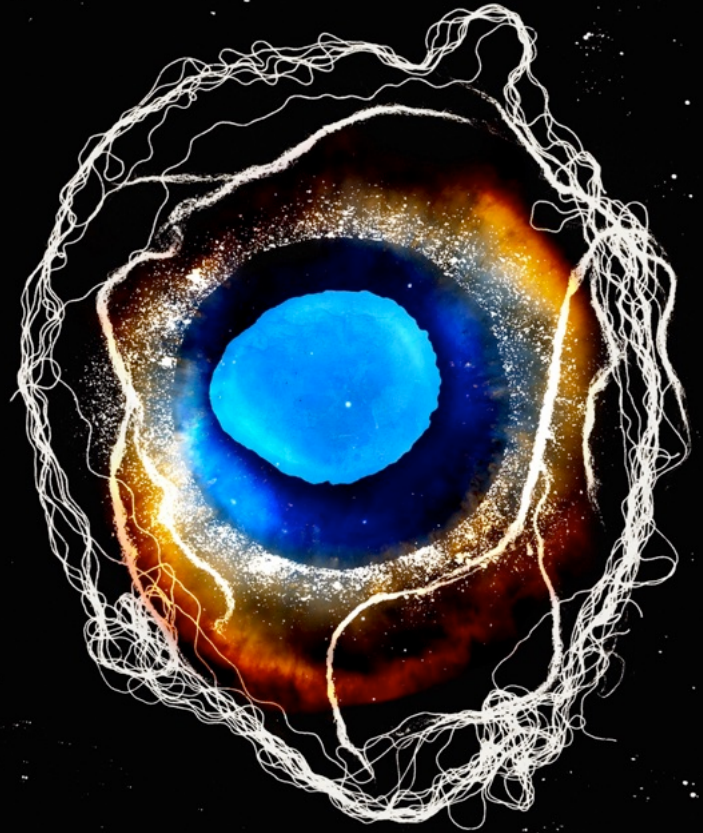
6 artists want to have an fMRI scan to map visual imagination in their brains.



I always felt as if my imagination and memory recall was different than those around me. I have trouble remembering and describing the details of things I've experienced or seen unless I have physical visual cues. I also assumed that the expression "The Mind's Eye" was more of a metaphor than something almost literal.

What makes my circumstance a bit more unique is that I am a designer and architect and rely on my imagination and creativity heavily in my day-to-day life. I've been told that I have a keen eye for design, colour and proportion. However, when I close my eyes all I see is darkness. While I can intellectually imagine design ideas or remember experiences, I don't 'see' them, but instead posit or recall the 'idea' of them.

