

Gallery Guide

Art Reflects Science

Artists turn to many sources as inspiration for their work. Because artists spend so much time observing the world, their sources can come, really, from anywhere. Some artists rely on current events as an inspiration, while others look to history. Throughout the history of art, artists have looked to what is around them in their culture for ideas to investigate in their work. University education encourages cross pollination of ideas across disciplines, allowing artists greater freedom in their exploration.

In this exhibition, *Art Reflects Science*, artists Elizabeth Busey, Hunter Cole, and Vera Scekcic look to various aspects of science as the source for their creative practice. In fact, Hunter Cole is a scientist with a PhD in Genetics, and uses her art as a way to “reinterpret science,” while Scekcic looks to science for its methodical approach yet allowing for chance in her “painted pours” that reflect biological images. Busey is interested in scientific patterns and forms, and how variances are formed. Each artist here shares a passion for scientific knowledge, interpretation, and understanding of the universe.

Elizabeth Busey is a printmaker who uses techniques that emphasizes multiples, creating patterns of similarities, and yet allows for anomalies in the hand-made process of printmaking. Her source material can be views from an airplane, providing patterns within landscape, or natural forms viewed by microscopic investigation. Both views from afar, and views from an exaggerated closeness provide patterns that Busey investigates with rich color and abstracted forms.

One series is inspired by land topography, inspiring repeated wavy forms separated by line; Busey’s emphasis on strong color and her exaggerated sinuous lines remove these from being straight depictions of topographical maps. The repeated patterns with variances read abstractly and allow for visual tension and dynamic design. Another series looks to patterns from nature found in plants and other natural forms; Busey exaggerates contrast of light in her color palette, making these images glow. Patterns might emphasize the Fibonacci sequence or the matrix of interlocked forms such as those found on the surface of a leaf, but each is transformed through Busey’s artistic and visually stunning approach.

Hunter Cole’s work is inspired by her work in bioluminescence. She uses bioluminescent bacteria to create glowing works of art which are exhibited as installations of drawings, or in photographs, as shown here. Working with organisms that glow presents Cole challenges in how to integrate these with other imagery, as well as how to display them in various gallery settings. To be seen in their entirety, these organisms need to be seen in the dark, but Cole has found a solution by taking photographs of them and combining surrealistic images with them. Her art asks us to question and explore the use of biotechnology in our lives.

Cole actually draws and paints with bioluminescent bacteria by dipping her brush into a Petri dish; here, the bacteria, as they initially glow and then fade as they die, become active collaborators in the making of a work of art. In addition, Cole often combines Petri dishes holding bacteria with objects and the human body, in her series called Living Light. These surreal images glimmer in the blue light created by the glowing organisms, providing a luminescence not easily seen in our everyday lives. Another series, Bioluminescent Weddings, involves photographing couples in the light provided by that bacteria. This is fitting, because one of the aspects of bioluminescence is for organic beings to attract a mate. Her work, Angel Bride, from that series, presents the viewer with an other-worldly vision of beauty and wonder.

Vera Scekcic creates paintings from looking at the physical properties of how paint moves when it's poured and dries. She uses thinning agents to transform the physical property of the paint, then pours overlays after each layer dries. She says the paint then is "allowed to dry, then excised, peeled, sanded, spliced and layered to generate new forms that accrete like microbial blooms". Her odd shapes suggest cells that are undergoing transformation. While her process of working tends to dictate the look of the work, she is very aware of the organic quality of the shapes and forms she's making; she then uses color contrast to enhance that organic quality. The placing of regular shapes against irregular backgrounds references the scientific property of change and transformation of organisms as well as the regularity of nature and its counterpart, hybridization. It is Scekcic's interest in biology that generates her images that come from a blend of imagination and observation. Her study of the characteristics of paint as a material mimics scientific study of matter, yet the freedom of art allows her to approach these with creativity and visual mastery.

Each of the three artists whose work is featured here blends an interest in science with artistic exploration. Their interest in science presents them a rich source for inspiration in their work. Scientific exploration requires a similar type of creativity as artistic exploration; one must be open to taking chances in both fields in order to expand creative parameters. The difference is that in scientific exploration, there is an end goal in mind, with an impact on real life. In art, the opportunities for a change and transformation are endless, with a final impact on the human soul.

Beth Shadur

Curator and Gallery Director