

Elizabeth King

Artist-in-Residence

The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye

April 1 – May 4, 2008

Jaffe-Friede Gallery
Hopkins Center
Dartmouth College

This exhibition is made possible by the
generous support of the Arthur J. Cohen '03
and Nellie Z. Cohen Fund.



To Varujan, our Muse

Previous pages:

(left)

Untitled

1993

Porcelain, glass, fiber optics

5½ x 3¾ x 4¾ inches

(right)

Eidolon

1998-99

Live-action animation, 14 minute loop

Video projection, 72 x 96 inch screen

Photo: John Sherman

Opposite:

Untitled (detail)

1994-2004

Porcelain, glass, eye lashes, wood, metal,
fiber optics

21 x 7½ x 5 inches

Eyes, neck, and shoulders movable

Photo: Elizabeth King and Lynton Gardiner



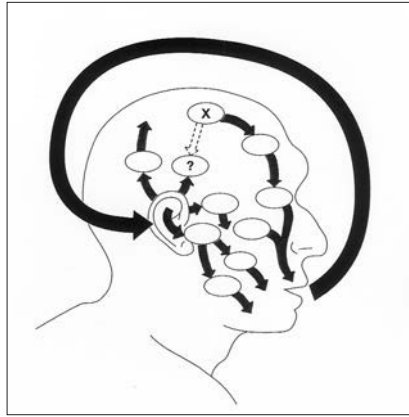


Illustration by Paul Weiner,
from Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*,
Little, Brown and Company, 1991, p. 196

The Ministry of Inside Things*

Here is a diagram from a book by philosopher Daniel Dennett: if you hear yourself speak you can find out what you think. Attention goes outside the body and comes back in, to make thought. For an artist, the arrow goes out through the hands, into clay or paint, then back in through the eye.

Can I get you thinking about the inside of a small hollow thing in the shape of a head? This is my subject: the mystery of what goes on in there. Somewhere in there is us. We are inside looking out.

Casting a wax head for a bronze, or casting a clay head in a slip mold: both processes produce an incarnation that is hollow, with thin walls. I am refining the inside of the nostril, and wonder: where *is* the line between the outside of the head and the inside? Once I'm all the way in, a different representational order takes over. The old metaphor of a theater behind the eyes holds my imagination yet. It would feel indirect, not to say impolite, to do this with anyone else's nose but my own. All the elegant apertures of the head!

A bronze piece I call *By Ear*, for the possibility of making a portrait of hearing. If you stand in just the right place, you can actually look through one ear and out the other. A portrait, not so much of

a person, but of a verb. An action taking place or being done. In this case, listening. Or looking. Paying attention.

When the *abject*—the unimmaculate flesh—took hold in the art of the 1980s, it felt as if there was a sudden explosion of things art hadn't yet said about the alive body. The miracle is that there *is* a center of emotional life within our bloody and corpuscular organism. "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," Psalm 139 says.

My father passed away this year, and at his memorial service my famous cousin Carol Chickering stood before us and sang for him. Bach's *St John Passion*, Rachmaninoff's *Vocalese*, and at the end of the service, the Latin hymn *In paradisum*. Her voice articulated a grief we might not have been able to access or bear on our own, and then set us down gently so that we might not be damaged.

Nothing in her hands, nothing between her and the world except her voice. Out her mouth, into our ears. Could I ever, clumsy sculptor, make something as bright and crystalline as that voice? Sculpture too has its timbre, pitch, and color.

With nothing in my hands, I can't think. Drawing, for example: I draw a thing if I can't possess it

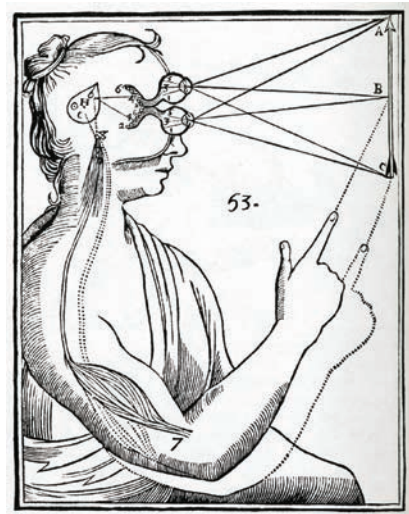
any other way. Then sculpture makes it all the more real. Portraits of my mother—because I couldn't have her any other way. Her half-a-body, polio legs. Particular materials for each kind of tissue...porcelain, glass, wood.

