

**Asser Saint-Val**  
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### Artist Statement

I am interested in Neuromelanin as it relates to spirituality and self-consciousness and I explore these ideas through paintings, sculptures, and multi-sensory art installations. My works are quasi-figurative and ambiguous, and bring together ideas central to modern debates about Neuromelanin. My environments are surreal, encompassing themes such as under-recognized African-American inventors, the politics of sexual desire, and the complex aesthetics, narratives and metaphors that attach to the organic substance.

Neuromelanin is a pigment found specifically in the dopaminergic neurons of the human substantia-nigra (dark-substance) in the base of the brain. Neuromelanin is secreted by the pineal gland, a part of the brain that is believed to play a significant role in human spirituality. French philosopher and mathematician, Rene Descartes, 1596-1695, for example, once stated that: "The pineal gland is the principal seat of the Soul and the place in which all our thoughts are formed." Later on, I engaged in my own research concerning Neuromelanin. Dr. Richard King has suggested that: "On a philosophical plane, Neuromelanin is the biological doorway through which the life force of African spirituality passes in moving from the spirit to the material realm."

My most recent work, *The Philosopher's Stone*, is a multi-sensory, interactive art installation. To be fully immersed in the work, audiences are welcome to lie on the bed while viewing a floating sculpture. Participants also wear a pair of binaural headphones and listen to a non-linear conversation in four languages. They are also experiencing thirteen different aromas within the space, while being fed by a phoenix deity.

The Philosopher's Stone is an ancient myth often described as a magical stone or elixir which is impossible to find. Metaphysically, the stone is a reference to the search for one's soul. The intention of the installation is to activate the audience's imagination through the senses. I want the participants to tap into the deepest parts of their subconscious through imagination and meditation.

This period in my work has expanded my consciousness both socially and spiritually. The impact the work has had on viewers has been described as an experience of magical transformation and self-awareness. I believe the spiritual nature of Neuromelanin and its abilities to connect us to our higher being is a universal curiosity that connects us as human beings.

### Artwork

- Title:** Swaab, D. F. and Visser, M. (1977). A Function for alpha-MSH in fetal development and the presence of an Alpha-MSH-like compound in nervous tissue. *Frontiers in Hormone Research*, 4, 170-178, 2006.
- Medium:** Mixed media on Masonite: coffee, chocolate, acrylic, watercolor, house painting, and color pencils
- Size:** 48 x 48 in.
- Year:** 2013

*Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry*, Summer 2020, 12(1), pp. 309-310  
 ISSN 1916-3460 © 2020 University of Alberta  
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