

Book review by Beatrijs Sterk  
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Crafts such as knitting, crocheting, embroidery and weaving positively influence our brain functioning and mental well-being. Anyone who reads the recently published book 'Stitch Your Brain' by Monika Auch will see this confirmed by the results of the long term project. The beautifully designed book with a textile cover, 140 detailed photos of the works, stories of participants and six commenting articles illustrate this and the dynamic relationship with our brain on a timeline since Leonardo da Vinci's drawings.

Monika was born south of Frankfurt, attended medical school at the University of Amsterdam and worked as a doctor. She took private weaving lessons from Bauhaus weaver Margot Rolf followed up by studying at the prestigious Gerrit Rietveld Academy. Since 2000 she works as a visual artist with a focus on weaving in her studio in Amsterdam.

The cross-pollination between art and science which characterizes her work led to the 'Stitch Your Brain' project structured as an empirical study. She observed, that due to digitalization many manual skills have been taken over by swiping, scrolling and tapping on screens. Publisher, Eleonor Jap Sam, known for her beautiful designed books, was fascinated by the questions Monika was asking: What is the influence of this impoverishment on the intelligence of our hands and on our well-being? How does hand-brain creativity actually work? Why do humans enjoy and even crave creative making? How do we visualize our brain?

In 2013 Monika volunteered at the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience in a research study about insomnia in exchange for data about her own brain functions during knitting! In search of answers to these questions she set up the "Stitch your Brain" study, aiming to involve as many and diverse participants as possible. An embroidery kit with a printed mid-brain image with yarns, needle and a short introduction sheet was designed. After completion of the work participants filled in a questionnaire, sent a photo for the website and even the "Stitched Brain" itself.

During the following ten years the unique collection of 105 works, the 'Amsterdam Brain Collection' was assembled. In 2018 it was shown as a monumental installation at WG Kunst in Amsterdam. All works are presented in the book. Carefully preserved and documented, they are intended to be displayed as a traveling collection, accompanied by the book as a catalogue.

The book has two messages. The first, taken from the data of the study states: Our brains appreciate arts and crafts. The results and statements of the participants form a powerful plea, supported by data, in favour of the positive influence of craft activities on health, long- and short-term learning, manual dexterity and mental stability.

The second is an insightful reflection by Robert Zwijnenberg: "The embroideries are self portraits, a material-visual quest of the makers in search of themselves, in and outside of their own brains. They hint at the ability of art to present the unrepresentable, the inexpressible, the unspeakable, the unimaginable and the invisible. The project shows that there are questions that will never and cannot ever be answered by the neurosciences. In order to understand ourselves, we cannot do without art!"

Publisher Jap Sam Books: "Stitch Your Brain", Monika Auch, additional texts by Prof.R.Zwijnenberg, Dr. Marieke Hendriksen, Charlotte Steels and Mané van Veldhuizen 253 pages, 160 color images, price 30 Euro, website <https://monikaauch.com/research> and [www.weeflab.com](http://www.weeflab.com) and [www.cargocollect.com/stitchyourbrain](http://www.cargocollect.com/stitchyourbrain)