



Gail Wight, *Study for "Crossing,"* 2003

Forum on Science and Art

A Discussion Platform for Artists and Scientists

The Ernst Schering Foundation devotes itself to the intersections and interfaces between art and science. Not only does the Foundation support and honor representatives of both disciplines, it also aims to bring them together for a productive and fruitful dialogue.

One of the initiatives in this context is a discussion series entitled "Forum on Science and Art," which the Ernst Schering Foundation launched in 2005. The forum offers a platform to examine the relationship between science and art in today's world. Over the course of centuries, art and science have developed in close cooperation – so why is it that today the two disciplines are seen to be so separate?

The goal of the series is to examine differences, commonalities and interfaces in an intensive discussion featuring both scientists and artists. It seeks to suggest possibilities for learning from or with each other and for trying new and unusual paths in both disciplines. The idea is to leave familiar things behind and to apply creativity or methods in new ways.

To that end, the Ernst Schering Foundation invites predominantly young artists and scientists to a moderated, intense, small-scale dialogue about specific themes. Short presentations by both scientists and artists on the relevant topics start off the discussion. What do science and art have in common? What is their relationship today – and what was it like in the past? What goals do scientists and artists pursue in their work – and what are the theoretical principles they build on? How do they approach the medium of the image – and which importance do they attach to it? Which role does the image play in both disciplines? And last but not least, how does one communicate in art and science – and why?

By providing answers to these questions, the Ernst Schering Foundation hopes to give valuable impetus to both science and art. Because with them it is like with good friends. They may be able to live without each other. But they are ill-advised to do so.

The Art of Translation

Science and art have one thing in common: They both thrive on creativity. But are they therefore similar? Do they have something to say to each other? In October 2005, the Ernst Schering Foundation gathered renowned representatives of both disciplines for an intensive discussion as part of its "Forum on Science and Art" series. The topic of the symposium, which took place in Berlin: "The Artist as Researcher, the Researcher as Artist? Scientific Methodology – Artistic Creativity."

Collaborations between science and art are booming. In countless works, images and facts of scientific research make an appearance as artistic science fiction. There is hardly a museum that has not enhanced an art exhibit with scientific experiments. And the world of science, too, from time to time discovers its soft spot for contemporary art, hoping that an intuitive approach to the audience will help overcome the fear of science in a Luddite society.

The collision of the two estranged worlds has thus almost become the norm in the world of art. Interdisciplinary catalogues and conference documentations by the yard fill the office shelves of exhibition planners. Symposia and press releases again and again call for the dialogue between the creative heads from both disciplines. One is almost tempted to believe that everything has already been said on this topic, would it not have been for a round-table discussion organized by the Ernst Schering Foundation, which revealed a surprising need for debate. The findings accumulated by scientists and art historians, museum curators and artists stood in sharp contrast to the collaborative routine. Instead of addressing practical issues of cooperation, the experts launched a spirited discussion on basic methodological issues.

The invited speakers represented the different perspectives on the unequal partnership. Mischa Kuball, free-lance artist and professor for media art at the University for Design in Karlsruhe, talked about his artistic reconstruction of a medical model. Eugen Blume, director of the Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum for Contemporary Art in Berlin, described art as a very special "science." Anette Sommer, Group Head Research of Schering AG, warned of an over-

hasty appropriation of scientific illustrations by art. And Frank Rösl from the German Cancer Research Center in Heidelberg described the collaboration with artists as a source of inspiration for highly sophisticated basic research.

It quickly became clear that the encounter between science and art is predicated not on interdisciplinary inspiration, but on a profound speechlessness. No artist understands intuitively how creativity develops in large-scale research projects, if s/he takes the surface appeal of scientific illustrations for the research itself. Conversely, scientific institutes know very little about the idiosyncratic methods of contemporary art production, whose radical concerns sometimes seem like a utopian counter-image to the organization and division of labor in complex research settings.

Both artists and scientists never tired to emphasize that the creative thought processes themselves would be material for successful interdisciplinarity. Only when researchers and artists begin to understand each other's methodologies, will they be able to communicate in a common language. Not every project that is on display in the galleries and exhibition halls is even aware of these difficulties of translation, warned the art intermediaries in particular.

That the focus of the symposium was on the different methodologies could be seen as a signal of change in the rapprochement between art and science. Mere curiosity about the exotic other is no longer enough for collaboration. If both sides are to profit from each other, it takes more than a view beyond one's disciplinary boundaries.

In conclusion, the symposium formulated above all two demands: It expressed the desire to institutionalize the dialogue instead of continuing the blind collaboration and stipulated a methodological learning process. For however individualistic the perspective of art and autonomous its expressive modes, fact-based science needs the radicalism of artistic models. Still, the experimental openness to each other – this was made clear by the symposium – has to be re-won. Only then will the collaborations lead to changes in perspectives. [Gerrit Gohlke, art critic, Berlin](#)