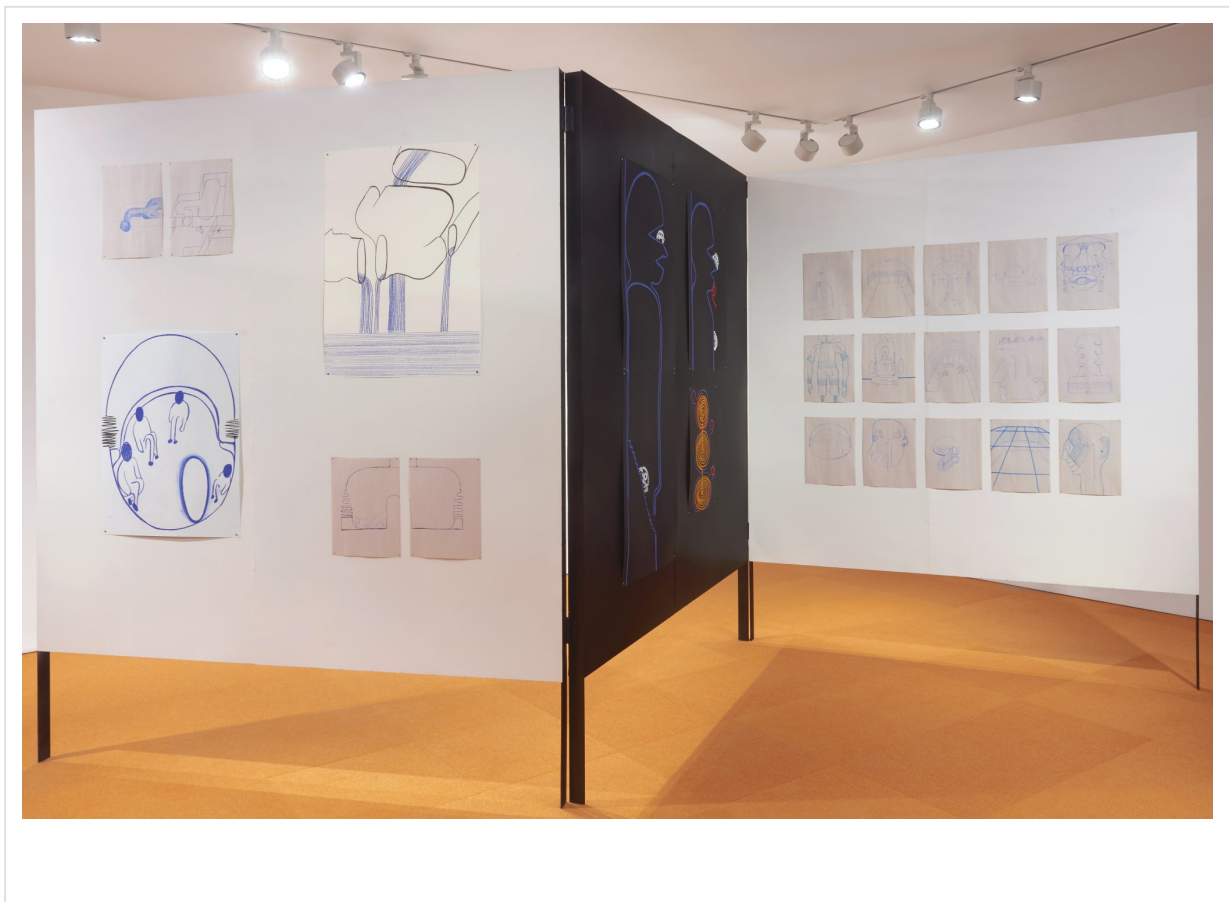


EDUARDO NAVARRO, (BREATH-SPACE), GASWORKS

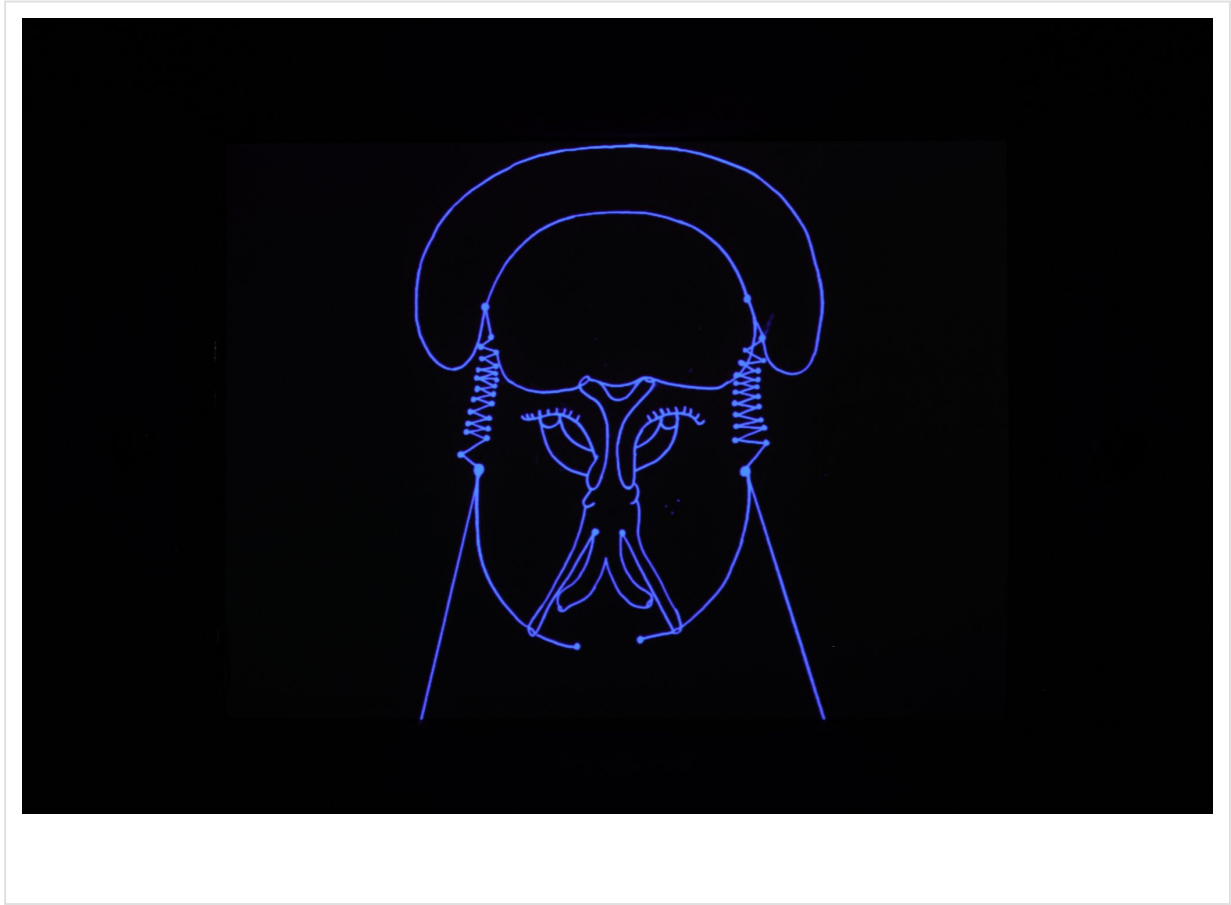
By [Phin Jennings](#) • 20 October 2020

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Argentinian interdisciplinary artist Eduardo Navarro is interested in our relationship with natural phenomena. Instead of creating traditionally representational work, he invites us to explore this relationship by offering first-hand sensory experiences. Where many artists look to tell their audience something, it seems like Navarro would rather have them feel something.

His 2019 work *Cloud Consulate* uses the clouds above it to create a pattern via a series of mirrors, allowing the viewer to immerse themselves in them and, in the artist's words, "reach a floating state of mind". When asked to contribute to the pedagogical program of the 9th Bienal de Mercosul in 2013, he did so by way of a telepathic message to participants. Navarro does not communicate straightforward messages in a straightforward way. He does not paint a picture, so to speak.



With this in mind, I was surprised to learn that his solo exhibition at [Gasworks](#) would consist of 100 drawings. Whilst they might be the choice of most artists, images on walls are not Navarro's usual output. It turns out that this is not the show that the artist had initially envisioned; when, having originally been scheduled for April, it was pushed back indefinitely the artist abandoned his original plan to turn the gallery into a giant lung. He withdrew to his studio and took to drawing daily, a practice that

resulted in this rescheduled and redefined exhibition.

Drawing is an unforgiving medium insofar as its marks cannot be covered or reworked as they can in painting. This is evident in the drawings here; they are immediate, intuitive and unpolished, pinned in loosely defined groups to temporary partition walls that break up the main gallery space. Navarro's thoughts are not mediated by heavy curation, glazed frames or overworked canvases. He described his lockdown drawing habit as a way to "relocate the studio inside my own head". Surrounded by these drawings I feel like I too have been transported inside the artist's mind. The exhibition's soundtrack, an audio recording of Navarro breathing during a meditation session, only serves to strengthen this.