RS, architect and designer

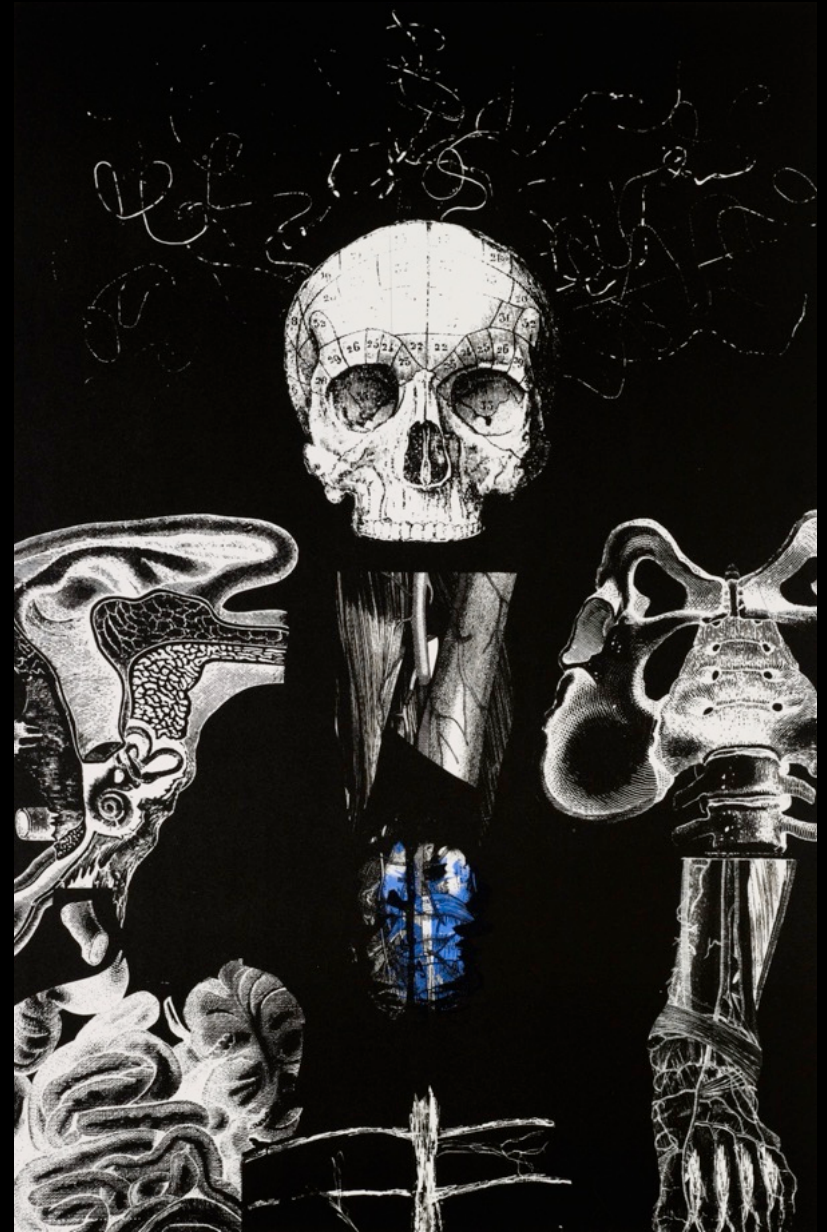


A few years ago I realized that I almost never saw images, even when I dreamed. I drew a lot as a child, but I never saw images. I was very good at some kind of mental model in my head that let me do some groundbreaking work in computer graphics. I never thought much about this until recently when I was talking with some artists. Of course I don't know what goes on inside other people's heads, and it never occurred to me to ask them.

However when I realized that something different was going on, I did ask them.

These are world-class artists in the animation world. I then found that they were all over the map. Some easily could create images in their minds, some to do it with some difficulty, and some couldn't do it at all. While this certainly was not a scientific experiment or statistically meaningful, I didn't see any correlation between their artistic creativity and whether or not they said they could see images.

EC. Animator



To finally have the name *aphantasia* for something that has shaped my life – gives it a sense of reality. My mother said I was lying and as a child I learned to fake holding an image in my mind. I am an artist.

Talking with others like myself I would explain that I could not picture my mother's face in my mind, but I could draw it. This is not a direct drawing but an exploratory process which the shapes develop by feel.

DW, artist



It has only become apparent to me within the last couple of years that there was a disconnect with others when I talked about visual imagination and memory.

What I'm coming to realise is that my imagination only become visual once it emerges out of my head and onto the canvas. At no point can I already see the image before it has been painted.

Here is a large monoprint painting that I made recently. There was no plan to include any figurative images, people or landscapes. I began to notice shapes and suggestive forms from which I could begin to pull out image. I never could have made any of these images from scratch, they are a surprise to me.

MC, artist



As an Art Teacher, I have told students to close their eyes and imagine a scene - but I didn't really believe they were actually doing it!

How does this lack of a working mind's eye affect my ability as an artist? Has it determined my artistic preferences? I have very good eyesight and enjoy observational work. However, I am not so good at drawing images from my imagination.

And I can't 'count sheep' but, when needs be, I pretend that the darkness in my mind is an underwater world - calm, refreshing and stress-free - completely surrounding me.

