

ART AND SCIENCE

Peter Stupples

As a system of visual representation art has a long history of recording human investigations into the world of nature and, even more broadly, into speculating, even fantasising, about what that world might look like – out there in unseen worlds or in there, in the body, underneath the surface of things. An unsatisfied curiosity is a characteristic of humankind. Leonardo da Vinci is the prime example of the artist/scientist forever looking and drawing what he or she has seen and, on the foundation of actuality, proceeding to give visual substance to more speculative ideas.



Figure 1. Drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci

In recent years science/technology has expanded the scope of art's reach – adding photography and computer-driven applications, such as photoshop, to the toolbox.

In order to explore this close association of art, science and technology the Dunedin School of Art organised a symposium in 2009 entitled 'Illustrating the Unseeable: Reconnecting Art and Science', bringing together both artists and those working in the visual presentation of science, such as Paul Trotman with his ground-breaking film *Donated to Science* (2009). This was the first of a subsequent series of symposia dedicated to the way aspects of the visual arts relate to our social world in a constantly changing reflexive symbiosis.

In 2011 Ruth Napper, of the Anatomy Department at the University of Otago, suggested returning to the art and science dyad with a new initiative, a nine-month project in which artists and scientists of specific disciplines might be encouraged to share ideas and experience, out of which artworks could be created inspired by that mutual interaction. She joined forces with Peter Stupples at the Dunedin School of Art and together they organised the Art and Neuroscience Project, November 2012-August 2013, that resulted in an exhibition and catalogue.

This venture was regarded as such a success by artists and scientists, as well as the University of Otago and the Dunedin School of Art, that another project 'Art and Anatomy' was launched in December 2013 and will have its exhibition in late June 2014 as part of the Dunedin Science Festival.

The aim is creative cooperation – not the illustration of scientific research but the speculative imagery that comes from the mind and hand of the artist in response to a close acquaintance with the actuality of scientific processes and ideas – or even commentary from the left field upon something that scientists take for granted, as part of their unconscious sense of normality and rationality.

It is hoped that not only artists and scientists can gain from this association, extending their respective cognitive and visual worlds, but that they can both offer the public, the community in which the artists and scientists work and live, as well as future artists and scientists – young people of today – windows into their own worlds that they never had an opportunity to look through before.

Peter Stupples is senior lecturer in art history and theory at the Dunedin School of Art at the Otago Polytechnic. He was formerly associate professor and head of the Department of Art History and Theory at the University of Otago between 1990 and 1998. He has written widely about Russian visual culture, his research speciality, and the social history of art, publishing six books and numerous journal articles. Stupples has also curated art exhibitions at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery including “Sites for the Eyes: European Landscape in the Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery” (April 2006–July 2007). He gave the Abbey College Prestige Lecture for 2011 on “Australian Aboriginal Art as ‘Art’” and has been invited to give the William Mathew Hodgkins Lecture at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in August 2011 on “Kikerino and Russian Art Nouveau Architectural Ceramics.”