



THE ART AND ARTIFICE OF SCIENCE

SANTA FE

In Latin, the word “science” means to know. This kind of knowing derives from the same classical Greek concepts of direct observation of reality that led to artistic naturalism, or the mimesis of the real. Science and art remain linked in the West until the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment separates them by tearing at an imagined seam that runs between fact and fiction. Today, both science and art can be defined as sites for the production of knowledge or by extension, systems for the visualization—or exposure—of truth, albeit with somewhat different working premises. Truth for postmodernism (post-Heisenberg) in both art and science is however an increasingly slippery concept.

The Art and Artifice of Science succeeds at exploring the ways in which both art and science are linked to imagination [Museum of Fine Arts; February 9—May 20, 2007]. It would not be too radical an interpretation to say that the exhibit realigns the two supposedly disparate disciplines, mends the seam between science and art, and places both under the umbrella of a larger project—the ongoing human creation of meanings. This suturing accomplishes the twin feats of restoring to science the realm of the extremely imaginative and re-opening possibilities for the role of art in serious inquiry into the nature of reality.

Curated by Laura Addison and Arif Khan, the exhibition divides into three temporal parts—past, present, and future—and is bookended by video projections. Descend the ramp into the New Wing Galleries and encounter Daniel Lee’s *Origin*, 1999-2003, which compresses millions of years of human evolution into a five-minute video loop. The work seamlessly demonstrates the fascinating transition from fish to rodent to monkey to man in visual terms that are biologically believable. Lee is unsurpassed as a master of digital morphology, and *Origin* puts first things first.

The exhibit ends in an equally amazing interactive piece. Here, a digital animation renders the workings of the nephron of the human kidney in sound and light. *The Waters of Life: A Reified Voyage into the Kidney*

invites you to explore a beautifully strange sci-fi landscape by jockeying joysticks and pushing buttons. The bright, whizzing colors are sumptuous and the music, by Panaiotis, algorithmically alters as you change speeds and move around this abstracted futuristic world. While such virtual realism was developed to help medical students visualize kidney functions, its presentation in the exhibition context makes it one of the most intriguing artworks.

Between these two digitized wonders are a seventeenth-century cabinet of curiosities, followed by a modern white-box laboratory, and finally the unbound virtual space of the future. This chronology corresponds to the spatial configuration of the exhibition into three large galleries.

The *Wunderkammer* [wonder chamber] does indeed present many fine curiosities. In the center of the room hangs Timothy Horn’s *Stheno*, 2006, a rubber and light chandelier in the form of a giant jellyfish. Harri Kallio’s *Dodo Reconstruction*, 2006, portraits of the extinct Dodo birds, are stunners and Alison Carey presents a meticulously constructed diorama of an undersea environment as it might have existed when life began on earth. Laurie Hogin’s *Still Life with Broken Fruit*, 2002, a vanitas painting of a proto-human monkey squirrel dining on a fruitful still life, is super spooky.

In the second room, Daniel Lee’s *Jurors*, digital inkjet prints from the *Judgement* series, 1994, present human animals as a wild group of scientists. In his series *Chromotherapy*, 2006, Patrick Ryoichi Nagatani creates equally fictional photographs of chromotherapy, imbuing colored lights with healing properties. Rebekah Bogard’s *Kisses*, 2005, an anime-inspired ceramic sculpture of two hybrid creatures enjoying amusing erotic pleasures in a bathtub, occupies the center of the room. Symbiosis never looked so satisfyingly silly. For pure beauty, Leigh Anne Langwell’s four abstract photographs—*Ejecta*, 2003; *Maculae*, 2002; *Drift*, 2002; and *Burst*, 2003—are unmatched. These black and white composite prints bounce between the macrocosmic and the microbiolog-

ical, implying that all is one. Next, Christine Chin’s *Vegetable Human Hybrids* digital prints series, 2003-2005, presents a humorous and dire warning against genetic engineering by way of cookbook-type images of human-vegetable genome collisions. *Potatoes* induces a new fear of Franken-foods.

The last room is an exercise in disembodiment as new media images map our inside and outside in newly imagined ways. The M-M-M collective [Min Kim Park, Masumi Shibata, and Mary Tsiongas in collaboration with Rex Jung of the MIND institute] presents *Thinking Machine*, 2006, an interactive touch-screen projection that allows us to jump through a number of video loops oriented towards the skin and sensation. Gary Schneider’s gelatin silver prints from his series *Genetic Self-Portrait*, use medical imaging to depict aspects of the body unseen in traditional portraiture. *Intestinal Flora*, 1999, for example, is a bizarrely compelling take on what we look like.

Ultimately, this outstanding show indicates that the fictions of science are no more real than the fictions of art. Truth then, scientific or otherwise, is necessarily an abstract fiction. Art and science have many a slippery story to tell, all in the name of knowledge.

—Jon Carver

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Daniel Lee, *Juror No. 6 (Leopard Spirit)*, from the *Judgement* series, 1994, digital inkjet print, approx. 35 x 53 inches (collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; gift of Marvin and Marlene Maslow); Daniel Lee, stills from *Origins*, 1999-2003, digital animation, 5 minutes (courtesy of the artist)