

Aphantasia: why a Disney animator draws a blank on his own creations

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

If you have seen *The Little Mermaid*, you can probably visualise Ariel in your mind's eye, but for Glen Keane, the Disney animator who drew her, that is impossible. Keane has a condition called aphantasia, meaning his mind's eye is blind. And so does Ed Catmull, the former president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Aphantasia is a relatively unknown — and only recently discovered — condition that affects 2% of the population, and both genders equally, says Adam Zeman, professor of cognitive and behavioural neurology at the University of Exeter. “People with aphantasia can think about an apple, or a front door or a loved one perfectly well, but they just can’t bring to mind the visual image of that thing or person.”

Zeman says that most aphantasiacs are not “desperately upset” when they discover their condition, “partly because they’ve always been that way”. One potentially upsetting aspect is the inability to recall a loved one’s face.

Catmull told the BBC that aphantasia was not a barrier to creativity, pointing out that Keane’s work was proof that you do not have to be able to picture something to be able to draw it. “People had conflated visualisation with creativity and imagination, and one of the messages is: ‘They’re not the same thing.’”

Summary: