

The New York Times

Beverly Fishman: "Islip Exhibition Explores How Science Influences Art"

By Karin Lipson

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From "Compendium," "Screened for Malaria" (2015) by Elaine Whittaker. Credit: Elaine Whittaker.

Julia Buntaine, an artist fascinated with the intricacies of the brain, creates work that shows the beauty of data culled from neuroscience. Beverly Fishman critiques our love affair with pharmaceuticals via some seductive-looking artistic interpretations of drugs. And Mark Nystrom demonstrates how wind actually looks — its forces captured on paper with the help of computer software.

Though their specific interests differ, all three artists draw inspiration, and sometimes methodology, from the world of science. And all are represented in "Compendium," an exhibition about science-influenced art — or SciArt — on view through Dec. 27 at the Islip Art Museum in East Islip.

With work by 13 artists in mediums varying from drawing to 3-D printing, "Compendium" ventures into such realms as biology and medicine, chemistry, earth sciences, astronomy, physics and computer science.

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The Islip Art Museum often exhibits work "that's not being shown specifically on the Island," said Beth Giacummo, the museum's curatorial and exhibition director, and a curator of "Compendium." Ms. Giacummo had noticed a dearth of science-related art exhibitions in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, she said, so she organized "Compendium" with Lorrie Fredette, an installation artist. (Ms. Giacummo, like Ms. Fredette, also creates art that is linked to science; neither curator has pieces in the exhibition.)



"Pillbox" (2015) by Beverly Fishman. Credit: Beverly Fishman

Among the show's participants, Ms. Buntaine is both an artist and an activist in the SciArt field. On view is a suite of her pen-on-paper drawings, based on experiments in human eye movements conducted in the 1960s by a Russian psychologist, Alfred L. Yarbus.

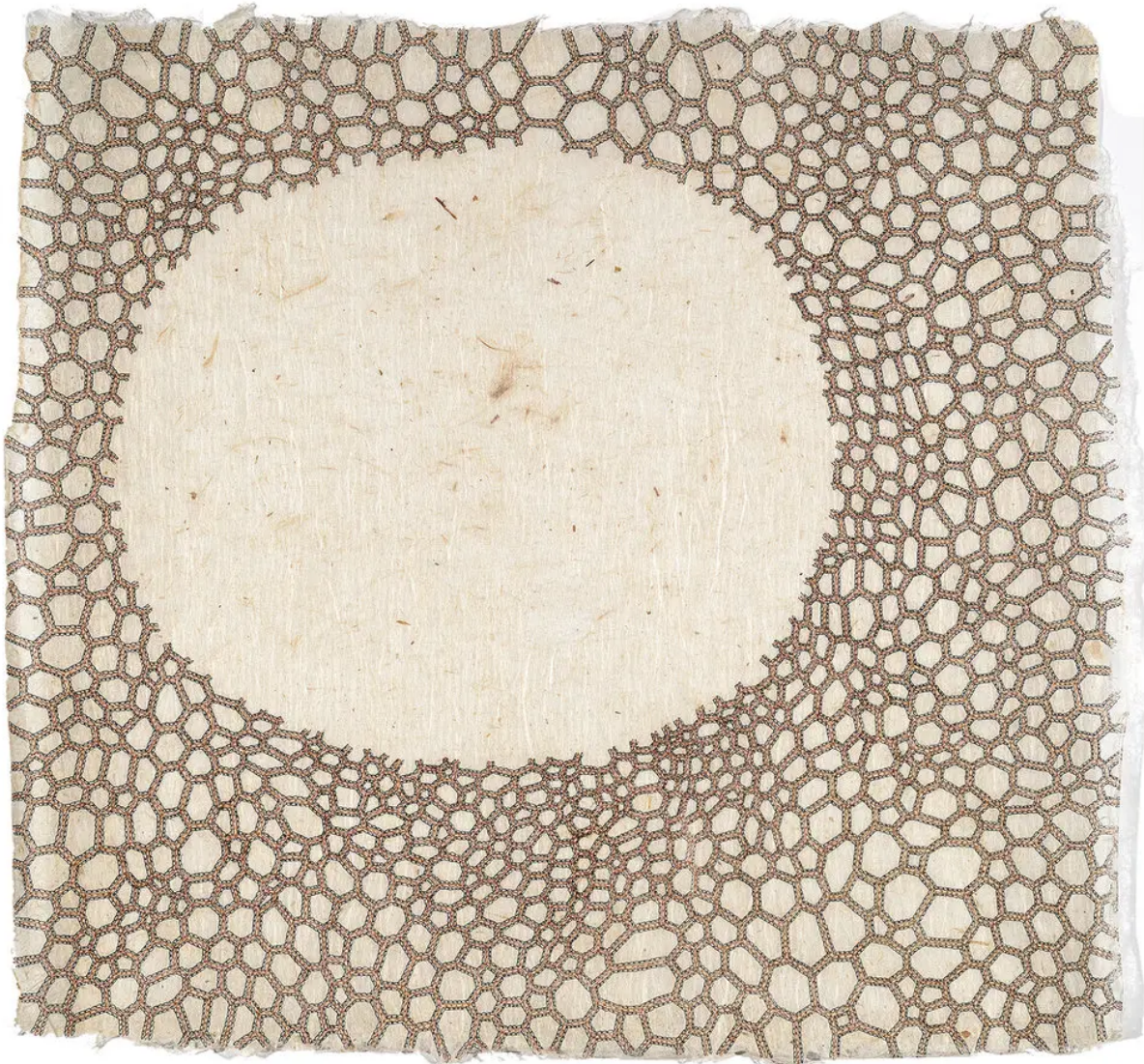
Ms. Buntaine's drawings may look at times like delicate spider webs gone haywire, with knotted clusters lodged among the interweaving lines. But in fact, they're meticulously hand-drawn replications of Yarbus's data-images, which she found online in a scientific journal.