VP, artist



Do you have a vivid visual imagination?

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



You could say that we live in our visual imagination all day and every day.

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.
GK, artist



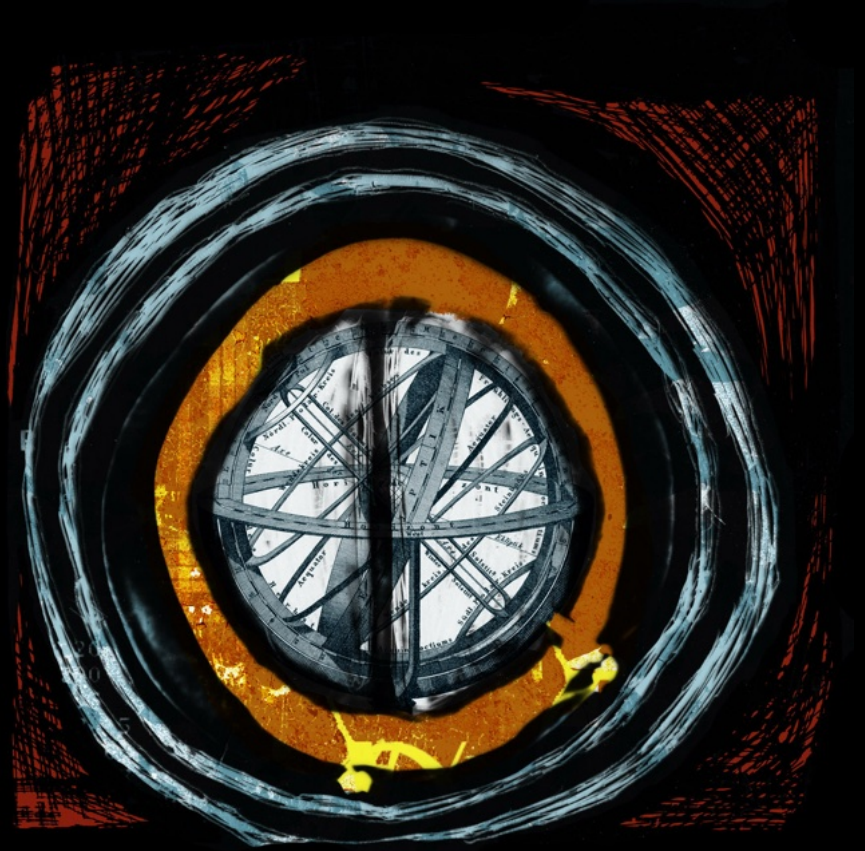
How frequently do you use your visual imagination?

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.

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



How does it manifest itself?

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 and ideas. 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: My visual imagination is tied up with my self. 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: I control the input and then like to be spontaneous with out put but always framing the output through a critical filter



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.

SH: 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.



