

Default State Network

By [Julia Morton](#)

What is consciousness? Religion, philosophy, even science can't give us an exact definition. Yet this is the question posed by curator Ryan Wallace in his group show Default State Network, now on at the Morgan Lehman Gallery.

Wallace chose work from 12 artists (including himself) that offer a visual interpretation of consciousness. Drawing inspiration from science, spirituality and philosophy, the pieces range from coffin photos by Glen Baldrige to Alex Dodge's sculpted self-portrait as an android, from geometric symbols by Elise Ferguson to Hilary Pecis' status symbols.

Chris Duncan's figurative sculpture and painted mirror placed near the center of the gallery set the tone of the exhibition. The sculpture features a colorful, bead-covered male head with a gentle expression. The head is set on an abstracted metal torso that sits on a pedestal. The man is staring into a wall mirror spray-painted with a blurry, multi-colored shape that only roughly corresponds to his figure; this work illustrates the underlying mysteries and ambiguous outcomes that define our search for consciousness.



"Stagecraft", Joseph Hart

Wallace chose the title Default State Network because it refers to the regions of the brain focused on daydreams, speculation and contemplation of the past. Perhaps this is where our sense of self is generated and stored. It's also an area scientists think is activated during creative thought.

Though I thought the gallery was too large and too bright for the scale of the art, and several pieces suffered from a lack of originality, when the show was considered as a whole collection rather than as individual pieces, the exhibit became more interesting and made an important point. Due to the breakdown of recognizable art movements, contemporary curators and collectors alike are now required to take charge and give disparate art an overarching connection or purpose. Just as film directors cast actors in order to shape the story they want to tell, curators and collectors can now cast works of art to shape and reflect their own creative agendas. In his search for consciousness, Wallace acts as that curator/director, and this show highlights what can be accomplished when one consciously uses collecting as a medium and a tool for self-discovery.

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*Through Aug. 13, **Morgan Lehman Gallery**, 535 W. 22nd St., 212-268-6699.*