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Data like Yabus's, made in the service of science, is generally "not appreciated for its beauty," Ms. Buntaine said in a phone interview. "I wanted to bring them out of this small, fuzzy state" of online reproduction, she said.

Ms. Buntaine, who lives in Brooklyn, is also the creator of a blog and online magazine called [SciArt in America](#), which she founded in 2013 to foster communication in the far-flung world of scientifically inclined artists. For similar reasons, she founded the SciArt Center, an organization based in New York City that holds monthly events to bring scientists and artists together.



Drawings on paper by Jeanne Heifetz.

Though science-based art in this country dates back at least to New York City avant-garde circles of the 1960s, it has been a "scattered" affair, Ms. Buntaine wrote in her magazine.

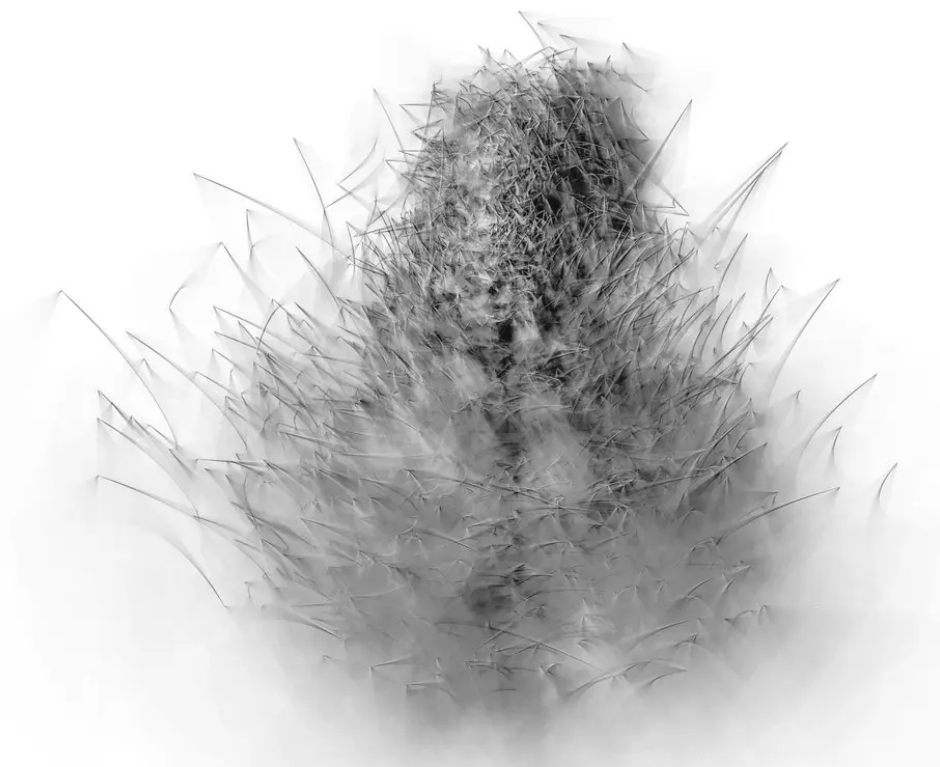
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For some in mainstream art circles, SciArt also remains a niche field. But Ms. Fredette sees positive changes afoot: In the last few years, she said, interest in this topic has expanded, with more organizations and exhibitions devoted to SciArt. These days, she said, "it's a more interconnected world."

"Compendium" does some interconnecting of its own. With its abstract imagery, Mr. Nystrom's "Wind Drawings" series initially bears at least a family resemblance to Ms. Buntaine's pieces. But the "Wind Drawings" are actually prints on archival-quality paper; created with the use of wind-monitoring instruments, a microcomputer, and software devised by the artist, they translate the force and direction of the wind into dense visual swirls.

Also in limited hues, Jeanne Heifetz's ink-on-paper works, looking a bit like sponges, reflect the artist's interest in patterns found in nature; Taney Roniger, in turn, punctures a white mat board with basic bifurcated patterns (also found in nature), and rubs graphite over the puncture holes, leaving the remainder white.



"Winds" (2009) by Mark Nystrom.

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Not surprisingly, computers figure prominently: Phil Hastings's small, wood-framed video displays of "invented organisms," morphing as they move on-screen, are digitally altered data; Travis LeRoy Southworth's mixed-media installation, "Detouched," focuses on facial flaws, like wrinkles and blemishes, that have been heightened using a software program; and Werner Sun's origami-like constructions, which resemble topographical maps, include computer-generated patterns. By contrast, Beverly Fishman used the venerable technique of glassblowing to create "Pillbox" — a grouping of oversize glass capsules and tablets in vivid colors and hallucinatory patterns that comments mordantly on the hypermarketing of medications.

Brandon Ballengée uses the chemical process of "clearing and staining" specimens to create haunting images of mortally undeveloped fledgling birds; and Michelle Frick, Elaine Whittaker and Laura Splan tackle subjects like biological contagion and the trauma of illness using such diverse means as hospital and lab supplies, digital prints and, in Ms. Splan's case, the 3-D printing of decorative objects (some stained with blood).

The cosmos itself is the subject of Gianluca Bianchino's site-specific installation, "Space Junk #2," which employs found objects, lights and drawing to suggest the ineffable.

Harnessing what may otherwise be incomprehensible is central to SciArt, said Mr. Nystrom, the wind artist. "If you start reading journals," he said, referring to academic science publications, "they're not going to make sense. But the artist's ability to use this complex information, this dense stuff, and make something with it — that resonates."

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