Emerging Researcher Image Competition 2025

VR Afterschool Club

Bowen Tan

Media, Arts & Humanities

This photo was taken during the VR Afterschool Club, a workshop I organized and led in collaboration with Out of the Box at Elm Grove Primary School. During the session, we introduced students to XR technology by guiding them through the process of creating artwork in a virtual environment.

Speaking with school staff, I learned that many primary schools struggle to include the latest technologies into their curriculum due to severe budget cuts and sluggish educational systems. Our workshop helped bridge this technology gap, giving students access to tools and experiences they might not otherwise have, helping them prepare for the tech-driven future ahead.

That’s why I am planning to continue these workshops, especially in underrepresented communities, to give more students the opportunity to engage with emerging technologies.

NATION BRANDING UNDER CONSTRAINT: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF EMERGING MARKETS

Charity Anietie-Akanam

Business School

Emerging markets like Nigeria face a double challenge: they are seen as places of growth and innovation, but also risk, instability, and weak institutions. These outdated perceptions persist, even as real reforms take place. This study investigates how Nigeria’s nation branders, those tasked with shaping how the country is seen abroad, respond to that reputational gap. Through interviews with government branding officials and communications specialists, the

research explores the strategic narratives and credibility-building efforts they use to shift global perceptions. Findings highlight the persistence of the Liability of Origin (LOO): a reputational burden linked to national image and how

branders work to reposition the country's story through alignment with reform and storytelling. The research reveals what it takes to rebrand under constraint and offers new insight into the narrative work behind global image change.

Seeds of Change: Collaborative Paths to Peace

Diana Ramirez Sarmiento

Institute of Development Studies

During the most intense period of the armed conflict, Carlos and his farm were caught several times in the crossfire between the FARC guerrilla and the Colombian army. Despite the challenges he faced due to the war and state neglect, after years of hard work, he succeeded in creating his brand of organic coffee.

Carlos was one of the farmers I interviewed while conducting my fieldwork in the South of Tolima, Colombia. Beyond helping me answer my research questions, he showed me how brave and resilient rural communities have been; communities that have endured not only direct violence but also the structural violence of a system that excludes them.

One outcome of my fieldwork is a collaborative project with these communities to help promote their agricultural products and support them in selling directly, without intermediaries. If you would like to learn more about this project, follow us on Instagram by scanning the QR code.

Is My Nephew Van Goghing to Be a Synaesthete? Exploring Synaesthesia in Families

Emily Whelan

Psychology

This is me with my nephew at a Van Gogh immersive exhibition—fitting, as Van Gogh is thought to have been a synaesthete. My research explores synaesthesia—where senses blend, like seeing colours in sound—and how it runs in families. Some theories, like the neonatal synaesthesia hypothesis, suggest we are all born with these

cross-sensory connections, but often lose them as the brain develops. Therefore, my nephew may currently have

synaesthetic traits that could persist or fade as he grows up. By studying families, I'm investigating the developmental pathways that shape this perceptual diversity and how our brains construct the richly varied ways we experience the world.

The Incoherent Spirit

Hanna Eldarwish

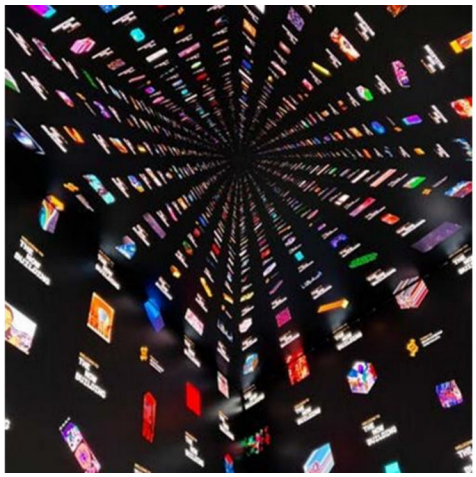
Psychology

Do you ever feel like nothing makes sense, as though you just can't put the pieces together? My research focuses on how a sense of meaning in life is threatened when your life feels fragmented, uncertain, incomplete, or in other

words, incoherent. This image is a visual metaphor for what that experience feels like to me: an image of myself on Brighton beach, a body occupying space, a spirit, possibly human, but missing the the defining features of myself.

Research suggests that people derive a sense of meaning in life through a sense of purpose, existential mattering, and coherence. While coherence has previously been seen as serving a meaning boosting function, we suggest that incoherence threatens meaning in life more so than coherence boosts meaning.

