

Exhibition at Union College brings science into 'focus'

SCHENECTADY — A dozen artists of national reputation explore the way science is received outside the scientific community in "Into Focus: Art on Science," an exhibition at the Mandeville Gallery in Nott Memorial at Union College through Oct. 11.

The show, whose works range from small pencil drawings and artist's books to an elaborately detailed installation occupying its own room, was curated by Adrienne Klein, an artist and curator from Schenectady whose own installations reference science, mathematics and the electronic media.

The collection of works is "very much a survey of artists who examine the role science plays in our culture," said Klein, who received a 1998 individual artist grant from the Albany-Schenectady League of Arts to examine the intersection of art and science.

Klein is currently living in New York City, where an earlier exhibit she curated, "Graphic Alert," an international survey of AIDS graphics, was shown last season at the Brooklyn Museum. She will return to Schenec-

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By PEG CHURCHILL WRIGHT

tady to moderate a panel discussion on "Into Focus" that will be held, along with a reception, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 17, in Nott Memorial.

Panelists will include participating artists Francois Deschamps, and Eve Andree Laramee, and photomicroscopist Felice Frankel, who will discuss her work with scientists and the ethics of photo manipulation.

As the name of Mandeville Gallery exhibit suggests, the 12 exhibiting artists "draw into focus not only discoveries of scientists but the world of scientific inquiry." Thus are those of us with little scientific knowledge or understanding provided a glimpse at the concerns, processes and vocabulary of the scientific community. What we see may be only the tip of the iceberg, but it can be fascinating.

For example, Daniel Zeller's meticulous pencil drawings of fictive internal organs, or the stark black-and-white portraits of the apparatus of scientific adventure by photographer Catherine Wagner. Lab apparatus also undergoes metamorphosis in the work of Laramee, who constructs tableaux from scientific apparatus. Works such as "Ideology/Uncertainty," consisting of two beakers of different sizes inscribed with those words, illustrate Laramee's insistence that emotional states are equal partners with science's empirical findings.

Robert Chambers does a playful turn on the modeling of a biological object with "Hair Gel Ball," an oversized acrylic ball filled with yellow and red gel and actual hair pieces. The "language" of molecular structure is employed by Suzanne Anker in her intricate prints of a genetic "text," into which she inserts very similar

tiny human figures — illustrations from exercise manuals — and calligraphic marks — examples of Leonardo da Vinci's secret code writing used to record ideas in his notebooks. A die-cut pop-up book by Deschamps and Judith Mohns salutes the founder of analytic geometry, 17th-century philosopher, mathematician and scientist Rene Descartes.

Science conducted in a moral vacuum is challenged by British artist Louise K. Wilson with her multimedia piece "Oneironaut," utilizing a video monitor, tape player, earphones and easy chair (in which to receive the artist's message). The piece is about the 1957 flight into space of the dog Laika as part of the Soviet space program. Laika's fate — death and disintegration in space — is revealed by a clipped male voice, his tale interwoven with the calming instructions of the hypnotist and video images of Laika, our spinning Earth and space ships.

The pre-eminence of natural processes is underscored by Dove Bradshaw's "Negative Ions III." The epitome of simplicity, this lyric work consists of a glass funnel, suspended from the ceiling, from which drops of water fall onto an untrimmed "boulder" of rock salt. While the drops form and fall almost more slowly than the eye can perceive, it is this relentless drip that carves canyons, as evidenced by a developing fissure in the salt boulder.

Area artist Michael Oatman is represented by another of his amazing installations, this one called "Long Shadows Chapter 2 (Shooing the Stork from the Slums)" and dealing with the controversial "science" of eugenics — the movement devoted to improving the human species through the control of hereditary factors in mating. This work, which occupies a small room off the Mandeville Gallery, paraphrases a much larger work that Oatman produced in 1995-96 for the Fleming Museum in Burlington, Vt., called "Long Shadows: Henry Perkins and the Eugenics Survey of Vermont."

Oatman's installation documents the practice of eugenics in Vermont only a few years before Hitler's horrifying application of this belief in racial superiority. It represents the office of Perkins, who taught eugenics in the



MARC SCHULTZ *Gazette* Photographer

This is "Negative Ions III," a work by Dove Bradshaw consisting of untrimmed rock salt, glass, dropping funnel and water.

his heredity courses at the University of Vermont, was curator of the Fleming Museum and who led a eugenics survey of some 300 to 1,500 Vermonters.

Perkins' office, as constructed by Oatman, features a large light table on which are set out hundreds of lantern slides dealing with eugenics research and contains an anatomy chart, several family trees, Perkins' desk and typewriter, an unfinished letter in the

carriage. Also included are Perkins' coat, hat and shoes, and even his obituary from the newspaper.

"Long Shadows" goes beyond historic authenticity and wealth of detail to provide a convincing portrait of Perkins, the scientist and individual.

The Mandeville Gallery is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, noon to 5 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 10 p.m.