But later, why a self-portrait? What is a self? We can't ever see our self as a whole thing. A self portrait is a kind of telephone call from inside to out.

So many of us on this earth, each with a lost father! It's hard to square the pain of my one-person's emotion, against the sheer numbers of us out there, across continents, each one weeping in the shower. The sovereignty of the individual—the very word individual: meaning undividable. What is a self, among the many?

And where is the solitary viewer nowadays, the dreaming viewer, the reader alone with a book? Now it's markets, constituencies, interest groups, voting blocks. But the ideal audience for a card trick is an audience of one.

What is a self? How about a diagram with the arrow going out one person's mouth, into another's ear, and out that one's mouth back into the first ear... with reroutes at every turn to eye and hand and clay and paint.



René Descartes, *Traité de l'Homme*,
1664, Paris (photo courtesy of Dartmouth
College Library, taken from Descartes,
Oeuvres philosophiques, Paris, Garnier frères,
1963–73, p. 456)

* The inventor Léon Theremin, groping for an English translation of the Russian Ministry for Internal Affairs, called it "the ministry of inside things."



Eye and Hand

The problem I return to again and again—my best problem—is to try and make two things succeed at once: to build a thing that looks like a human body (sculpture’s age-old province), and at the same time engineer its joints so that it moves like the body. These two tasks are remarkably incompatible off paper. The automaton, the puppet, the doll, and the mannequin tell their own histories of the compromise between sculpture and mechanism to represent the alive and moving body. Take the famous opposable joint at the base of the thumb: robotics has modeled its grasping action, but in the process lost its human look. Striking a different bargain, I fabricate each working joint to capture as much mechanical anatomy as I can without sacrificing the emotional coherence of the image. It becomes a contest, even a fight. In just the same way, we are always caught thinking of a person as a thing one minute (made of blood, organs, joints), and a being the next (a personality, with memories, plans). We can never quite put these two definitions of ourselves together. What happens in the finished work of art from forcing one form of representation to collide with another?

I am absorbed in traditional processes of modeling, carving, and casting—interrupted by machine operations on the lathe and mill. Then I take the jointed figures I’ve made and set them in motion with live-action or stop-frame animation, on film or video. How shall they move? I try to capture fugitive non-iconic gestures: the things you might unconsciously do while talking to yourself, or daydreaming before a window, rubbing your ear. Threshold actions. Then, this time in the gallery, I again try to do two things at once: to find a way to present the sculpture and its film together. As I’ve used magnifying lenses to see the work in my hands in the studio, so I use lenses in the gallery, to project the animations and to generate ambiguity and interplay between the moving image and the still object.

This exhibition in the Jaffe-Friede Gallery at Dartmouth focuses on a single sculpture, an untitled half life-size portrait figure finished in 2004, together with its animation on video. Companion sculptures in bronze and porcelain from earlier and later studies of the same head, and a more recent work, *Bartlett’s Hand*, present the body in fragments, hand and eye at a distance.

