

The Telegraph

Ariana Page Russell: The human Etch A Sketch

This woman has used a bizarre skin condition to turn herself into a human Etch A Sketch, and make works of art that sell for thousands of pounds. By Ben Leach | posted 13 Apr 2009

Ariana Page Russell's skin swells up into welts with a slight scratch. The artist has turned her body into a canvas, tracing intricate patterns and words onto her legs, arms and torso.

She uses a blunt knitting needle to trace her art works and the condition, dermatographia, means her skin swells up in five minutes. Miss Russell



An example of Ariana Page Russell's work show's a floral print on her skin

photographs the results because, just like an Etch A Sketch toy, the drawings are temporary, with the skin returning to normal in about half an hour. The resulting pictures have gone on display in art galleries and sold for up to \$4,500 (£3,070).

Miss Russell said: "I use my skin as a canvas. People think it is pretty weird. They think it is beautiful or interesting, or they think it is pretty disgusting, gross and painful. "Some people can't get past the idea of pain, no matter how many times I tell them it doesn't hurt. I can just feel a sensation on my skin. It feels a little warm. "I think it is fun to be able to draw on myself. I like it."

Miss Russell, who lives in New York, said she did not even realise she had dermatographia until a doctor diagnosed the condition five years ago, but she had already become interested in using skin as art.

Dermatographia is thought to be caused by cells in the surface of the skin releasing histamines under the slightest pressure. This causes the skin to swell up in an allergic-type reaction, similar to hives. It affects around 5 per cent of the population, but its severity varies amongst sufferers.