



Lisa Meek's oil pastel mixed-media painting "All that Jazz" evokes the connections between musical creativity and the development of cells.

## Art, science link hands in Promega

*"A maxim of the profession is if an operation does not 'look' beautiful it most likely will not function beautifully."*

— Leonard Shlain, surgeon, in his book "Art & Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time & Light"

By Kevin Lynch  
The Capital Times

Many scientists scorn artists as too intuitive and irrational, and for serving too little functional purpose.

For their part, artists often believe that scientists undervalue art's beauty, craft and ways of challenging and expanding human experience.

And yet the cats and dogs of contemporary culture seem to be nuzzling up to each other in a stimulating new exhibit at Promega Corp., 5445 E. Cheryl Parkway in Fitchburg, running through June 12. (Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-



RICH RYGH/THE CAPITAL TIMES

Jean Dibble's large-scale inkjet photoprint on canvas "The Life in Physics, No. 24" conveys the dynamic three-dimensional energy of the Greek goddess Nike.

Friday or by appointment at 277-2669.)

"Art/Science: Exploring the Connections" presents artwork by several people with scientific or medical training, and one master artist with a talent for suggesting relationships between physics and art. The art-science blend is a natural for Promega, the Madison biopharmaceutical technology company that often mounts ambitious art exhibits.

Leonard Shlain's 1991 book asserted that surgeons rely heavily on "right brain" intuitive and visual-spatial skills — the same skills used by sculptors

and architects.

The artist/scientists in this show seem to agree: Artistic creativity is not that far removed from scientific inquiry.

"I think that feeling, emotion and intuition are as much at the heart of scientific thinking as artistic thinking," says exhibitor Robert Root-Bernstein, a professor of physiology at Michigan State University and a MacArthur Fellow who specializes in the connections between creativity and invention. "Intuition and sensation precede logic."

Root-Bernstein's "Idea" is an ideogram wherein the letters of the word "IDEA" morph into a light-bulb. The physiologist suggests that seemingly whimsical symbols or formulas may lead to more sophisticated, viable methodology.

Conventional scientists have often sneered at trailblazers, who also frequently excel in the arts — Louis Pasteur displayed talent as an artist, Albert Einstein played the violin, Albert Schweitzer was an accomplished organist and Bach expert.

Exhibitor Lisa Meek's life is a testament to the pitfalls of scientific arrogance. This geriatric physician abandoned her discipline "because I wasn't able to tap into the creative aspects that would keep me happy," she says.

Now an artist living in Cleveland, Meek agrees that scientific inquiry and art remain very close, "especially at the research level, or in Ph.D. work."

Meek's biomorphic forms wriggle on "canvases" of plain brown wrapping paper, which is enhanced and strengthened by buffering agents, gesso, acrylics and varnish.

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# Art

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In her Miro-like "All That Jazz," Meek also uses oil pastels to depict "biological cells and their evolution into whatever they are going to be," she says. "Cells have the potential to be anything, depending on how they're nurtured."

Meek sees parallels in how jazz musicians take the germ of an idea and develop something unpredictably new.

Promega's sunbathed upper-level exhibit space displays Jean Dibble's gorgeous large-scale inkjet prints. This virtuoso artist synthesizes photography and graphic symbols in exquisite prints, either on laminated paper or on canvas.

"They look simple, but they are multilayered," says Dibble, who earned her master's of fine arts degree at the UW-Madison and now heads the printmaking department at Notre Dame University.

The artist admits that the configurations in her cutting-edge photo-prints do not have precise scientific correlations.

Still, the effects are stunning, magnificent and thought-provoking.

Each of her prints is titled "The Life in Physics," with separate numerical designations. No. 24 is a gorgeous 6-foot-tall canvas depicting an ancient Greek statue of Nike, the goddess of victory.

Hovering near Nike's figure is a geometric diagram that corresponds to her expansive three dimensionality.

"The Greeks were the first artists to conceive of art truly in three dimensions," Dibble explains. "Before that, even sculpture was made in a two-dimensional way."

This Nike virtually flies in multiple dimensions, with shoulders, arms, legs, bust and garb projecting a superhuman dynamism.

The exhibit also includes "The Problem: The Cure," a complex, 18-foot-long collage

by Todd Siler, the first visual artist to earn a doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

His mixed-media "metaphorm" on canvas suggests how minds need to "continually rethink, reframe and rebalance our knowledge to gain understanding or discovery," he writes. The images of three other exhibitors — all faculty members at the UW-Madison — more tenuously address the art-science dialectic. The artistic team of neurophysicist Viktoria Danilova and physiologist-pharmacologist James Will exhibit cityscape photography. Bengt Goram Hellekant, a professor of animal health and biomedical sciences, does landscape paintings.

But these works have small, quiet stories to tell about how science and nature interplay to shape our lives and environment.