Untitled

1994–2004

Porcelain, glass, eye lashes, wood, metal,
fiber optics

21 x 7½ x 5 inches

Eyes, neck, and shoulders movable

Photos: Elizabeth King and Lynton Gardiner





Portrait

2005

Live action animation, 1½ minute loop

Plasma screen, glass lens, bellows, circular
steel and brass frame, steel table

81 x 44 x 39 inches overall dimensions

The projected animation appears to float in
empty space within the circular frame

Photos: John Sherman

Untitled (detail)

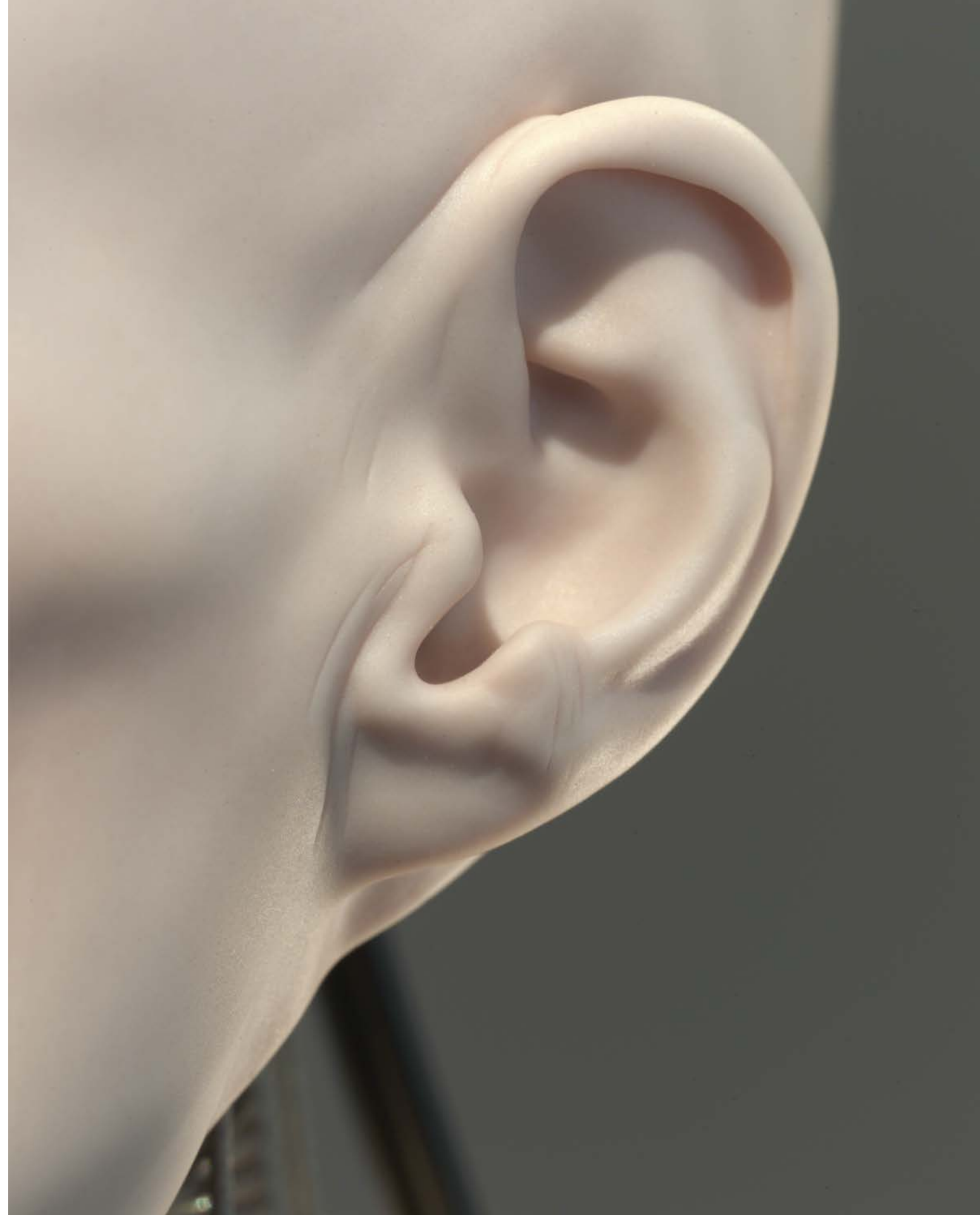
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Bartlett's Hand

2005

Sculpture and stop-frame animation
English boxwood, brass, LCD screen,
computer, wood frame

