

## VIEWS & REVIEWS

### EXHIBITION REVIEW

## The emergence of art-science

Although art inspired by medicine and science is nothing new, writes **Sally Carter**, this exhibition prompts discussions about pertinent issues in biomedical ethics

Sally Carter *technical editor, BMJ*

#### Art & Science: Merging Art & Science to Make a Revolutionary New Art Movement

An exhibition at GV Art Gallery, London W1U 6LY

Until 24 September

Listen to two panel debates on the exhibition at [www.artandscience.org.uk](http://www.artandscience.org.uk). A third debate will occur on 22 September at 7 pm

[www.gvart.co.uk](http://www.gvart.co.uk)

Rating: \*\*\*

Don't let the long and rather pretentious title put you off—this exhibition is an adventure. Arthur Miller, emeritus professor of history and philosophy of science at University College London and co-curator of “Art & Science: Merging Art & Science to Make a Revolutionary New Art Movement,” asks if the two disciplines can combine to form a third culture. He also chairs a series of debates held in the gallery around this theme. However, regardless of whether this is a “revolutionary new art movement,” the exhibition has some interesting art done by some clever people.

The exhibition comprises pieces by 13 artists who work at the boundary of industry and nature, many making use of the latest technology, where dark and difficult ethical challenges often lie. They cover subjects from surgery and tissue engineering to photosynthesis and physics. Before you go, print out the catalogue from the gallery's website: you'll need it.

Some of the art is shocking, whereas other exhibits are subtle and take longer to appreciate. Many ask questions about death, how we view ourselves and our bodies and nature, how we use the latest technology in areas such as plastic surgery, and the ownership of body tissues.

The first piece you see as you walk into the gallery is *The Physician* by David Marron, an artist and paramedic. Inspired by his day job, Marron has produced a striking life size sculpture of what seems to be a plague doctor made from wood and plaster and, as the exhibition list says, “adorned with symbolic found objects.” The sculpture's head has a plague doctor's beak and the feather headdress of a shaman, but it also wears a stethoscope and surgical gown. The torso doubles as a medicine chest filled

with jars of leeches, electric fish, paracetamol, laudanum, and honey. It takes some time to notice all the detail, but you can tell right away that this physician is all about death.

Susan Aldworth also explores a big subject—the self—in her work. She had a functional magnetic resonance scan done and a set of 20 digital prints from it are incorporated into her work, *Cogito Ergo Sum 3*. She altered each of the pictures, adding words and images to connect the scans to her life. It's what a set of images might look like if they could show what was going on in the imagination.

Among the pieces that shock is the performance artist Stelarc's *Stretched Skin*. It is a digital portrait of Stelarc's flattened face that hangs horizontal just above the floor. Stelarc also appears in Nina Sellars's *Oblique: Images from Stelarc's Extra Ear Surgery*, which comprises a series of giant unframed photographs that show Stelarc having an extra ear made from living tissue inserted under the skin of his arm. The pictures of the operation itself are fascinating, but it also makes you wonder who is the artist—Stelarc, as the patient; the surgeons; or the photographer.

Less shocking but no less impressive pieces include *Pleasure/Pain*, an intricate sculpture by the artist Annie Cattrell working with the neuroscientist Morten Kringelbach. It looks as though it could be a vertebra, a coral, or a fungus. You need the gallery catalogue to know that it's a model of structural connections of the periaqueductal grey—an area of the brainstem that is involved in regulating pain. Cattrell tries to make a moving, active neurological process tangible using a type of “sculptural photocopying,” and it turns out to be a beautiful object.

Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr are artists, researchers, and curators in biological arts. Their piece, *Pig Wings*, is a set of three framed wings formed from cultured pig mesenchymal cells grown over degradable polymer scaffolds. They developed it during a residency at the tissue engineering and organ fabrication laboratory at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School. If pigs could be designed to fly, what would their wings look like? These wings—in the form of angelic bird wings, satanic bat wings, and pterosaur wings—hint at potential futures

in which we have semi-living objects and animal organs being transplanted into humans.

This exhibition is such a mixture of artists and subjects that it can't really answer the question of whether art and science can merge to make a third culture, and there's nothing new in artists being inspired by science. But the gallery showcases some excellent artists who might make us think, if not differently,

then at least a little harder about some difficult areas of science and technology.

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