Digital Space



Jiaqian Guo

Media, Arts & Humanities

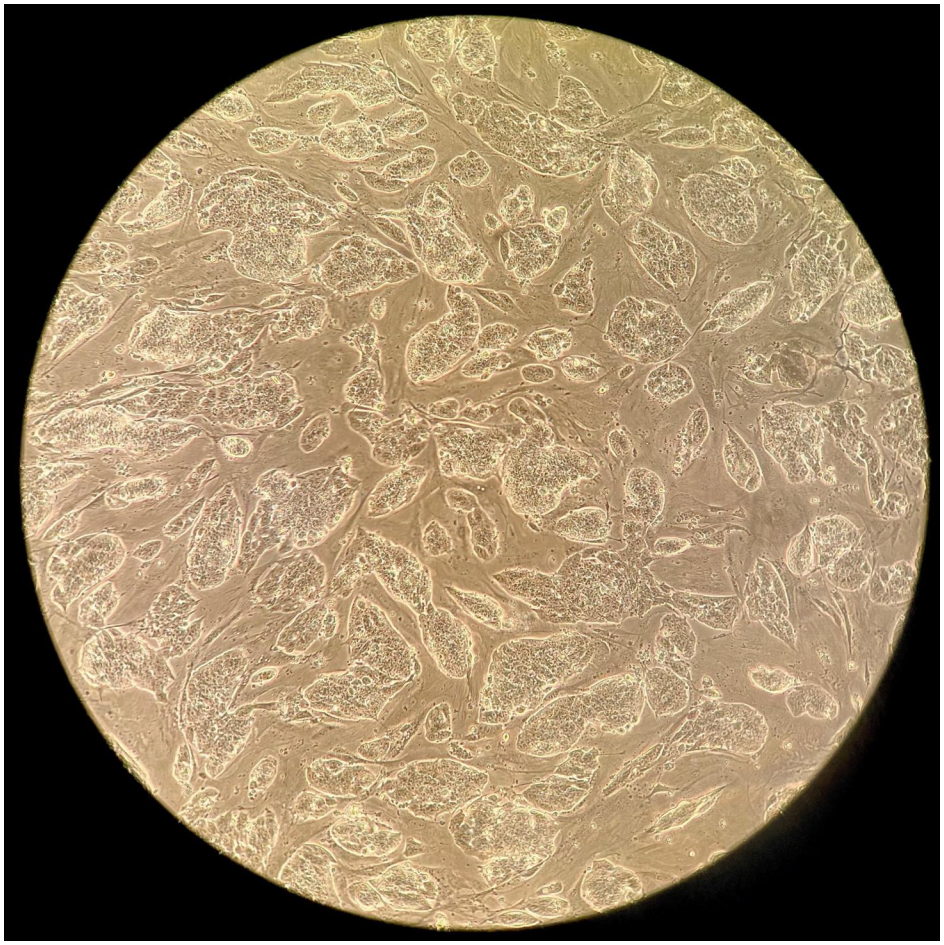
My research explores how AI-generated illustrations circulate on social media. While these images can be visually striking, they often reflect aesthetic homogenisation, which is a result of biased datasets and the subtle reinforcement

or reshaping of social norms. Meanwhile, social media amplifies their reach, offering a space where these illustrations

are shared, commented on, and constantly recreated. I took this photo during an open exhibition I stumbled upon, showcasing various digital artworks. I caught this scene where all the digital artworks became a symbol, a small

window, and together they combined to surround us in a vast digital space that stretched upwards seemingly without end. Just beyond my camera's frame, people were already sharing the moment on Instagram or TikTok. At that moment, it struck me that perhaps we had become part of the data, reduced to symbols within the ever-expanding imagery of AI.

Everyday is a full moon



Joanna Fernandez

Life Sciences

Mammalian cells forming colonies in culture (some healthier than others) as seen under a light microscope. These particular cells require care and maintenance every single day to keep them healthy and happy. Everyday inspecting them through the eyepiece of the microscope is not unlike gazing at the full moon. One could not care less about me, the other cannot grow indefinitely without me.

From Data to DaDa - Can human voice be reduced to AI training data?