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

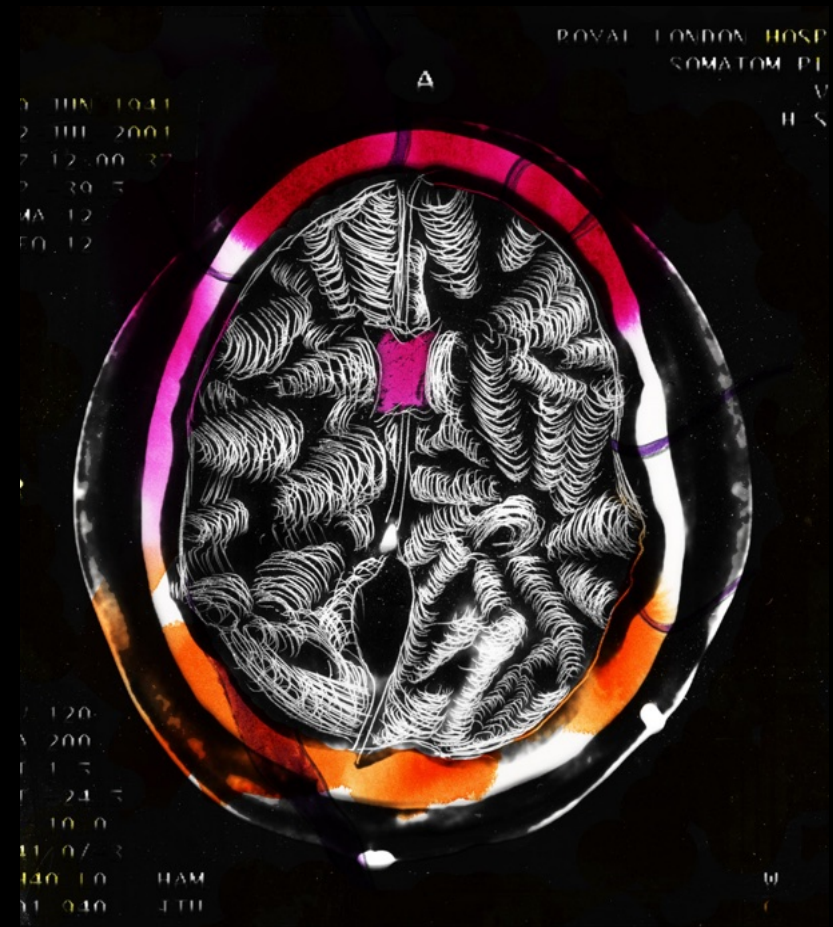
BS: Memory, bringing disparate things together, being inspired by what I see in the world. I have a very strong visual imagination. It started as a child, was enhanced by art school, and now it is a way of life.

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.

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

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



Do you a photographic memory?

SH: I can 'see' a page of words, 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.

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.



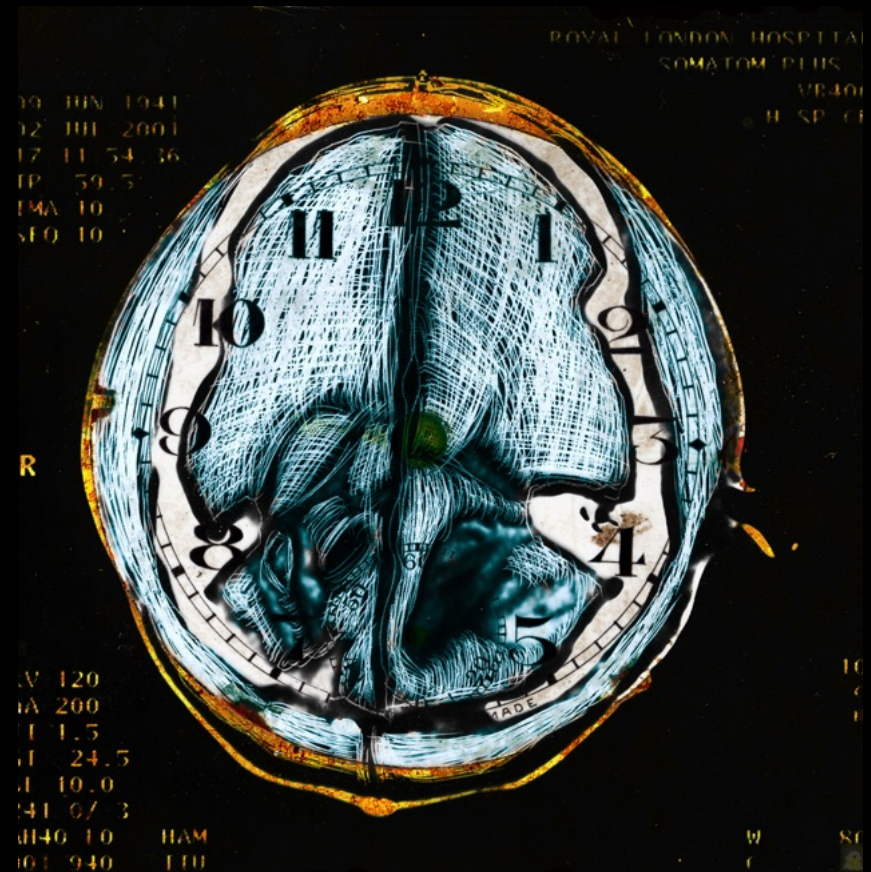
How much of your mental life is occupied by visual imagery as opposed to the verbal or 'propositional'.

