Not polar opposites, science and art form bond at Walsh

By Amanda Valentovic
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Science and art merged at the Seton Hall University Walsh Gallery in an exhibit called "Strange Attractors," which is on display through March 8. The show is an extension of a symposium hosted at the CUE Art Foundation in November 2017, which explored how art can generate insight into other fields. Co-curated by Taney Roniger, the organizer of the symposium, and Walsh Gallery Director Jeanne Brasile, the show displays the intersection of art and science.

“This was an outgrowth of the conference. We wanted to ask ‘what is the relationship between art and science?’” Brasile said in an interview with the News-Record at the exhibit’s opening reception on Jan. 25. “There was really nothing in the way of critical thinking about it. We’re trying to get to the heart of the matter and have a visual thesis.”

Most of the art in the show is by non-scientists; though some have a science background and some have a computer science background, most are just artists who are interested in science. Many of the pieces feature bright colors and what look like abstract shapes but are actually chemical molecules. The art is based off of all different types of science — chemistry, physics, biology and more.

“There’s rhythms that carry a lot of it through and that thread it together," Brasile said. “There are a lot of different ways that artists work with science.”

The symposium went so well that Roniger wanted to expand on it, so she contacted the same artists she worked with a See ARTISTS, Page 3
Artists find equilibrium between art and science in show

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year ago and asked them to be a part of the SHU show.

“A lot of what we did was text, so we needed a visual element,” Roniger said in an interview with the News-Record at the event. “This represents the whole range of what is going on in art and science. I wanted a conceptual range so some of the artists are interested in physics, others in cognitive science, others in the physics of music, others in biology.”

Scientific theory talks about left-brained versus right-brained people. Individuals who lean on the right half of their brain are said to be creative, intuitive and artistic while those who rely on the left half of their brain are analytical, logical and good at math. Scientists are more likely to be left brained and artists are more likely to be right brained. According to Roniger, the lines between those two types of people are much more blurred than many people believe.

“In many ways they’re seen as opposites, but they actually share a lot,” she said. “Scientists are interested in knowledge and how things work and so are artists. Artists are interested in aesthetics and so are scientists. But then you get into the differences, which are interesting. I think we can help each other and work together if we learn to communicate better.”

Linda Francis has three large chalk pieces hanging in the gallery that depict atomic structures. One shows how molecules multiply and grow bigger and smaller, one shows how the number three often repeats in nature and one shows a spiral.

“I like thinking about the structure of things on an atomic level,” Francis said in an interview with the News-Record at the reception. “It shows the rhythms in things. The movement determines the structures. It’s not always specific; things are moving in all directions at the same time.”

Francis is not a scientist but is interested in how she can reflect science in her art. “Things look different based on the way they move,” she said. “The principals are in the way we think and we make things based on how we behave. That’s all rooted in science.”

Michael Hadley and Elaine Reynolds created “Saved,” a live microscope feed and video installation that explores where soybeans are cultivated and stored. The video breaks down a world map to show what countries are the leading producers in soybeans and what countries are the leading savers of soybeans, contributing to preserving plant life and food supplies.

“We wanted to point out seeds, where people are saving seeds, and how it is affecting food supply and climate change,” Reynolds said in an interview with the News-Record at the event. “It’s representing plants that are important in the face of climate change. Some of them have traits that will allow us to save crops and soy.”

Reynolds is an associate professor of biology at Lafayette College, one of the artists featured in “Strange Attractors” who is involved in both the science and the art worlds. She said that she and Hadley wanted to show people where crop seeds are being produced.

“Many of the top producers are not saving seeds,” Reynolds said. “It gets people to See EXHIBITION, Page 7...
Exhibition resonates with artists and scientists alike

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think about seed diversity and who’s saving what, and where.”

Brasile said bringing the perspectives of art and science together might solve problems previously thought to be without solutions.

“These are topics that are on everyone’s mind,” she said. “But historically there’s been a very strong connection between art and science. To solve problems, we can’t think myopically. Maybe we should open things up to people in different fields. Physics alone can’t solve everything. We’ve got such serious problems that maybe the old ways of thinking aren’t working anymore.”

The SHU show is Roniger’s first curation experience, and she said she would like to continue to explore the relationship between art and science. In the future, she wants to become more specific, possibly examining sound or technology alone.

“Scientists are thought to be more analytical and artists more intuitive,” Roniger said. “That’s true to some extent, but science can be intuitive and art can be analytical. They are more in common than people think.”

Other artists featured in the show include Roniger, Werner Sun, Suzanne Anker, Ed Kerns, Gianluca Bianchino, Daniel Hill, Matthew Richie, Leonard Shapiro, Eve Andree Laranee and Catherine Chalmers.