



*Emotional  
Algorithms*

works by  
**Jan Guy**

**Opening**  
**22nd September 2-4pm**  
till  
**2nd October 2018**  
**Sean Gallery**  
G/F, 12 Tai Ping Shan Street, Shung Wan  
HONG KONG

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## Emotional Algorithms

works by Jan Guy

### Artist's Statement

I often think that the way one experiences the world is something that is equally shared by others, and for the most part this is true. But it can take almost a lifetime to realise that the way we are put together differs by degree. It can also take time to realise that our values and understanding of our own make-up are not the result of a consistent reality. The embedded nuances of a personal disposition are forever challenged by shifting collective ideas. As a child, I thought nothing of staring for hours at the hairs on a blade of grass or fixating on the texture of my mother's roped, woollen cardigan while she chastised me. My world has been predominantly remembered and emotionally felt through the haptics of touch. It is no wonder that the directness of clay has remained an important part of my material vocabulary. It allows discrete movement from the mystery of formlessness to the unimaginable form. This is the poetics of art.

One of my greatest pleasures is to travel to new places to make art in residency. Whilst I carry my habits with me, wherever I go I am newly immersed in the poetics of the world; discovering new sounds, smells, light, gestures in the fibre of the land and its inhabitants. It is the unexpected things and events that become the focus of these inevitably brief, creative encounters. I am grateful for these opportunities. They provide limitations in that I am outside the comforts of home and expansion in that I have to engage with the unknown and unfamiliar.

Recent philosophical research into Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience suggests that the seemingly unwieldy complexity of human emotions may be measurable algorithms. I hope not, but if it is, then let the mathematical become the subtleties and beauty of art. Let me remain ignorant of the reductive equation.



*Conjoined with Remainder* (2017) Installation view  
Photo: Ian Hobbs

## Some Things Come Apart

by Allegra Holmes

Australian artist Jan Guy says that her work is always about the dynamics of relationship. Knowing that Guy does not mince words, I found this use of absolutist language – always – to be particularly intriguing. I have known Jan Guy for ten years, and yet her work has been somewhat of a mystery to me. Being made privy to the inner workings of her mind, and actually, just getting to see Guy's work at all is something of a coup for me. Guy draws on her self-described tactile memory, the textures and physical feelings of a space dominate Guy's recollection of experiences, and as she puts it, come to stand for the event.<sup>1</sup>

Guy addresses complex notions of quantum physics through the equally complex intermingling of texture, form and ceramic materials. Her work shirks off any preconceived ideas of ceramics as art. Guy uses this material to investigate concepts that are theoretically impossible to investigate in a material way – as quantum concepts are by definition immaterial. Her piece *Entanglements* (fig.1) is constructed of two small, interlocking modules that can be reassembled. Like memory itself, they are composite structures with many different parts creating the whole. The object is different from every angle, as with a memory, the perspective from which you experience it changes what you see.

From one angle (fig.1), the work seems to be violent and static, looking like an assembly of dead objects – bones, dried organs, the skull of a bird piercing through an unknown piece of skeleton. The depth of penetration here is shocking, evoking a sense that the objects were driven together with great force. This angle also shows a sphincter-like disc, with a second object linking through its opening, trailing out like excrement. Then, this same piece can be flipped on its head, and the static 'deadness' is gone. In this configuration *Entanglements* (fig.2) is harmonious, the connections seem elegant and natural, and there is a sense of gentle undulating movement. The other side of the sphincter-like object is surprisingly smooth and beautiful, it's elegant mingling of red and blue giving off the appearance of a piece of polished agate. When describing the physical mechanics of her work Guy explains that 'some things come apart'. Memories can come apart too, some memories get reworked, re-remembered. Guy's memories are embedded in tactility, in textures and touch - in the the physical feeling of space and objects. *Entanglements* is just that, an entanglement of these tactile memories.



Figures 1 & 2 Jan Guy, *Entanglements* (2018) Ceramics. Image courtesy of the artist

Artist Lynden Stone asserts that visual art is a viable method through which we might begin to understand concepts of quantum physics outside the relatively inaccessible language of formal science. Stone's hope is that visual art dealing with quantum concepts can assist in a revision of our attitude to physical reality.<sup>2</sup> Stone rightly points out that the quantum world is not material, that it exists in a state of potential – much like memory. Stone also points out that quantum concepts and effects must be described using the available language, and that the artist is therefore 'restricted by the language and connotation of the materials used to convey the immaterial.'

