

Week 7 Presentation: The Beauty of the Brain (Zeki) & Gestalt Theory

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Introduction:

This session contrasts Semir Zeki's neuroaesthetic exploration of art as a function of the visual brain with the foundational Gestalt laws that govern how we organize chaotic stimuli into coherent forms.

Brainstorming Questions: 1. **The Art Critic in Your Head:** Zeki says great art pleases the brain's biology. Explain, as if you were talking to, an artist friend that we generally love simple, balanced shapes (like in Mondrian paintings) because our brain's visual areas are efficient and love pure signals that hit their "sweet spot" perfectly.

2. **The "Good Figure":** Gestalt psychologists say we see the whole, not the parts. Explain, as if you were talking to, a child why a bicycle looks like a "bike" and not just "wheels + shiny bars," because our brain instantly glues it all together—"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."
3. **Grouping by Color:** Show a picture of red and blue dots. Explain, as if you were talking to, your grandma why she instantly sees "rows of red" and "rows of blue" (Law of Similarity) without even trying. Her brain is obsessed with organizing things into "teams."

Recommended Readings:

- Zeki, S. (1999). *Inner vision: An exploration of art and the brain*. Oxford University Press.
- Wertheimer, M. (1938). Laws of organization in perceptual forms. In W. D. Ellis (Ed.), *A source book of Gestalt psychology* (pp. 71-88). Harcourt, Brace.