

**Nature's Calculation:
The work of Jan Pleitner**

Interview and text by G. Leddington

Lobe-upon-lobe, Cortex-within-cortex, neuron-after-neuron. Countless synaptic pathways. Mediated electrochemical signals. Organs kept running. Thoughts formed. Memories made. Things forgotten.

Nestled within the inner brain is a complex system of interrelated structures known as the Limbic System. Though deemed to be potentially obsolete as a functionally unified system, it is known by science that this series of inner-neurological structures are responsible for several functions of the brain and our resultant behaviour as human beings. Emotion, motivation, long-term memory and sense of smell; all functions mediated by what is referred to as the Limbic System.

The primal collaboration of cells known as a jellyfish journeys through the depths of the Atlantic to mate at the surface. A honeybee drone dances before its hive-mates to direct them to a good nectar supply. A baby turtle heads out to the open ocean shortly after breaking out from its egg.

Also governed by the Limbic System is instinct. Unlike a reflex, instinct is not the spasmodic actions of the human body as triggered by a singular stimulus, but the inborn, relatively short sequences of complex actions carried out without the need for formal instructions. It is the knowing without knowing.

A female chimpanzee, raised in captive isolation abandons her offspring having not been taught the necessary maternal skills by her own mother.

All creatures have innate behavioural patterns to a certain extent. Some, such as reptiles, are governed by instinct to a greater degree than those with more complex neural systems. On the other hand, mammalian life, with its enlarged cerebral cortex, relies heavily on social learning to the point that should certain skills not be learned, decisions can be made that lead to personal and evolutionary disadvantages.

The boy grabs for the larger piece of hamburger divided by his mother for him and his brother. A man kicks the dropped bank card of a fellow shopper under the shelves in revenge for getting beat to the last of a particular item in the store.

Some human instincts could be described as vestigial; residual traces of a more primitive lifestyle. It was smart, for example, to eat what you could, when you could if you did not know where the next meal was coming from. It could be argued however that many of these instincts are maladapted to today's technologically influenced environments and highly complex social structures. As humans we are by no means free of the basic parameters that developed these instincts, but we do now reside in a much more multifaceted value system that requires conscious evaluation of our actions.

An early homosapien traces the shape of his hand on a rock using an ember from a cooled fire. A deep sea robot explores the high pressure, black-nothingness. A Renaissance genius ponders the nature of perspective. A government funds a space program.

Just as mountains are climbed because they are there, paintings are made because they can be. There is no reason, only satisfaction on several levels.

Interview

G. Leddington. It seems to me that you are interested in the exploration of 'space' in all of its manifestations of meanings. Outer-space, the deep ocean, even psychological space. I guess it is about voids: infinite emptiness and our existential relationship to that insurmountable, and overwhelming yet, humbling thing.

I think however that these references (space programs, deep-sea robots etc.) are analogies for something else... something more internal. Have you heard of psychonautics?

Jan Pleitner. It's not necessarily only about something internal or analogies. I believe the facts that we

know already about our universe are incredible in every way. I use very easy rules of perception, like perspective, front and back, light and dark areas, as a system. Sometimes I like to use colors for their symbolic meaning. But yes, there is always a reference to the inside... and yes I have heard of psychonautics.

What I try to do is to listen to my subconsciousness while I paint, which most of the time happens in one progression. It's a little bit like a dive and I only let myself get up again when I am satisfied on different levels, and many of those levels are different feelings.

G. 'A bit like a dive' again a reference to the deep... but lets move on slightly. I think you would agree that what you do is in direct lineage with Abstract Expressionism especially in the way in which you talk about listening to your subconsciousness. But going back to this term psychonautics (this notion of inner or cerebral exploration), how conscious actually are you when it comes to creating your work, do you try and 'switch off' so to speak, to run on instinct. Where for you is the divide between conscious and subconscious?

J. Those things are switching continuously and happening automatically. It depends on your own system. But it's quite easy. Subconsciousness tells you what to do. Consciousness helps you how to do! There are many levels or states you could believe a painting is ready... in the end you decide. But I believe you always need to go a little bit over the top to start an evolution inside your work. If it's getting exhausting you probably win something as well.