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

TS: As an architect I'm 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 extraordinary. 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.

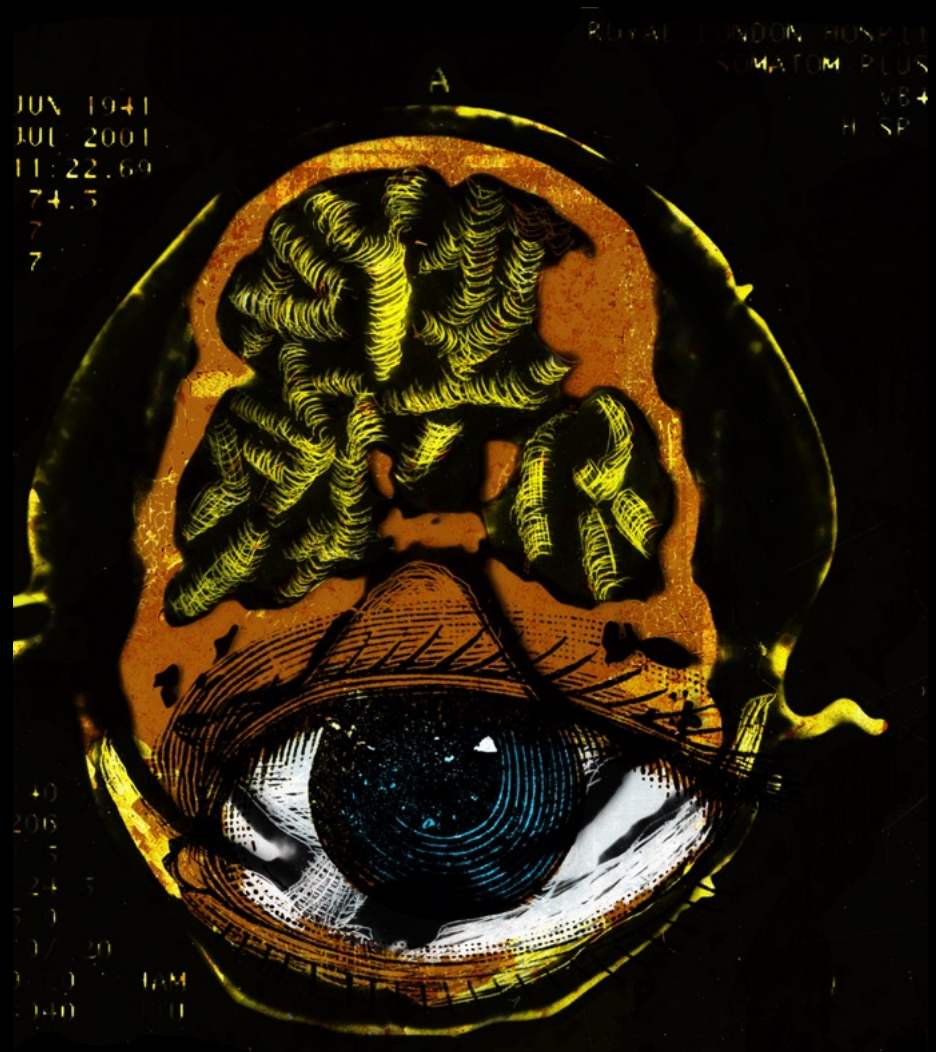


Do you use your visual imagination for problem solving in work?

