

Sci-Art Workshops – be inspired

Egenis has organised a series of Sci-Art workshops which bring scientists and artists together to discuss their practice in a public forum. This document offers a template for other organisations to use to run their own Sci-Art workshops.

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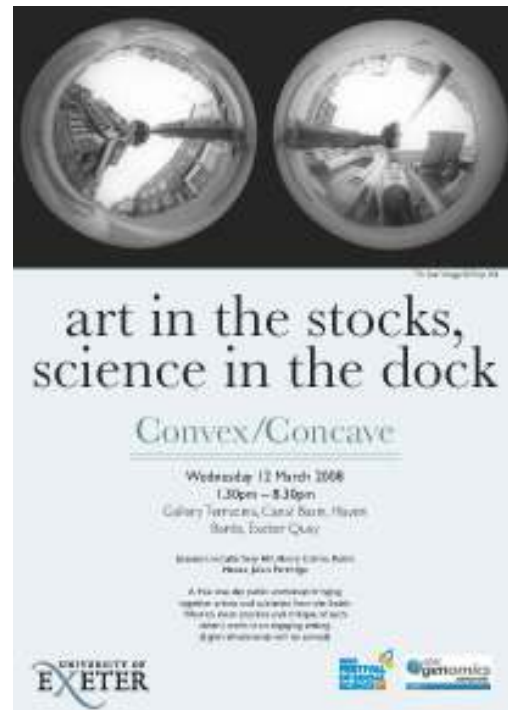


1. Background

Egenis wanted to bring scientists and artists together to talk about what they do, how they do it and why, not just to each other but to a public audience. The 'Art in the Dock, Science in the Stocks' series of public workshops, began in 2006. The overall theme for the workshop that year was 'Exploring complexity, form and function' and more than 100 people joined us at the Gallery Terracina in Exeter to hear from speakers including physicist Dr Peter Vukusic and artist Rob Pepperell. The following year a similar number came to the gallery for our 'Perspectives' workshop. They heard from speakers including psychologist Professor Richard Gregory, Egenis artist in residence Dr Deborah Robinson and biochemist Professor Nick Smirnov. Last year, 2008, the theme was Convex/Concave – Ways of Seeing. Once again the venue was the Gallery Terracina. Attendees heard from, among others, filmmaker Tony Hill and biologist Dr Julian Partridge.

2. Rationale and objectives

The overall objective of our workshops is to establish an art/science discourse in a public forum, to break down some of the barriers between disciplines and to de-mystify some scientific and artistic endeavour. The events are held in an accessible public space, rather than an academic setting, with audience members free to come and go as they choose.



3. Practicalities

- a) Theme – it is useful to establish first of all the theme of your workshop. This should offer the opportunity to hear from an equal mix of artists and scientists, with a range of disciplines and artistic media represented. Invite your speakers from a range of different academic and artistic backgrounds – call on sociologists as well as biologists, psychologists as well as physicists, maybe musicians as well as visual artists.

- b) Speakers – Speakers talk about their practice, and then answer questions from the audience. Pairing speakers means that they can respond to each other's work and discuss their practice, as well as responding to questions and debate from the audience. If you can, pair one artist and one scientist. Have a chair to introduce the speakers and moderate the discussion. This might be a different person for each pairing, or you may choose to have a single chair for the entire event. We have found it a great stimulus to have different chairs who can bring their own expertise. Well-known names can certainly be a draw – you will need to think carefully about whether to pair them, and with whom. But local scientists and artists should be the backbone of your event. Do ensure that there is a broad representation and steer clear of anything that looks like an 'in group' – the public will be put off, and discussion will suffer. If the group of speakers is wide-ranging, each others' work will be novel, so that there is plenty of interest and challenge for the 'performers'. The workshop should be about all the participants discovering something new.

Ask your speakers to talk about their practice with whatever examples and representation they choose. Such free rein will throw up some interesting contrasts, although all speakers should be reminded that this is likely to be a highly visual event. All talks should be aimed at a general audience – the workshops are completely open to the public, so there can be no assumptions about prior knowledge.

- c) Venue - Try to find a space in which the public already know that they are welcome, rather than an academic setting, which can be rather intimidating, unwelcoming, or simply hard to find. A public library, for example, will often have a meeting room available. But we have found an art gallery to be a perfect venue for our workshops. The exhibited works can fit the overall theme and provide a conversational focus as well as prompting discussion in the breaks between speakers.

- d) Time of day – Our own events have lasted over a full afternoon and into the evening. This enables the workshop to create its own momentum, with each new discussion building on the last and contributing to the overall theme. As the event lasts a number of hours, allow people to choose their own level of commitment. We have been able to keep our events free, without any need to register or obtain a ticket. Let audience members come for as short or as long a time as they choose, attending for a single session or staying for the whole event as they have the time or the inclination. (We have found that some people who intended only to drop by have been hooked, and stay for the whole thing.)

If you are hoping that people will attend for several hours, you may need to make refreshments available. What you can offer will depend on your venue and on your funding. You might be able to offer hot and cold drinks during one break, with a longer break for people to go out find something to eat if you are in a town centre, at a library, for example. At our events we have been able to offer refreshments between the afternoon and evening sessions.

4. Example Programme:

Art in the Dock, Science in the Stocks.

Venue : Galleria Terracina, Haven Banks, The Quay, Exeter

Monday, 12 March 2007, 2pm-10pm

A free one day symposium bringing together artists and scientists from the South West to critique and analyse each others work, with audience discussion and interaction. Open to all.

2pm Introduction : **Steve Hughes**, Professor and Co-director, ESRC Centre for Genomics in Society.

Session 1: 2pm-4.30pm

Art, Consciousness and Perception.

Chaired by **Sam Smiles**, Professor of Art History, University of Plymouth

2pm **Richard Gregory** Emeritus Professor of Neuropsychology, University of Bristol

Visual perception and illusions

2.30pm **Rob Pepperell** Reader in Fine Arts, University of Wales
The Conscious Act of Looking at a Painting

3pm **Paul Broks** Senior Clinical Lecturer & Honorary Consultant in Neuropsychology, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth
Consciousness & how the brain constructs a sense of self

3.30pm **Break for refreshments followed by discussion with audience**

Session 2 : 4.30pm-5.50pm

Approaches and Perception in Spaces

Chaired by **Steve Hughes**, Professor and Co director, ESRC Centre for Genomics in Society.

4.30pm **Brian Goodwin** Professor of Biology, Schumacher College
Goethe and the Edge of Chaos: Creativity and perceiving the world constantly coming into being, as described and practised in science and in art.

5.10pm **Mike Phillips** Head of the Institute of Digital Art and Technology, University of Plymouth.
Digital Perception in Spaces

5.50pm **Tea/coffee break**

6.20pm **Discussion.**
Chaired by **Steve Hughes**.

7pm **Evening session : Crossing Categories.**
Chaired by **Bob Witkin**, Emeritus Professor in Sociology of the Arts, University of Exeter

7.10pm **Nick Smirnoff**, Professor of Plant Biochemistry, University of Exeter

7.40pm **Deborah Robinson**, Artist in Residence, ESRC Centre for Genomics in Society and Senior Lecturer, University of Plymouth
Molecular Laboratory: Re-presenting time

8.00pm **Chris Cook**: Reader in Painting, Plymouth University:

8.30pm **Refreshments and Discussion.**

10.00pm **End of Programme.**