G. With the mention of exhaustion you bring up an important point. There is frantic energy to your works... fast, dashing lines, quick and swift scribbles and scratches. In a sense this goes interestingly against the notion of introspection we spoke of before, something which is usually thought of as quiet and meditative, methodical even. Its as if you are trying to get some things out and down on paper before they leave you for good.

Wouldn't you say?

J. I really like writing that's why I can't really compare it to my style of painting. But maybe what you mean for me this is an analogy to Rally Car Racing. Brains are so fast. That's the point. All the shit we are used to speaking about gets compressed into a millisecond demand of action. I mean it's good to know the track and the motor... but in the end you drive on instinct. And somehow you are very much aware of it... Instinct gets more and more dissed in these times instead of creating a new idea of a contemporary, fast instinct in high definition. I see people get paralyzed in front of a superpower of new media and the internet, instead of believing to be able to compete with their personal abilities.

G. I'm not sure I agree about instinct getting a bad reputation these days. I mean all good artists, curators, critics and even public, know that art is not something 100 percent calculated... in fact when it is, you see it straight away, it misses something, life perhaps, it is still born so to speak. Perhaps indeed people don't speak about instinct, but I'm not sure they speak negatively of it either.

It is true that the overwhelming amount of information available to us can be crippling, choices we make, directions we move in for example... how can one continue forward with confidence and authority when the majority of paths seem to have been trodden? How can one make images when all the images seem to be there already?

You have spoke to me of several references that inform your thinking and therefore work, some of which we have discussed in this interview, but I know there are many more culled from this 'overwhelming amount of information'. However with the exception of some of your titles, the references or thoughts that inform your work are completely obscured. Is this your way of dealing with all this information? Do you produce anti-images?

J. Before I answer the last question I go a bit back to the 'instinct vs. calculation'. There is in everything a piece of instinct but what I meant is that it depends on the speed of the instinct and if it has any filters laid on it. But maybe in the end it's a very painterly idea of instinct. I definitely learned to prefer it in a lot of ways as a better answer than anything calculated. Somehow it's a very fast calculation by nature.

About the anti-image: I am not working against anything overwhelming and I don't feel incriminated by these amounts of information. I just think that a lot of those images are packed with stereotypes and

dogmatic and simple reasoning. But it's fine and it's their right to be however they wish to appear. The problem mostly lays in the ability of the spectator to understand an image. I try to produce images, which put the focus on a different state of mind instead of having the focus on any idea. Also to obscure with words is mainly to sharpen the eyes for the benefits of an image itself. But most of the information I gather around my work isn't so obscure as it might feel in the first moment. It's not about an anti-image it's more about a discovery of an unknown image.

I prefer to feel a story of a whole other world in any image, than the story of an image in an image.

G. So it's about the creation of worlds then? Alternate, psychological universes perhaps?

You refer to this notion of the 'image within an image' which is a twist, of course, on the literary device 'a play within a play' which is traditionally used as a metaphorical tool, a meta-narrative that somehow conveys the grand narrative within the logic of its own microcosm. Are you saying then that the references, influences and so on, are removed from your work in order that they can become their own universes, wholly independent of a meta-narrative of existing 'things'?

J. Somehow ... yes, but not as a totalitarian topic. That means not that every image is totally independent from 'existing things' in general. One painting might show for example an emotion, a perspective, an excerpt, a complete story or even a random mix from things inside its own universe and all paintings together show a much wider spectrum further from all of this. Inside here I don't want to make any exclusions for anything, which includes also existing things. It's a little bit the same with the science fiction movies, even if most of them are using much more conformed and stereotypical conditions of reality. These films and shows define, sometimes for one plotline, a complete new system of how the universe might work and then the story is based upon this new, created physics.

I don't want to declare physics like this but I want to create it inside the system, inside the progress and with the tools I use to form the image as a setting for the upcoming world (finished painting). What I wanted was, to leave a traditional form of the narrative in my work... but I also didn't want to kick it out completely.