NEUROART Exhibition Guide

# Stop 1

*Description:* A white table to the right of the entrance door. Contains complimentary earplugs, NEUROART stickers, and postcards of two of the artists’ (Carrie Ravenscroft & Bethan Burnside) works.

Also signs communicating: (1) If you would like some quiet and to be alone, ask a NEUROART volunteer to show you to the designated space. It is in another building 2-minute walk away; (2) The event will be photographed and filmed. If you do not want this footage on future NEUROART promotion or communication, please speak to a member of the NEUROART team.

## NEUROART EXHIBITION

**Curated and produced by** Bethan Burnside, Keshvi Shah, and Shaakir Salam

**Supported by** MRC Centre for Neurodevelopmental Disorders, WOHL Cellular Imaging Centre, ADHD Research Lab, Ness Labs, and the British Neuroscience Association

# Stop 2

*Description*: The following poem, placed on a music stand, with an accompanying music player device with headphones to hear a recitation by the author.

## ENGAGING DIVERSITY

So many worlds defined by us,

Many a shades added to the brush.

Look how unique this poem turns out to be,

When every reader engages a thought with it.

Fortunate is the human race,

To possess the prowess to relate.

But what use is this precious blessing,

If we make no effort to consider other’s processing.

Why do we wish to see monochromatic?

When we can access so many perspectives.

We often find ourselves holding derogative judgments,

Thinking that, “only my thoughts are allowed to be different”.

Well, here’s a different thought,

And there a distraught.

Yet another’s truth has been denied,

By a scared society that will soon be deprived.

Imagine a world with only one kind of brain,

Wouldn’t that life be insane?

Like robots, we all shall see,

Without a hint of freedom to breathe.

A bright light has shone upon those,

Who have accepted the neural chaos.

I stand here today to preach of human intelligence,

That welcomes the diversity being born every second.

— *Sajal Porwal.*

# Stop 3

*Description*: Four A4 photographs by Bethan Burnside displayed on a black metal grid.

## VOTIVE

In March 2020, while the rest of the world was navigating an impending pandemic, I was getting to grips with an equally unexpected event: an ADHD diagnosis. I was 24 years old, close to graduating a Master’s, and preparing to embark on my career as a neuroscientist. Working memory issues, processing differences, and concentration difficulties had significantly dampened previous work experiences. My newfound neurodivergence amalgamated into the melting pot of gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic differences that rendered me feeling like a fraud, an imposter, a contaminant to the hegemony of so-called scientific logic.

My microbial art practice, stemming from the methods and philosophies explored as part of WhiteFeather Hunter’s BioArt Coven, served as a catharsis. In direct contrast to the lab - which strives to eliminate contaminants via structural, disciplinary, and emotional containment - at home, contamination is encouraged; its unique beauty acknowledged. The microbes and I, in a co-collaborative effort, therefore present this: a votive.

A votive to witches in labs, to midsummer, to real autistic allies.

A votive to ADHD’ers doing experiments, to the women in the

classroom of men, and to those with a lifetime of shame.

A votive to chaos and disorder.

To the women diagnosed wrong, too late, or not at all.

A votive to bacteria.

A votive to contamination and growth.

— *Bethan Burnside.*

# Stop 4

*Description*: Four A1 illustrations by Carrie Ravenscoft displayed on a silver board.

## PAIRING ARTISTS AND RESEARCHERS

NEUROART provides a platform for neurodivergent people to share our living experience with neuroscientists who research topics relating to neurodevelopment and neurodiversity.

To foster this dialogue, NEUROART paired neurodivergent artists with neuroscientific researchers. Pairs had the chance to learn from each others' expertise and experience, and work together to create art pieces which explore themes resulting from their interactions.

Carrie Ravenscroft and Anne-Laure Le Cunff were selected through an Open Call to collaboratively create an artwork in the ADHD Research Lab at King's College London.

### ABOUT ANNE-LAURE LE CUNFF

I study neurodiversity in online education, which means that I try to understand how different brains learn differently in an online learning environment. Ultimately, my goal is to publish evidence-based guidelines to help educators design inclusive online learning experiences, so no learner is left behind! In my research, I use eye-tracking and electroencephalography (EEG). Eye-tracking gives us heat maps showing where people look and for how long, and EEG gives us wave patterns of brain activity. With these techniques, I can record data relevant to attention and working memory load, which helps me explore how the brains of different learners react differently when engaged in online learning.

