

Artist statement

I was scared to death / I could have died of joy (2000)

The spectator enters a darkened room with two stainless steel tables separated by an empty space. The tables are on human scale, from a clean room used for computer chip design or biological engineering. On the tables are objects that appear to be specimens. Two half brains made of glass, again human scale, are encased in glass tubes. Unlike many anatomy illustrations where the brain ends at the neck, these models have trailing tail-like nerves, like devolved creatures.

At first observation, the objects might seem familiar or recognizable to the spectator. It soon becomes clear that they are not inert. The spectator is sensed and the brains excite. Electrons become agitated and plasma gases flare up in the tubes, the brains responding. The spectator might touch a tube and the plasma's energy stream follows the hand, straining for contact.

Finally, the light begins a beat, a pattern of on and off, as if signaling. The empty space between the tubes becomes highly charged, especially if both brains are firing, both tubes are beating. In this charged space, with the tubes signaling like distant planets, spectators wander like unfixed entities, the signals competing for their attention. In scientific terms, the spectators' own brains may be affected quite directly, through a process called "entraining." The electronic pulses, visualized as beating light, are based on patterns that have been claimed to be the timing of neurons firing in certain areas of the human brain. The firing patterns used in this work correspond to states of haunting, or abject fear, and benign enlightenment or rapture. These emotions might be understood as two sides of the same coin, a habitation of something that feels other than oneself. One may sense instability of the boundaries between the self and the conditions created by the objects in the work.

I made this piece after *Charged Hearts*, working again with images that are almost not there. In one sense, as glowing, fragile objects, they might seem hyper real, yet they suggest something that isn't visual. Again, the spectator becomes a performer moving from observer status through a series of transgressions linked with the object. Like *Charged Hearts*, this piece simulates interactive intimacy. It is the continuation of my thinking about emotions, new technologies, and electromagnetic fields, thinking that is located somewhere between metaphor and physics.

It was clear to me that I should work with another part of the body after the hearts that were central to *Charged Hearts*. Like the heart, the brain fires, and it is another part of the human anatomy that is known to work electromagnetically. Since all this seemed so obvious, I resisted. However, observing what seemed to be a renewed general interest in ways to map emotion in areas as far flung as adult toys and neuroscience, I became more engaged with the brain as an electromagnetic terrain. Simultaneously, my work on *Method and Apparatus for Finding Love 2000* drew me deeper into considering the notion of modeling emotion and, finally, I gave in. It was the slippage between physiology and emotion which fascinated me. As it turns out, the brain is now under study for its relation to emotion, and emotions can be 'seen' in the patterns of the brain's firing. *I was scared to death / I could have died of joy* – the title of this work – might suggest an ecstasy of emptiness, or a simultaneous seduction between two extremes, rapture and fear.