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. Unlike the Abstract Expressionists, I do not think that my visual imagination provides a sudden moment of unique inspiration, it is more considered. 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?

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.



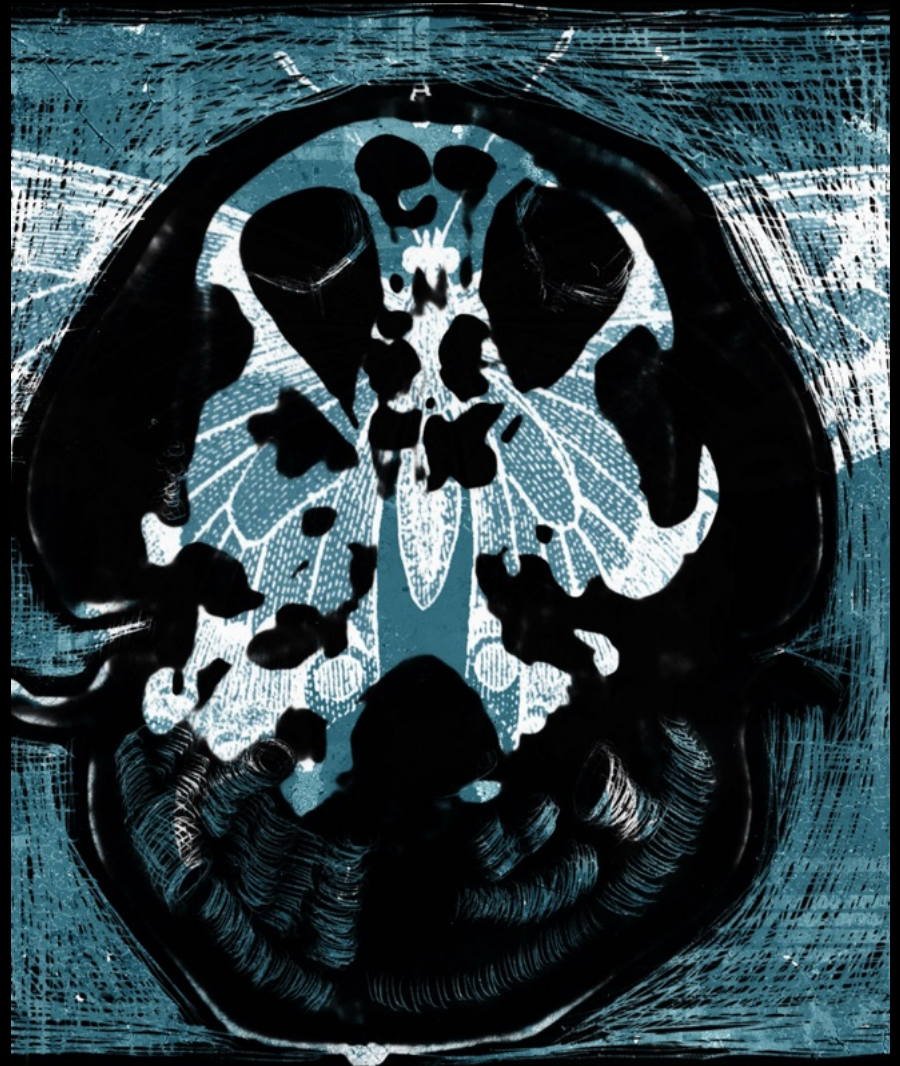
Have you ever experienced hallucinations? Can you describe them, and the circumstances?

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.