### ABOUT CARRIE RAVENSCROFT

I am a neurodivergent, queer artist and art therapist from London, currently working at Mind as a mental health support worker. I initially ran groups here, as a volunteer, for women, asylum seekers and LGBTQ+ clients. I moved onto facilitating wellbeing workshops for Portugal Prints, The Big Draw and Jennifer Lauren Gallery. Additionally, I am a psychedelic first aid volunteer with Psycare. I got diagnosed with ADHD a few years ago at the age of 30, which significantly shifted my life in new ways. I’m learning this is a common experience for many women and feel motivated to speak out about it with the tools I have: art! My artistic journey has been heavily influenced by my own lived-experience. I'm eager to collaborate with neuroscientists, who can offer variety as well as a scientific and educational knowledge base to support my visuals.

## WE WERE FAILED

In the realm of neuroscience, we catch glimpses of how we ‘function’ and, at times, how we ‘don’t’. This exploration delves into the reasons behind our functional mishaps and whether they are modifiable. Yet, this journey is not about self-blame or self-help; it's about elevating awareness of difference and its role for individuals, their communities, and humanity.

Often, science and art are seen as conflicting forces. I prefer to view them as equally driven by curiosity, the compulsion to know and explore. When we introduce varied and marginalised groups, including neurodivergent voices, into this mix, it broadens and deepens our understanding of our Selves.

My research into neurodivergence, juxtaposed with my lived experience, creates a visual narrative for others to see and feel. It aims to contribute a previously unheard piece to the global conversation about fitting into society’s ‘normal’ functioning paradigm. This is a dialogue about the world as experienced by those who grapple with conventional societal constructs.

Reflecting on my educational journey, I often wonder whether I failed school or if the school system failed me. It was a series of painful, repetitive failures until I sought help, but only after failing university. With a support network encompassing diagnosis, disability assessment, ADHD medication, coaching, study skills, therapy, and neurodiversity mentoring, I was able to complete my Master’s degree. Ah, networks again.

This pursuit of understanding led to a curiosity about brain function, stemming from a sense of ‘difference’. Initially, my efforts were to fit in, but over time, my perspective shifted. I embraced my uniqueness, transforming it into a lifelong quest for connection, community and growth. This shift is reflected in my art, where neuron-like structures began to manifest. I wonder if my collaboration with neuroscientists in this project conjured a deeper, more realistic perspective.

The visual style of this series, comprising interconnected individual pieces, extends my exploration of connection and networks. It draws inspiration from the human body, nervous system, and brain while echoing the collaborative, networked, essence of this project. The series presents four elements. One for each element of this study, including preparation and reflection. While distinct, these elements are designed to interconnect, as well as allow for future additions (growth).

— *Carrie Ravenscroft.*

## FAILING FORWARD

We must confront an uncomfortable truth: our traditional research and teaching methods have often failed to inclusively address the needs of neurodivergent individuals. The pervasive bias towards neurotypical standards marginalises those who do not fit this narrow paradigm. This systemic oversight not only limits our understanding of neurodiversity, but also hinders the well-being and potential of those we aim to support.

This collaborative project is an invitation to view neurodiversity through a new lens. It’s a call to rethink our approaches in education and research, to acknowledge our shortcomings, and to move forward with a renewed commitment to inclusivity.

It is imperative that we shift from conducting studies *on* neurodivergent individuals to collaborating *with* them. This is why participatory research is a cornerstone of how we conduct science at the ADHD Research Lab. By inviting an artist into our lab, we didn’t just observe; we engaged in a meaningful dialogue; we listened and we learned. We tried to fail a little bit less.

We hope this work opens up a dialogue about the often overlooked perspectives of neurodivergent participants in scientific studies. Both art and science are driven by a deep-rooted curiosity—the human desire to understand our world and ourselves. By bringing art and science together, we aim to challenge existing perceptions and inspire a societal shift in how we view, study, and discuss neurodiversity.

— *Anne-Laure Le Cunff.*

# Stop 5

*Description*: A short film by Jem Chevilotte, projected on the wall.

## ART + SCIENCE =

— *Jem Chevillotte.*

# Stop 6

*Description*: A large board divided into sections, with pens and post-it notes to interact with the board’s contents.

