

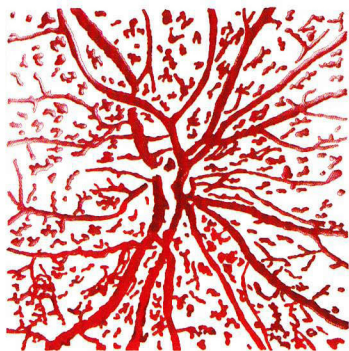
REVIEW: *Rhode Island*

CHINA BLUE: BRAIN'S EYES

Warren Alpert Medical School (Ground floor) • Providence, RI • lifespan.org/centers-services/norman-prince-neuroscience-institute/meet-artist-residence-china-blue • November 13, 2017–March 1, 2018

In the past two years, China Blue has made art not in the company of painters, sculptors or printmakers, but neurologists, surgeons and researchers. Blue is an artist who has long investigated scientific technologies in her creative process, from bio-acoustics to monitoring brain waves. During an artist residency with the Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute, Blue crafted a body of work concerning a part of the body: the eye.

Blue's exhibit *Brain's Eyes* derives its visual textures and structures—blobby, stretchy, branching, patterned—from researchers' images of the



China Blue, *P01R*, 2017, urethane, pigment and acrylic on canvas, 24 x 24".

human retina's microvasculature (blood vessels). Blue illustrates these vessels, hoping to unify in one image the optical organs and the imagination they inspire. "Although the brain accepts what the eye looks for, it can also separately generate flights of fancy," Blue explains.

To achieve this simultaneity of thought and sensation, Blue employs traditional and high-tech techniques. Paintings comprise most of *Brain's Eyes*: acrylic on canvas, with urethane and aluminum added for extra material flair.

3D-printed reliefs of the eye's microvasculature, palm-sized recreations of the protein that causes Alzheimer's, and a six-foot sculpture of meditation-drenched brainwaves dubbed *Periodic Theta* make up the rest.

The paintings vary in mood, motion and col-

oration. In *P.51*, Blue uses a glacial palette, its titular hue swirling around a rough hub of white in the canvas's center. *P.38 Red*, meanwhile, is more of a map, a hot circuitry of lines that suggest multiple sources of vitality coagulating and converging. Given the room for artistic license, these paintings could have benefited from a bolder use of color or transparency. The 3D-printed reliefs avoid this issue by appearing in strong black and white—mounted in Riker boxes, floating in glass, like specimens from a dark world.

Blue's work reminds viewers that abstract art can depict a body's reality—its feeling, its presence, its fantasies—as powerfully as representational art. Inside each of us, these images (or something like them) thrive as actual blood vessels. Blue's rendering of these optical organs combined with her imagination, and one glimpses the breadth of consciousness, that profound meeting of the felt and the dreamt.

—Alexander Castro