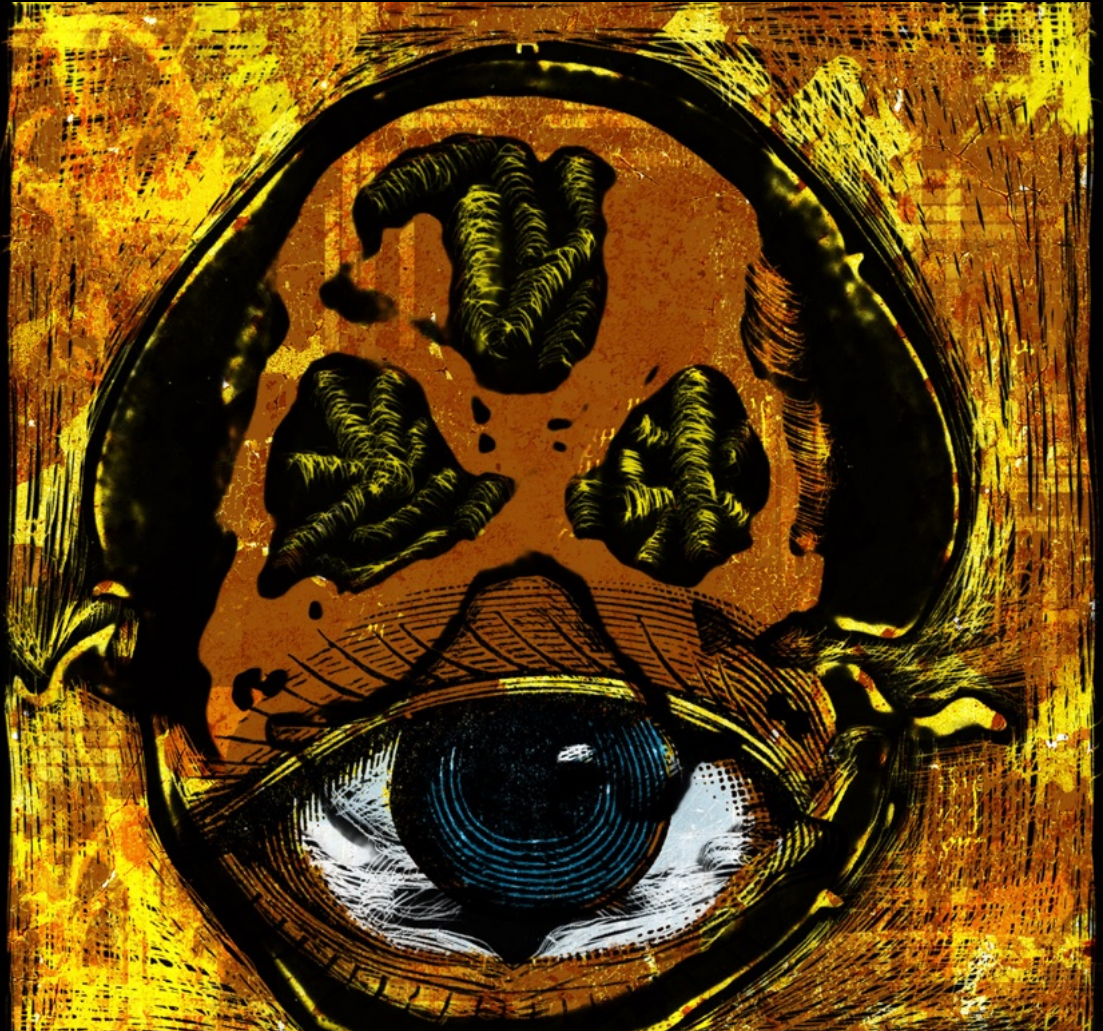
BS: I can remember hallucinating twice. Once when I had a terrible ear infection and was on heavy-duty painkillers. An old lady was sitting knitting at the side of my bed. The second time was when I was heavily pregnant. I saw a man in 17th century costume at the foot of our bed. He smiled and then disappeared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



Any other thoughts or comments about your visual imagination?

AC: I probably use visual imagination more than I think in making work, but it is so automated that I am not conscious of it. And for someone who has made a lot of visual work over 30 years it must have played a big part.

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. There is a subjective and highly individual relationship between a person and their visual imagination. It is complicated.

BS, artist