<sup>1</sup> Jan Guy, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Lynden Stone, "Revising Attitudes to Physical Reality: Quantum Physics and Visual Art" *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 5, no. 6 (2012).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Ceramics is powerful as an art material because we touch it intimately everyday of our lives. We all know the coldness of the bathroom tiles, the heat held in our tea cup, the hard surface of the bathroom sink as we lean over it to brush our teeth or wash our faces. Guy's use of ceramics taps into this subtext, creating artworks that are layered in both conceptual and material meaning. Ceramics straddles both the domestic and art world, which has long been considered reasonable and material meaning. Ceramics straddles both the domestic and art world, which has long been considered reasonable to question its validity as an art material in a way that other media never is. Guy's ceramic objects are created from a material that has intimate knowledge of our lives. As an artist working with ceramics, Guy has entered into a relationship with this material, and now has intimate knowledge of it, too.

Guy's ceramic objects are strong realizations of the multifariousness of relationships. One moment they can seem entirely characterized by a push and pull dynamic, the next an effortless partnership in which each member accommodates the other. In their biological and archaeological appearance, Guy's objects allude to primal kinds of relationships, those that are born out of blood ties. Familial relationships can be beautiful and unconditional. They can provide a sense of belonging and safety, a foundation from which an individual may eventually achieve their full potential. Then there are relationships that are flawed, fractured, violent and inexplicable. There are relationships that persist even when they cause the participants pain and disappointment. This can be true for non-familial relationships too, and the dynamics of these play out in Guy's work in both the way the pieces relate to each other and how we, the audience, relate to the artwork.

Guy often places her ceramics in unexpected places – directly on the floor or hung from the ceiling – positioning the viewer to ceramics in a way that is unfamiliar. When viewing her 2017 exhibition at Sydney College of the Arts Gallery, I watched as audience members carefully circulated some of the works that were laid out on the concrete floor. These pieces were detailed, delicate and complexly linked. Their placement on the floor compounded a sense of vulnerability in the objects. Viewers had to crouch, hunch, bend down to view them, another unfamiliar positioning of the body to art. My son, four years old at the time, laid down on the concrete floor with his face centimetres from the work. Only a small child, unaware and unconcerned with the conventions of viewing art could make so bold a move as to lie down with the artwork. Had we followed his example, we could have viewed Guy's work in an entirely different way. Not only the angle and perspective (close, and from its level), but our physical experience – lying down, vulnerable as the objects are, our faces pressed against the cold concrete.

Guy's objects appear as bizarre, nonsensical forms with random connection points. They are emotional abstractions that require a letting go of conventions in order to understand them, and to fully experience them. In that same exhibition, Guy exhibited a piece which shouted expletives when touched. I only know this because she told me later. Due to my unconscious following of the established rules of gallery-going, I lost out on an entire aspect of the work. This is in no way the fault of the artist, rather I see it as an intentional, additional quality of the work. It is a lesson learned, in the importance of constantly challenging the conventions of both art making and art viewing.



Contemplating Love I | Kristalissa Vase  
Photo: Ian Dibble

This is the sort of demand that Guy's work makes of her audience – to recognise that the art object and the viewer are not actually of separate worlds. As with classical mechanics, which asserts that everything exists at a fixed point in time and space,<sup>5</sup> conventional art asserts that the art object is on the wall or the plinth, and the viewer views it from an appropriate distance. Guy's work breaks through this convention, applying the quantum mechanics assertion that everything exists in probability fields; that there is likeliness for an object to be at any point in time and space.<sup>6</sup> The viewer can try to look at Guy's art from that safe, conventional distance, but Guy's arrangements within her installations mean that while you are viewing one piece, you have been positioned in unconventional proximity to another. One could find themselves next to the art, under it, above it, touching it or even having it swear at you.

In her recent show *Nanette*, Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby explains that in comedy one freezes parts of a story in order to orchestrate tension in the audience, which the comedian can then relieve in the form of a punchline.<sup>7</sup> This is not dissimilar to what artists can do, in that art has the power to create tension within itself and within the viewer. This creating of tension can be understood as an establishing of a relationship between the comedian and audience, art and viewer, viewer and the artist. In *Nanette*, Gadsby goes on to assert that 'you learn from the part of the story you focus on'.<sup>8</sup> This is relevant here, as Guy's tactile memory means her focus is always on touch. In contemporary art the emphasis on not touching is often routine, it is visual art after all. Within the gallery setting, touching artwork is considered inappropriate, disrespectful and dangerous. Guy utilizes this 'no touching' rule to create tension between the work and the viewer. Smooth, glossy surfaces are juxtaposed against ruptured, carved out texture. By placing somewhat opposing textures side by side, their qualities are emphasized, and a kinesthetic desire created in the viewer to experience them – to want to touch. Further, Guy subverts this no-touching rule by creating a work that needs to be touched in order to be fully experienced. This is where art and comedy differ, the tension created is rarely relieved, and the viewer is often left to experience their discomfort indefinitely.

