

# The motivation to experiment — an art and science exchange

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As the blindfold was put over my eyes and tied tightly, I began to wonder if maybe I had bitten off more than I could chew. We often talk about being pushed outside of our comfort zone, but I began to realize that to be uncomfortable is a fairly rare occurrence in our everyday lives. But of course, that was the whole point of our art and science exchange with the Masters students of Central Saint Martins at the University of the Arts London.

Back in February 2018, undeterred by “the beast from the east” nine intrepid members of the Biochemical Society battled through the snow to the MA Art and Science studio in North London. This pioneering Masters course investigates the creative relationships between art and science and how to communicate them. Designed in collaboration with Society members and staff alongside CSM course leaders and students, this day-long exchange was an opportunity to explore, compare and contrast the role of experimentation in both science and art. What we hoped to offer

**“Artists are similar to scientists in many ways”**  
(Quote from participant)

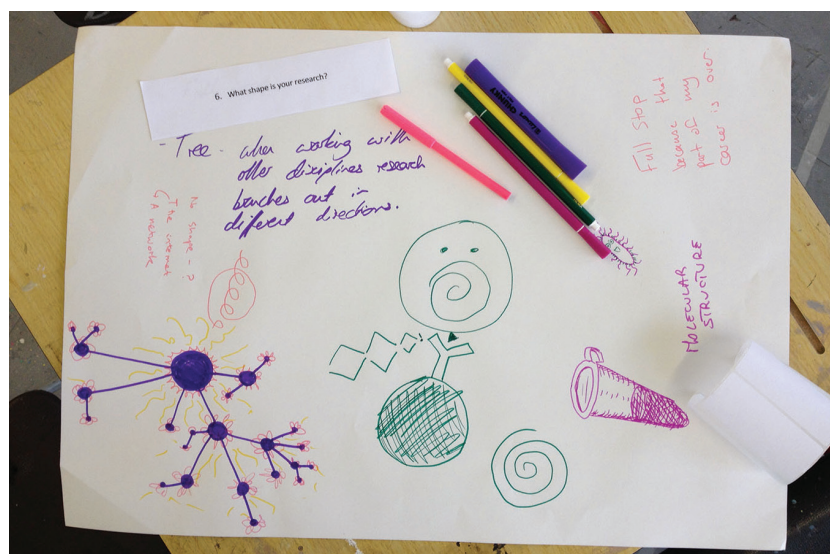
participants was the chance to view their own work from a different perspective, or through a different lens and re-think how they approach their work, both in practise and in communicating it to others.

The day started off with introductions and round-table discussions about a series of questions;

1. What is the place of discovery in your work?
2. What role does tradition play in your work?
3. How would your research differ if you had access to unlimited time/resources?
4. What shape is your research?
5. What might be the consequences of misuse of your work?
6. What does a successful failure look like in your field?

The discussions brought up lots of interesting synergies and interpretations. While there were a lot of similarities in their responses, there were definitely different emphases and perspectives on the same questions.

With the ice well and truly broken, the rest of the day took a more active approach, starting off with collaborative poetry writing, group tai chi, sensory sketching (hence the blind fold!), and a chance to explore the students’ work and how they were using science as inspiration and re-interpreting scientific processes. This included activities with organic dyes,



What shape is your research? Here are some suggestions from participants.

***“It was good to spend time with scientists in a creative environment. I learned some things about current areas of scientific research that I didn’t know.”***

(Quote from participant)

VR, microscopic images and more. There was also the chance to group together and talk about potential future collaborative efforts or various topics of mutual interest. A huge word of thanks must go out to all those who organized and ran activities during the day.

It is very easy, if not inevitable, to spend most of our time within our own little bubble; interacting with colleagues and friends whose day-to-day experience is very similar to ours. The structure of our work places and educational institutions can sometimes make it difficult for scientists and artists to find the time and opportunity to interact, never mind work together. This separation is good for neither field as each has so much to benefit the other. Creativity, experimentation, communication, observation, failure, success, and collaboration are essential features of both art and science and so opportunities to discuss and share different approaches to these are an opportunity to refresh and re-invigorate our working practices.

Further to these intrinsic benefits, there are also substantial gains to be made when engaging different publics with our work. Being able to view what we do from different perspectives and being able to communicate key concepts in a variety of ways to a variety of people can really increase the access to both art and science to groups who would not normally be engaged for various reasons.

As an opportunity to bring people together, events like this hope to light a spark that can result in someone looking at their work in a different light, having a conversation that leads to a collaboration, learning a new skill, or even just feeling re-enthused about their work. Events like this aim to inspire and gently nudged out of our comfort zones to be reminded that there’s a big old world out there full of exciting new experiences and different perspectives. And blindfolds, apparently.

*The Biochemical Society’s Scientific Outreach Grants and Diversity in Science Grants open in June and September respectively and can be used to help fund art-science collaborations. If you would like to be involved in future art and science activities, please email [education@biochemistry.org](mailto:education@biochemistry.org) to find out more. You can read about Central Saint Martins MA Art and Science at <http://www.arts.ac.uk/csm/courses/postgraduate/ma-art-and-science/>*



Participants take part in the sensory sketching activity



Exploring the world through VR