

THE SWISS ARTISTS-IN-LABS PROGRAM

Prof. Dr. Jill Scott

Zurich University of the Arts
Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts
Switzerland

Contact: jillian.scott@zhdk.ch

Abstract

Since 2003, the Artistsinlabs Program has placed over 40 artists into many different science labs in the life sciences, physics, cognition, computing and engineering. In this presentation I will give an overview of this history, an outline of the methodology we had to invent and an idea of how to facilitate this exchange for other people who might be interested to set up similar programs in their own institutions. Within this program my colleague Irène Hediger and I have facilitated international residencies for artists, exhibitions, concerts and publications, research projects and Art/Sci/Culture exchanges. The program has evolved through various stages and the funding sources have changed alongside the growth of art and science into a new discipline.

Keywords

Art, science, exchange, building bridges, new methodologies, experiential embodiment as education, evolution of the program.

Introduction

In 2003, I founded the program with René Stettler (curator) and Marille Hahne (filmmaker) and with the help of the Swiss CTI (federal commission of technology and innovation). We arranged for the hosting of 12 international artists in 9 Swiss science labs. In a second stage (2006-2013) we were jointly funded by the Zurich University for the Arts and the Swiss Ministry for Culture, SITEMAPPING. At this point Irène Hediger became the co-director. Marille Hahne continued in her role to make film documentaries of the results. (1) In 2013 we entered into stage 3, with Irène's leading concept of International Exchange Residencies and Exhibitions funded by Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council as well as research initiatives funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation. However our aims have remained educational and experiential in nature. These are:

- To give artists the opportunity to be immersed inside the culture of scientific research in order to develop their interpretations and inspire their content,

- to allow artists to have an actual “hands on” access to the solid raw materials, pertinent debates and scientific tools,
- to encourage unique potentials and allow them to attend relevant lectures and conferences held by the scientists themselves,
- to help scientists gain some insight into the world of contemporary art, aesthetic development and the semiotics of communication that is understood by artists to reach the general public,
- to encourage further collaboration between both parties including an extension of discourse and an exchange of research practices and methodologies.

New Methodologies

By stage 2 we had invented and tested a methodology, which provided the opportunities for scientists to work with the artists right from the beginning of a full 6-9 month long term. Application processes supported this methodology. Proposals were collected from artists, and these had to be specifically focused on the lab of interest. We received about 70 applications per year. We then constructed juries of both artists and scientists to select the applications. Our choices were based on content and the technical and /or social issues of transferring scientific inquiry into the public realm. In the first round of the analysis the jury assessed the quality of the proposal. These had to be well-researched concepts that considered the current state of research in the residency environment and why this particular location was an inspiration for each applicant's artistic production. We discussed the level of originality, the thematic relevance and the levels of innovation and interpretation. We were not looking for scientific visualization projects, but for filtering and interpretative abilities. We then reviewed their project plans for the residency including a prototype production schedule as well as their ability to communicate artistic ideas, processes and methodologies with others around them. In the second round for the 10 finalists, we conducted on-line interviews, followed by discussions with a second mixed jury of art organizers and scientists. In this step we compared the relevance of content in the artist's proposal to general development in me-

dia arts or other relevant fields of practices, reviewed the previous work of the artist and the potentials to expand or exhibit the results. In all steps we considered issues of gender equality, geographical location problems and levels of commitment. Our very final choices were about each artist's ability to orient, integrate, reflect and produce. These artists were treated on the same level as PhD students by the allocated science lab, with special desks or studio spaces, keys and internet addresses. We made contracts for them to have "hands on" experiential access to research processes, scientific tools and methods, conferences and discussions. Monthly wages and in some cases material costs as well as some of the scientists were paid to tutor the artists.

Results

The details of the results can be found in our two publications (2). However, in summary, the public access to science was improved due to the robust scientific knowledge embedded in the interpretative prototypes that were built by the artists. Great new projects were developed. Also the artists found it inspiring to be able to be engaged in the ethical discussions around scientific processes and discoveries. Lectures by resident artists about contemporary art were popular and well attended by the scientists. The know-how transfer between artists and scientists increased and we could compare the skills, methods and processes of art and science. New recommendations were suggested to improve the collaboration potentials. While it was easy for us to collect the advantages and enthusiasm from the artists for such a program we also assessed reactions from the scientists. The following is a few example comments collected from our publications and documents. (ibid 2)

"Working alongside an artist allowed us access to different approaches and points of view about our own research and how to bring it to the public."

"They gave us the ability to see an experiment or problem from another perspective and to think about building our own differently."

"We gained a lot of training in answering all those great "why" questions from the artists."

"The know-how transfer of science is easier than we thought to non-scientist."

"It was interesting for us to watch the interpretative process unfold-from conception to production and presentation of the art work."

"We realized that art could be a catalyst for the opening up of more discourses about the ethical and social side of our research in the future."

Current Projects

Right now we are in stage 3 of our evolution. As mentioned in the introduction, this includes international exchange residencies, exhibitions, national residencies and Swiss national research projects. More information about these projects can be found on the [artistsinlabs](http://www.artistsinlabs.ch) web site:

www.artistsinlabs.ch. (3) In 2010, Irène Hediger initiated a Sino-Swiss residency exchange entitled: SHANSHUI-Both Ways with 2 Chinese artists, Aniu and Liao Wenfeng and 2 Swiss Artists, Aline Villat and Alexandre Joly. This was followed by another Indo-Swiss residency exchange that took place in 2011, with one artist, Sureka Anil Kumar from Bangalore, who spent time in aquatic ecology at EAWAG and with one Swiss artist, Adrien Missika who was located in biology at NCBS, Bangalore, India. Currently there is a Russian-Swiss residency exchange taking place with Claudia Comte (Swiss artist) and Urban Fauna Lab (a Russian group) exploring ecosystems in Russian and Swiss labs. Other current projects include the national Artists-in-labs residency (The current one is Marc Boulos located at the Laboratory of Cognitive Neuroscience EPFL) and an AGORA SNF project entitled: *The State of the Art: Science and Art in Practice*. Also Irène recently collaborated and co-curated an exhibition with Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich on seminal exhibition about the interface between art and physics entitled: *Quantum of Disorder* (4)

Conclusion

Over 12 years we have evolved from an international project into a fully-fledged program and our investigations have led various comparisons and revelations. In the beginning we had to invent our own methodology, and this methodology continues to evolve with current discourses about art, science and society. We remain committed to the analysis of subjective and objective phenomena and we are about to publish our third book on the potentials of new knowledge that our program investigates. This book is entitled *Recomposing Art and Science: Artistsinlabs* with 8 accompanying documentary films.(5)

References

- (1) DVD productions: mhahne@solnet.ch
- (2) Scott, J 2006. *Artists-in-labs:Processes of Inquiry*. Springer/ Vienna New York, Scott J, 2010 / *Artists-in-labs: Networking in the Margins*. Springer /Vienna New York
- (3) www.artistsinlabs.ch
- (4) <http://www.hauskonstruktiv.ch/en/exhibitions/archives/quantum-of-disorder.html>
- (5) Hediger, I and Scott, J 2016. *Recomposing Art and Science. Artistsinlabs*. De Gruyter- Birkhäuser Austria/ Switzerland.

Biography

Jill Scott is the Professor for Art and Science Research in the Institute Cultural Studies in the Arts, Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland, founder of the Artists-in-labs program and Vice Director of the PhD program, Z-node (Planetary Collegium). She is also a media artist who works across neuroscience, social science and environmental science.