

THE SINGING PART OF IMAGINATION

Eleanor Minney's Exhibition : Switching Perceptions
Bethlem Gallery and Bethlem Royal Hospital, Beckenham

Switching Perceptions is one of the most unusual exhibitions of an artist you are likely to see, because this is not just a demonstration of the artist's passion and personality, not a gushing expression of their lone existence. Rather it is an opening out of sensibility and a pause in the ego-infested culture that we are all herded into. There is no doubt about the quality of Eleanor Minney's art: The four metre long, hanging sculpture-tapestry-score; *Segment of aself*, that bisects the gallery, is a masterpiece of formal and conceptual composition. The delicacy and commitment of its original language being matched by the calm intensity of its presence.

I will come back to this later, but first it is important to examine her modus operandi and how that is important in this exhibition. When art and medicine come together, one is often the explanation or illustration of the other. Minney's time working with patients and staff from the National Psychosis Unit at Bethlem Royal Hospital, has been much more profound. Her approach allowed them to suggest and describe the parameters of investigation and creative response, and then using that lens to visualise pathways of external understanding. So the last thing we are seeing is a demonstrating of the popular misapprehension of the face of Psychosis. Instead we given gentle diagrams that question their memory and individual validity while enjoying the surprise of the there in built poetic nature. The 'Think Tank' she has shared with them has generated a the truth of expression that invents maps and pathways of careful balance and critically aware judgment. These works surround and frame the artist major piece in the gallery. Not as explanation or justification, but as an index to a shared vocabulary of inner thought and feeling. Here the highly personal is not shouted out or splashed about in a

tedious masculine display. It is considered celebrated and given many whispering harmonic tongues.

Segment of aself is a banner to this. It hangs in space like a new reality, one that is entirely constructed of everything known from the old one. Its double sheets of simple calico separated by thick wadding, suggesting a warmth of insulation, a density of purpose. One side of this floating screen is delineated with rows of squares. A regiment of containment. A housing block of shuttered lives that are also stamps of uniform genetic coding. Each box contains an I.

On close examination a few have red thread piecing their likeness. These offer escape or communication to the other side. Winding their nerve like umbilicus through the stuffing and out into a field of a million chatters. Where cyphers, hieroglyphics, calculations and tiny stitched drawings all flutter and thrive. On this side of the hanging are hundred of languages all speaking at once. All individual, intimate and celebratory. What these insect-like marks are saying we will never know. But the wisdom of their activity, uniqueness and need to exist is overwhelming. This is massively generous work. The hours put in to creating it being multiplied by the rightness of its gift. The viewer will also smile when finding themselves recognising pictographs of books, couples holding hands, ring pulls, saplings, question marks, dendrites, bottles, paperclips, keys, leaves and tears, all in an active discussion that we thought we had forgotten until the artist activated it in the singing part of our imaginations.

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