(Jonathan Reus performs with sound poet Jaap Blonk at IZIS Festival in Slovenia)

Jonathan Reus

Media, Arts & Humanities

My doctoral research investigates the changing meaning, value and function of human voice in the rapidly evolving landscape of AI voice clones, voice identity ownership and data economies. The research is interdisciplinary

music-practice based, and involves the development of new open digital music tools, bespoke voice datasets and

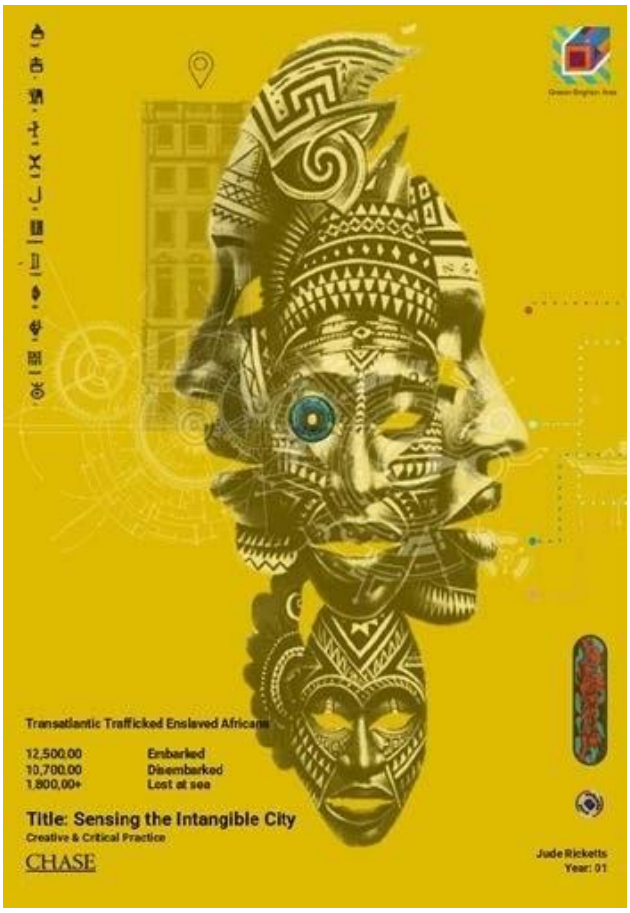
collaborative/collective artistic approaches to voice dataset creation. My research attempts to foreground the less visible vocal and data labor and the often extractive and exploitative relationships around voice AI. The aims of my

research are to develop new arts-based methods and approaches that treat datasets and dataset making as cultural and artistic processes imbued with context, and to build conversations and bring attention to desirable care and ethics around human voices under the concept of “vocal values”. This photograph depicts a live dataset making

performance between myself and the prolific Dutch sound poet Jaap Blonk, featuring myself performing with the

bespoke open source voice synthesis software Tungnaá. In this performance, Blonk’s voice is recorded and added to a training dataset that is used to train a more convincing voice clone of Blonk to be used in the next performance.

Sensing the Intangible City: Decoding Historically Centralised Narratives



Emily Whelan

Psychology

Fragments of cityscape surround cultural iconography, mapping four interconnected research directions surrounding the Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved Africans (TTEA): from the distant past on the African continent, through the near past in the Americas, to the present, and onward to speculative futures.

This layered temporal approach draws on Black geographies (McKittrick, 2021), Afrofuturism (DeLuliis & Lohr, 2016), and Black speculative traditions, inviting viewers to consider how archival data can inspire strategies that critically reimagine the before, during, after, and future of the Black and People of Colour (BPOC) experience.

Foregrounding BPOC voices as co-authors, the work challenges dominant narratives and proposes more equitable ways to engage with the region's layered colonial past and its ongoing legacies:

Of the unremembered Methodologically, this research uses participatory counter-mapping, archival data, and speculative storytelling rooted in Black geographies' tradition of alternative spatial imaginaries and resistance. Disseminating outcomes in engaging and impactful ways through extended reality (XR).

If you want to fly, like the Bat on the wind

Katie Allan

Life Sciences

Nathusius' pipistrelle is a rare migratory species of bat that is found in the UK. We have been part of a project that is using new radio technology to track these bats during their migration across Europe. Nathusius' look extremely similar to our resident pipistrelle species but can be identified using the patterns of collagen bands in the wing membrane. We attach a radio transmitter to the bats on their backs, using a non-toxic surgical glue. Once we are happy that the bats are happy and healthy we then send them off to fly into the night.

