

2 OLGA BALEMA

“brain damage”

Bridget Donahue, New York
by Laura Brown

Olga Balema’s “brain damage” places words onto the convoluted bodily pathways with which you might read a room. At Bridget Donahue, the floor is ready: faded wood covered in paint splatters, shadows of color, and other signs of mystery time. Lines at all angles hover above this ground. These are long stretches of elastic, painted and knotted into a vast net and tacked low to the space by nails and staples. Broken into thirteen unapparent parts, it’s fun to relate Balema’s installation to images of spiders’ webs woven under the influence of various drugs; the two methodologies share an anfractuosity. Some tendrils reach up the wall or settle onto the floor. Throughout, the elastic’s tension changes with time. Although each line functions against a respective backdrop, the work cannot really be described as site-specific. Something greater is happening.

This big network of sculpture is absolutely time-based. The work is far longer and larger than what the current room holds, although this is its immediate status. What is brain damage? The sudden destruction or deterioration of the brain’s cells—otherwise the longest-living cells in the body. Applied by Balema, a rich red stain feels familiar, as does the personality of a frazzled knot. These parts weren’t processed once. Like a garment exposed to the weather, new smudges and curls accrue through movement. Over and over I crouch down to get a closer look, becoming dizzy in the process. Each movement has an effect. Each detail is a decision, the result of an action. Details become reminders: new neural connections. Later on, someplace else, a loose nail seen on a floor makes me flash back to this moment. Pre-staged, these sinuous networks traveled flat into the gallery—and will keep traveling. Being in fact a very large amount of sculpture, every single

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element is impossible to take into account. “Brain damage” is a circuit of shifting information, a stretchable presence, like a life.



2 Olga Balema, 1, 2019. Elastic band, paint, glue, nails, staples. 7×302×52in. Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York.