Many of the drawings seem to illustrate flows or processes: water travels through a series of pots and into a main body, a stack of flattened concentric circles orbit a central axis, funnels and pipes make up marble run-like structures. Perhaps the clearest flow is that, marked out by arrows, of an unknown substance into, around and out of a not quite human but nonetheless relatable character's head. The static illustrations are given a rhythm by Navarro's breathing. In the next room, an animated version of our friend with the arrows expands and contracts in time with the artist's in and out breaths.

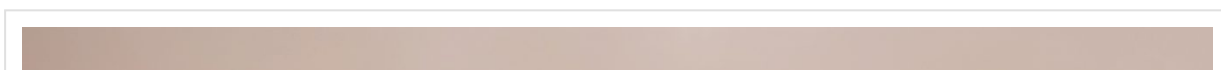
My initial reaction is to wonder who this character represents. Is it Navarro, finding space to breathe – "breathspace" – in his lockdown studio or is it the viewer, whose biological rhythms are syncing with the artist's as a result of having almost unmediated access to his mind? However, this line of thinking that questions what the subject of the artwork really "is" – what it represents – belongs to the very paradigm that Navarro breaks away from.

A lot of artists communicate messages through their work. Such communications can be explicit, like Jenny Holzer's straight-talking Inflammatory Essays or oblique, like Jasper Johns' flags. Whether they print them in plain text or use signs and symbols to guide us towards them, their art represents their ideas about the world. I leave the exhibitions of these artists with the ideas expressed in their work at the front of my mind.

The drawings in this exhibition also communicate, but don't seek to instil in the viewer clear and distinct maxims. They instead come together to constitute an experience that leaves a pile of fragmentary, though not entirely disparate, thoughts and impressions. At the centre of this pile is a focus on the tangle of processes that constitutes the natural world and how we fit into it as living human bodies. The focus is loose, and feels more like an invitation to explore one's own experiences than the kind of cohesive message that Holzer and Johns drive home.

Since my first visit I have found myself regularly returning to Navarro's drawings and, as a result, his invitation to consider the interplay between my body and the world surrounding it. Each time I sit with a slight discomfort, attempting to find in the images a clear and singular communication, a thought that they come together to represent. But I know that I can't, and really I suspect that I would have stopped thinking about them long ago if I could.

Eduardo Navarro, (breathspace), Gasworks, – 20th Dec gasworks.org.uk





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