Words Beats Bombs: A Beat Tape From the War Zone

Michael John Feltham

Media, Arts & Humanities

War is all around us. Words are all around us. Let's make some beats, put our words of dissent over them and send it out as a counter-narrative soundtrack of solidarity. All voices and all sounds are welcome; they who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Scintillating life

Nicole Bryce-Sharron

Life Sciences

DNA dyed with Ethidium bromide fluorescing under UV light for band visualisation / extraction.

You are my reflection.

Parichat Chiablaem

Media, Arts & Humanities

This photograph reflects the way I conducted my data from both as an insider and outsider's positions. I aimed to explore beliefs of Thai content teachers towards their language use in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms and how those beliefs influence the way they teach under the strict English-only policy. In the photograph, the

water reflection shows how the building looks like in different angles from the reality viewpoints to its reflection

that is displayed in a wavy-shaped look. The building itself can be referred to the beliefs of the Thai teachers have

regarding to their language preferences that are strong and solid, but the reflection is rather seen as weak and vague.

Therefore, from what the teachers believe they should do might be different from what they actually do. Moreover, the

bright clear blue sky represents some positive lights on their instruction, on the other hand, the dark shadow depicts drawbacks and challenges that they have encountered while teaching content subjects in English.

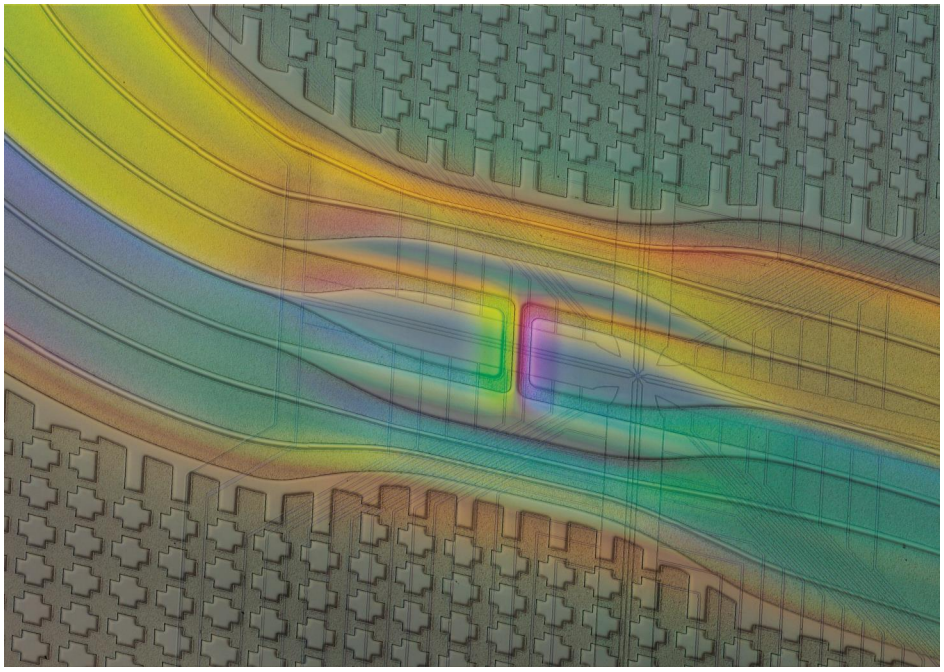
Reading Feelings: Can reading fiction enhance empathy and prosocial behaviour in children?

Persefoni Tzanaki

Psychology

The image shows pages from the book 'Owen and the Soldier' with emoji stickers placed around the text. This activity is from my postdoctoral research for the 'Reading Feelings' project, led by Professors Jane Oakhill, Alan Garnham, and Robin Banerjee, exploring how reading fiction can foster empathy in young readers. In this activity, children read a story and placed emoji stickers next to words that matched the emotion shown. This encouraged deeper emotional engagement, eliciting stronger empathic responses than reading without emotional focus. We are now exploring the use of this activity in classrooms and homes to support empathy development.

A Quantum Landscape



Sam Hile

Mathematical & Physical Sciences

A high-resolution microscope image of a quantum computing microchip engineered by researchers in the Sussex

Centre for Quantum Technologies to levitate individual atoms. We see an area just a few millimetres wide, where complex electrode and wiring features within multiple layers of the microchip's structure are visible due to the imaging

technique. The rainbow-coloured overlay is an accurate representation of the carefully configured quantum landscape which the atoms experience as a result of the microchip's geometric structure and electrical configuration. This

precisely crafted apparatus is the is the hardware foundation for quantum computing research at Sussex, focussed

on developing the building blocks to enable future computational enhancements in a diverse range of fields including materials science, financial optimisation, climate and weather modelling, and drug discovery.