Animation: 5 minute loop

72 x 24 x 60 inches overall dimensions;
boxwood hand is half life size (dimensions
variable, all joints are movable)

Photo: John Sherman



Bartlett's Hand (detail)

2005

Sculpture and stop-frame animation
English boxwood, brass, LCD screen,
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72 x 24 x 60 inches overall dimensions;
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Photo: Lynton Gardiner

Following pages:

Bartlett's Hand: 14 Poses

2007

(*Pose 1, Pose 10,*)

Chromogenic prints

17 x 17 inches each

Photos: Elizabeth King and Lynton Gardiner





ELIZABETH KING received BFA and MFA degrees in sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute. She is represented by Danese Gallery in New York. She teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Department of Sculpture and Extended Media. Awards for her work include a 2006 Academy Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a 2002–03 Guggenheim Fellowship, and a 1996–97 Fellowship in the Visual Arts at the Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute, now the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study, at Harvard University. Her work is in permanent collections in the Hirshhorn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Her book *Attention's Loop, (A Sculptor's Reverie on the Coexistence of Substance and Spirit)* was published by Harry N. Abrams in 1999. She is currently finishing a second book, written with co-author W. David Todd of the Smithsonian Institution: a study of a Renaissance automaton in the Smithsonian collection and the legend behind it, entitled *A Machine, a Ghost, and a Prayer: The Story of a Sixteenth-Century Mechanical Monk*.

I am indebted to collector Myron Kunin for generously lending the central piece around which this show was composed. Robert and Karen Duncan permitted us to borrow the equally essential *Bartlett's Hand*. Marc and Kathy LeBaron lent the bronze head *By Ear*, and John and Dede Brough let us include the early porcelain portrait head that is the first of the series. My deepest thanks go to Gerald Auten and the studio faculty at Dartmouth who made this show possible. Shawn Lotze gave us his magic hands at installation. John Kemp Lee, without breaking his teasing stride, designed and built for me an elegant suspended projection screen. When I graduate from my residency at Dartmouth, how will I survive without John Crane and Nance Silliman, my guides? The week we installed, Varujan Boghosian charged in every day yelling “is this show up yet?” Only later did it dawn on me that all the decisions about what went where were his. I am grateful to the superb crew of Dartmouth students working as gallery interns who guarded the show once it opened, and kept all the hidden equipment running. Finally, Brenda Garand, solicitor-poet, may the conversation you started last our lifetimes.

EK

Studio Art Exhibition Program

Gerald Auten, Director
HB 6081 Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755
(603) 646-3651

Gallery Hours

Tuesday – Saturday 12:30 – 10:00 pm
Sunday 12:30 – 5:30 pm
Closed Mondays and holidays

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| Virginia Beahan | Senior Lecturer in Studio Art |
| Mary-Thérèse Braun | Department Administrator |
| Brenda Garand | Associate Professor of Studio Art, and Chair of Studio Art |
| Louise Hamlin | Professor of Studio Art |
| Karolina Kawiaka | Senior Lecturer in Studio Art |
| John Kemp Lee | Adjunct Assistant Professor of Studio Art |
| Brian Miller | Senior Lecturer in Studio Art |
| Ben Frank Moss III | George Frederick Jewett Professor of Studio Art |
| Soo Sunny Park | Assistant Professor of Studio Art |
| Colleen Randall | Professor of Studio Art |
| Enrico Riley | Senior Lecturer in Studio Art |
| Nance Silliman | Assistant to the Director, Studio Art Exhibition Program |
| Esmé Thompson | Professor of Studio Art |
| John D. Wilson | Adjunct Assistant Professor of Studio Art |

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Front cover:
Untitled
1994–2004
Porcelain, glass, eye lashes, wood, metal, fiber optics
21 x 7½ x 5 inches
Eyes, neck, and shoulders movable
Photos: Elizabeth King and Lynton Gardiner

Back cover:
By Ear
2004
Bronze, glass, black basalt plinth
5½ x 3½ x 4½ inches
Photo: Lynton Gardiner

