

The Two Cultures: Visual Art and Science c.1800-2011

Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference, 26 April 2012
History of Art Department, University of York

Keynote Speaker: Professor Arthur I. Miller (Emeritus, History and Philosophy of Science, UCL)

Merging Art & Science: The Coming of a Third Culture

It is bizarre how little of twentieth-century science has been assimilated into twentieth century art.

C.P. Snow, 1959

In his 1959 lecture "The Two Cultures" C.P. Snow asserted that the intellectual life of western society was increasingly being split into two polar groups: the sciences, and the humanities. The notion that visual artists and scientists are two entirely isolated strata of human activity and experience has proliferated since the nineteenth century, and continues to plague academic institutions and political policy today. The term "scientist" was coined in 1834 as a means of designating those who worked professionally in the various sciences. The "scientist" was described by direct analogy to the *artist*; suggesting that these now seemingly dichotomous areas of scholarship were in fact intended to exist in direct relationship to one another.

This conference seeks to challenge Snow's separatist assertion, and explore the ways in which visual artists *have* acknowledged, appropriated and assimilated the ideas and theories of the ever-expanding field of "science" in their work since c.1800, the moment at which the professionalization of the sciences engendered a seemingly irrevocable split in the academy. As a result, we hope to recoup a sense of interdisciplinary fluidity amongst the international fields of visual arts and sciences, in order to build as complex and nuanced a picture as possible of the exchanges and interconnections between the "two cultures" over the past two centuries.

We invite abstracts for papers of 20minutes by postgraduates that address the theme of relationships between the visual arts and the sciences 1800-2011. We welcome submissions from students working across the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and applied sciences, but ask that the papers specifically address such relationships from the perspective of visual or material culture. Possible themes for discussion might include, but are by no means limited to:

- Collaborations and communications between artists and scientists.
- Representation and/or use of scientific concepts, vocabularies or technologies by an artist in the creation of works.
- Modern medicine and representations of the body.
- Representations of warfare, machinery and technological development – their physical and psychological effects/treatments.
- The influence of post-Darwinian structures/theories on the visual realm.
- The effect of/responses to new media such as photography, film, and internet.
- The advent of cybernetics and computers, from early experimental use to contemporary digital media.
- The ways in which the relationship between art and science intersects with issues of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.
- The attitude of art education to science and vice versa.
- How established genres such as landscape and still-life have responded to scientific developments.

Abstracts should be no longer than 300 words. We ask that applicants also submit a brief biography in addition to their abstract. The deadline for submission is February 24th 2012. All submissions should be sent to Kirstin Donaldson and Robert Sutton at TwoCultures2012@gmail.com along with any questions regarding the conference or abstracts.