Undocumented Immigrants: Unseen, Unheard Illegal?

Seyi Mercy Ugochukwu

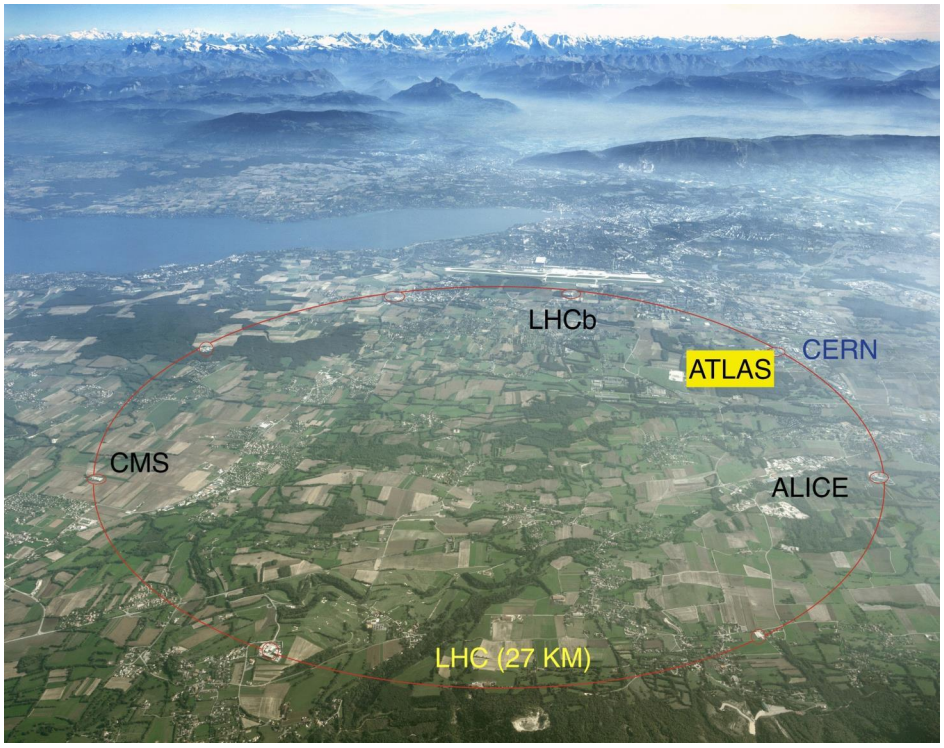
Law, Politics & Sociology

This image captures a protester holding a sign that reads ‘No Human Is Illegal’ : A powerful reflection of my doctoral research on access to legal aid for undocumented migrants in the UK. My work explores how immigration policies

shaped by colonial legacies continue to exclude racialised migrants, particularly those from former British colonies, from state-funded legal aid. The image conveys not only defiance but also the urgent question at the heart of my research: who gets to be heard, helped, and protected under the law and who is left out?

Generative AI was used to simulate a real-life protest while protecting identities.

Beneath the Alps: ATLAS in Pursuit of the Unknown



Shaadil Shah Mandarry

Mathematical & Physical Sciences

Hidden about 100 metres under the French-Swiss border lies the Large Hadron Collider, a 27-kilometre ring that accelerates two streams of protons to near-light speed before letting them collide. Those tiny collisions briefly

re-create the extreme conditions of the early universe. ATLAS—one of the four huge detectors positioned around the ring—acts like a high-speed, 3-D camera. Its layers of sensors track every fragment that sprays out of a collision,

measuring their paths and energies millions of times per second. From this data we reconstruct the “family photo” of

fundamental particles, testing the Standard Model of physics and looking for anything new. ATLAS has already helped

confirm the Higgs boson, the particle that gives mass to others, and it continues to hunt for clues to dark matter, extra dimensions and other surprises that could rewrite our picture of how the cosmos is built. My own research inside

ATLAS zeroes in on the most promising collision events, looking for signatures of entirely new particles that could redefine the fabric of the cosmos.