Jan Guy says her work is *always* about the dynamics of relationship. The aforementioned tension is an element of relationship dynamics, and in the witnessing and contemplation of Guy's work I have started to imagine this tension as literal threads between the viewer and the work. Guy's work not only creates a tension between her objects and people, but opens the space within that tension, giving significance not only to the art object but the space around it. Her work emphasizes behavior around art, giving the audience an opportunity to walk that tight line of tension to the artwork, and literally connect. This requires a shift in how we relate to art, a shift that extends to how we relate to physical reality.

Guy's work plays with the ideas of alternate states of existence, drawing on the notion that these objects are not representations of memories or memory structures, but rather they could be the memories themselves. If we are to understand the faculty of memory as a system of processing information, the physical experience of one of Guy's installations is like entering that very system. Surrounded by relics of Guy's memories, one is left somewhat scrambling, trying to decipher the immaterial realised in material. Endeavoring to understand quantum physics requires one to let go of concrete ideas of what or where things are in space and time, and enter the realm of probability – of all the ideas of what or where things could be. It is uncomfortable at first, to relinquish the illusion of control we have over our circumstances. It is near painful when one begins to engage with the mental gymnastics necessary to begin to understand quantum concepts. Guy's work offers us a foothold from which to enter a complicated field of ideas. Being open to these ideas means a realization that there quite seriously are endless possibilities – for the dynamics of relationships, for connection, for empathy, for the materials we use to make art and the way we exhibit and view that art.

#### Bibliography

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Guy, Jan. 2018.

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Stone, Lynden. "Revising Attitudes to Physical Reality: Quantum Physics and Visual Art". *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 5, no. 6 (2012): 59-72.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Leighton Richard Feynman, Matthew Sands. *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*, vol. 3 (California Institute of Technology 1964).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette* (2018).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

## Sean Gallery

Sean Gallery is a commercial space located at the heart of Hong Kong's creative district, Sheung Wan. It consists of a ground floor exhibition space and a working ceramics studio on the second floor. It is run by ceramicist, Loretta Sean and Sydney-based artist and curator, Yves Lee. It is Hong Kong's active creative area of PMQ and Tai Kwan.

We welcome all that are interested in art and those who are yet to discover their interest. Our gallery space supports emerging, mid-career and established artists from all over the world to exhibit their work. We aim to cultivate artist's practice, and to form a dynamic creative community.

In addition to our existing gallery space, Sean Gallery has initiated a residency programme for both artists and curators. Our one month long residency programme allows artists and curators to spend extended time in our studio space. They get the chance to experience and to learn more about local cultures, as a way to expand their practice. They also get the opportunity to run classes, give talks and demonstrations to broaden their connection within the art industry of Asia. In the process meeting people from Hong Kong who are genuinely interested in their practice. During the course of their residency, they will be curating or making work towards an exhibition at Sean Gallery in the last week of their stay in Hong Kong.

Our curator is also the founder of the annual exhibition *Love Letter*, held in Sydney since 2014. We aim to bring together and cultivate artists from all disciplines and all parts of the world. Encouraging diversity and opportunities for experimentation in our artists' practice, while fostering the individuality of our artists' contemporary practice.

Sean Gallery encourage our artists to think, research, form opinions and communicate their concepts through art making. We see art as a language that communicate between all peoples; a way for artists and curators to express their understanding of the world. At the same time audiences are able to enter that world from an outsider's perspective and enhance their own understanding of the world. At Sean Gallery, we encourage our artists to experiment with space, and examine their work from multiple perspectives. We encourage our artists to further push the potential of their work and allow the audience to engage and experience the risks the artist has taken.

Committed to provide a nurturing space and bringing together artists from around the world, Sean Gallery wishes to create a conversation between contemporary art, it's artists and their audience.

*We believe that contemporary art has the power to change the world. However, a collective of people who supports each other has even more power in creating a difference.*



Our first resident, Jan Guy giving a wheel throwing demonstration at Sean Gallery

[www.sean-gallery.com](http://www.sean-gallery.com)  
G/E, 12 Tai Ping Shan Street, Sheung Wan,  
HONG KONG



*Connection III* (2016)  
Photo: Yingge Ceramics Museum



*Passing Over (a matter of dimensions)* (2016)  
Photo: Ian Hobbs



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Photo: Ian Hobbs