



THE NUANCES OF NEURO ART

Fascinated with the brain and its many functions, Laura Bundesen creates art that delves deep into the secrets of the cranium and reveals them in vibrant colours

words | LAURA BUNDESEN art images | JOHN POLAK

I'm the daughter of a quilter and have been creating textile works since my teens when I embroidered mandalas on my friend's denim jackets, graduating to funky crazy quilted clothing for myself in my twenties. My mother gave me my first sewing machine and always encouraged me to follow my own artistic vision. She also taught me to be unafraid of bright colours. In my thirties, I became an arts administrator, working in non-profit finance and eventually became the executive director of a small but thriving art school. While in this role, I took over twenty studio classes studying everything from ceramics to jewellery making, pastels to paint, and even played with glass. All of this experimentation has added to my current mixed media work where I combine fabric, thread, and paint into joyful explorations of neuroscience.

My work is centered on brain imagery, a subject that I find endlessly fascinating. I started down this path quite by accident four years ago when I was invited to participate in an invitational fiber art show at a gallery that was somewhat edgy. I wanted to stretch away from the florals and abstracts I had been working on and was looking for a new subject matter. My partner of 10 years, Izzy Gesell, a motivational speaker and improv guru, suggested I think about doing brains and I went with it, creating the first two pieces of neuro art for that show. The response to this work was immediate and encouraging. In my own life, I have close family members who have suffered from mental illness, Alzheimer's and other brain illnesses. In showing and selling my work, I've now come into contact with survivors of traumatic brain injury and brain cancer and have become friends with a young woman who had a hemispherectomy at the age of eleven. Every single story I hear of brain injury and illness carries with it connection and inspiration.

I begin by researching the brain's functions and learning about how the different cerebral lobes and the cerebellum operate as a whole – which functions lay in which areas of the brain, where vision and speech, creative thought and our sense of touch reside. I use this information as a very loose guide during the process of creating.

Most of my pieces begin with a fabric collage laid out on artist's canvas. The choice of fabrics and colours is loosely based on the position and processes of each of the cerebral lobes. Then, I stitch this layer down on the sewing machine with Gutermann's invisible thread using a zigzag stitch to help prevent fraying. Once the fabric is fastened down, I begin hand embroidering, further emphasizing each lobe's functionality with varying stitches that best seem to fit

Previous page: *Mindful Alchemist*, 18" x 24", fabric collage and hand embroidery on canvas. Acrylic paint.

Clockwise from right: Sewing down in process; *Pink Skies*, 36" x 36", fabric collage and hand embroidery on canvas. Acrylic paint; Applying paint, work in progress.



in that region. For instance, I might use a French knot in the parietal lobe in the area responsible for sensing touch or a more precise stitch and form in the frontal lobe responsible for judgement and reasoned thinking. The cerebellum (or little brain) at the rear base is always done solely in embroidery satin stitch as it is tightly coiled and responsible for motor functions. In both the fabric collage and the embroidery I work spontaneously, letting the colour and form develop in free flow without any real plan other than to stay within the cerebral lobe formations.

Occasionally, I do the full brain only in

embroidery, partitioning off the different lobes through colour variations. This works particularly well when I'm working on an infant or child's brain and want to explore the formation of the brain and thought processes.

After the fabric collage and embroidery are finalized on the artist's canvas, I then stretch the canvas onto stretcher bars and begin the final process of applying paint. First, I prime the raw canvas with gesso, very carefully painting around all of the fiber using the tiniest of brushes to get into all the nooks and crannies that develop around the fiber. After a coat or two of



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gesso, I begin to apply the final coat of acrylic paint. My favourite brand is Golden. It's the best acrylic paint for me in both texture and its rich colour palette. Whether I'm working on a monotone background or creating a multi coloured sky, this step often takes several layers to get it just right. The entire process from conception to the end is very time consuming and I love every moment of it. The fabric collage and painting steps are fast and improvisational, while the hand embroidery is slow and meditative, utilizing different parts of my own brain in the process of making.

In 2017, my work was featured in The

Telus Brain Project as one of 100 artists selected to participate in the creation of free standing brain sculptures displayed on the streets of Toronto, Canada, raising awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care and research. I was also honored to be among six artists exhibiting at the Art of Neuroscience show at the Society for Neuroscience convention, a gathering of 30,000 neuroscientists from all over the world. Join me on the journey by visiting my website or follow along on Instagram @Laurabundesen. [Laurabundesen](#)

www.laurabundesen.com