A Sleeping Bear

Sian Panton

Psychology

Whilst I research sleep, Bear tries to sleep near me. Sleep is a biological necessity that serves as a foundation for mental, physical, and emotional well-being. This is true not only in humans but also for our furry friends. Sensory

sensitivity (SS) refers to heightened responsiveness to sensory stimuli—such as lights, sounds, touch, or internal sensations—and is increasingly recognised as a key individual difference with implications for emotional and

physiological regulation. Bear is a highly sensitive pooch who is easily dysregulated, he doesn't sleep easily when

overstimulated and needs very specific environmental conditions to switch off and eventually drift off. My research seeks to understand not only whether human individuals with higher SS are more vulnerable to insomnia and parasomnias, but also how fluctuations in sensory sensitivity and arousal throughout the day may dynamically influence night-time sleep quality—and vice versa.

Embodied Literacy

Susan Pinnick

Education & Social Work

Literacy rates worldwide tend to be measured by the ability to write (Unesco, 2025). However, theories of embodiment question the idea of a single, fixed, or permanent literate identity, which is often emphasised by approaches that

focus solely on cognitive and skill-based views of literacy. Embodied literacy also seeks to challenge and decolonize traditional concepts of literacy that limit opportunities for growth, particularly for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and

disabled students, or those with special educational needs. This photo, taken as part of my fieldwork during a

lesson observation, shows a secondary English teacher in a school in the South-east of England, using drama-based pedagogy as an approach to reading. My research explores how embodied literacy can engage students in reading, while developing their reading interpretation skills.

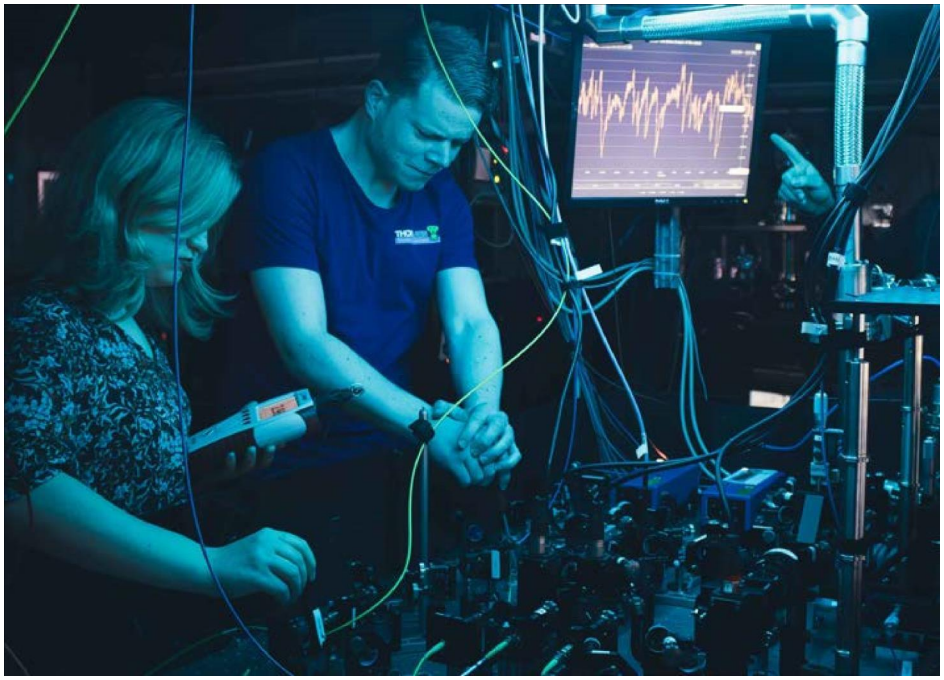
The experience of colour is augmented reality

Yesesvi Somayaji Konakanchi

Psychology

Is my red the same as yours? We can never know. My research involves exposing observers to colour-manipulated realities to understand whether the visual system can adjust to these shifted perspectives. Additonally, it also shows that what I perceive as ‘coloured’ can be experienced so differently by an external observer and altered reality is a tool to enable such experiences.

Hard at work: A look at life in the lab



Vijay Kumar

Mathematical & Physical Sciences

Two physicists in their native lab habitat building a laser set up that is one small part of our prototype quantum computer. The elaborate maze of mirrors, lenses, and other gadgets will steer and alter the laser beams before being fired into vacuum chambers trapping single atoms. This alongside microwave and radio frequency radiation will be used manipulate the atom's quantum state and prove they can be used as a platform for quantum computation.

When people imagine quantum physicists they normally think of equations on a board and apples falling on heads whilst people read under picturesque trees. In reality, it's a lot of manual labour in dark rooms with expensive equipment you constantly fear you have broken.