## GET INVOLVED IN NEURODIVERSITY RESEARCH

1. Tell us what research topics you’d like us to explore:

* Strengths & Challenges
* Inclusivity & Accessibility
* Mental Health
* Community & Belonging

1. Join our study at the ADHD Research Lab: <https://qualtrics.kcl.ac.uk/jfe/form/SV_0lefOc8oUHtbP9Q>

# Stop 7

*Description*: We asked students and staff at King’s College London to send in artwork on the topic of NEURODIVERSITY. These visual works are displayed on silver boards.

## VER

“Ver”, meaning ‘to see’, serves as a visual ode to the richness found in neurodivergent experiences. It captures the essence of diverse cognitive processes and invites you to witness the beauty of non-linear thinking that affects the unique interpretation and navigation of the world around them.

— *Toni Mo.*

## UNTITLED

This artwork encourages viewers to embrace the diversity of individual perspectives, cultivating an awareness and appreciation for the distinctive mosaic of minds that contributes to shaping our world.

— *Khushali Khowal.*

## SURGEON IN HOGWARTS

When I had a stroke, the doctors put me in a medically induced coma. Being in a coma was a lot like a really long lucid dream that I still remember as if it was my life. Though coming out of coma, I couldn’t always distinguish between reality and dreams. This image is showing a memory of when I thought I was in a dream having adventures in Hogwarts, and I was trying to save a friend by pulling poison lines from them, but I pulled out the tubes from my neck leaving subtle scars, the blood was gushing and it wasn’t in a dream and a doctor had to come and install those lines again. In the process of creating this image, I was in that memory, and I see how much more meaning is there behind each brushstroke.

— *Anastasia Smirnova.*

## DIVERGENT BY DESIGN

A reality where neurodivergence shines and spills into society.

— *Trinity Bernard-Jones.*

## I CAN’T SEE ME

— *Zoë Grisedale-Sherry.*

## WHERE IS MY RITALIN?

“Where is my Ritalin?” explores the darker side of a nuanced dimension of ADHD treatment, particularly the medication Ritalin. Aiming to shed light on an aspect that is often overlooked within the “ADHD treatment” discourse, the drawing focuses on the emotional aftermath of the stimulant drug, capturing a frequently experienced feeling of emptiness post-Ritalin use, or “crash.” The title of the piece, along with its visual narrative, also delves into the vicious follow-up of the "crash,”which is suddenly followed by the need of refilling the mind through more medicinal stimulation through the same drug that gave rise to its emptiness. The deliberate depiction of the rapid comedown from the drug – rather than its rapid rise – through a black-and-white drawing of an empty head in an empty room seeks to highlight a dark aspect of medication for ADHD, experienced by many but often kept under wraps. The drug-induced, sudden feeling of emptiness also raises questions about not only its use but also the potential for abuse in unregulated settings. Moreover, the cyclical nature of relying on Ritalin to fill mental emptiness, despite the sometimes-agonizing crashes when the medication wears off, brings commentary on societal expectations and the pressure on individuals with ADHD to conform to perceived norms.

— *Irene Dompé.*

# Stop 8

*Description*: As part of the NEUROART project, artist Bhavani Esapathi and neuroscientist Deborah Reyes from the Deepak Srivastava Lab at King’s College London were paired to inspire an artwork stemming from their interactions. The resulting artwork is displayed on a large TV monitor screen.

## INCITE TO CARE

Extrapolations from the cellular parts that make up the human body as a whole. This installation seeks to ask the question: “How can we build on the model of care from nursing cells in a lab into patient interface?” And the answer depends on you, the viewer.

— *Bhavani Esapathi*.

# Stop 9

*Description*: A white table in the centre of the room with chairs, pens, revision cards, paper clips, and small business cards filled with questions on the topic of neurodiversity / in research and art. There are the following instructions:

There is no right or wrong way to do this.

Choose a question card. Grab a chair. Stand, or wiggle a bit.

Invite a stranger, invite a friend. Say no to either.

Brainstorm an answer: quietly or out loud. Written or drawn. Verbalised or thought. Do you think in pictures or in words?

Connect the ideas. That’s what the paper clips are for! Can you find any patterns?

# Stop 10

*Description*: A visitor’s book to share your experience of the exhibition.