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IN THE FRAME

Art and emotion under the microscope

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Nene Humphrey, *Circling the Center* (2016) (Photo: Rudolf Costin)

The New York-based artist Nene Humphrey discovered a remarkable resemblance between a cultural practice and neurology while working as an artist-in-residence in the lab of the neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux at New York University: the images she had been researching of the Victorian mourning ritual of braiding dead loved ones' hair for trinkets “looked exactly like” the neurons of the amygdala, the area of the brain that processes emotions, when viewed under a microscope, she tells *The Art Newspaper*. This inspired her performance piece *Circling the Center*, conceived as a private meditation on loss, which she recently staged at the 3-Legged Dog Art and Technology Center in Tribeca. In the performance, five women chant, sing and act out the Victorian braiding ritual, using red copper and steel wire on three traditional braiding tables, while a live cellist plays and images from MRI scans of Humphrey's own brain—particularly focussed on the amygdala—are projected on two screens. “I think it's fascinating that we've been on the moon but know so little about the brain—the most complex and beautiful part of ourselves,” Humphrey says.