

How Do We Perceive Art?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Neuroscientists at the University of Leicester are to work with a renowned international artist in order to gain new insights into perception.

Thanks to funding from The Leverhulme Trust, Rodrigo Quian Quiroga, Professor of Bioengineering at the University of Leicester is to work with an Argentinian artist, Mariano Molina as artist in residence.

Professor Quian Quiroga is a leading neuroscientist and bio-engineer, whose discovery that a remarkable type of neuron in the brain fired in an ‘abstract’ manner to completely different pictures of familiar persons, for example Jennifer Aniston or Halle Berry, and that it was possible to actually tell what people were seeing from the [neuronal activity](#), has been cited among the top papers in the world.

Recently, together with Dr. Sandra Dudley, from University of Leicester School of Museum Studies and with Dr. David Barrie, the former director of the Art Fund, he has also turned his attention to the world of art, an exploration of how we perceive works of art and what goes on in the brain when we look at a picture.

This latest funding has allowed him to invite the artist, Mariano Molina, to spend five months working in his laboratory, studying the principles of [perception](#) from both an artistic and neuroscientific viewpoint.

Professor Quian Quiroga commented: “Without knowing anything about [neuroscience](#) Mariano Molina is using principles like ‘focus of attention’

and the ‘center of gaze’, which we know through our research. But he understands the concepts as an artist. An excellent example is his acrylic on canvas: “The center of gaze”, in which the focus of attention is clearly directed by Mariano Molina’s technique.

“For about half a year he will be in my lab and will be studying visual perception but from a neuroscience aspect. Questions include: ‘How do we perceive art? How do we gaze at art pieces compared to non-artistic pictures? What principles from neuroscience can help an artist in his creations? and so on.

“At the same time, he will bring to us all the principles from an artist’s point of view. He teaches art and has a lot of experience in public exhibitions around the world.

“During his time with us he will create up to a dozen pieces of art using the principles he has learned. We will use our methodology tracking the exact eye gazing with an eye-tracker to study perception through his creations.

“He and I are both very excited about this. We hope it will be just the start of a whole new process.”

Mariano Molina commented about this project: "This unique and great possibility that Professor Quian Quiroga offers me, is the best opportunity to learn and study how to look a piece of art in a scientific perspective. I really think this concept will also influence my artworks in a very new way and may change 100 % how I will look art pieces in a close future."

The work created by Mariano Molina, who is due to arrive in November, will be on display at the end of the project, together with explanations of the neuroscience principles behind it.

This collaboration is closely linked with a separate research project in which Professor Quian Quiroga is working with the University's celebrated School of Museum Studies and The Art Fund, to understand the 'wow factor' - how and why people react in different ways to [art](#) in galleries and museums.

Provided by University of Leicester ([news](#) : [web](#))

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