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Art vs. Science . . .

Posted on August 4th, 2008 by earlehilland

Sunday's story in the *Columbus Dispatch* introducing Ohio State's new "arts ambassador" raised a fundamental question in my mind, one of those philosophical quandaries that seemingly arise from nowhere and then plague your thoughts all day.

"Why do we see art and science as being so very different?"

The *Dispatch* story explained how [Karen Bell](#), a former dean of the [College of Arts at OSU](#), is now the institution's chief arts proponent, charged with reinforcing the fact that a vibrant city and state need a vibrant arts community. Bell's probably the perfect person to fill that slot and remind us all that the arts sustain our humanity.



And in a community like Columbus, with OSU, [Battelle](#), [Chemical Abstracts](#) and dozens of other research institutions, and scientists numbering in the thousands, appointing a similar ambassador for science seems unnecessary.

Most people innately understand the need for science at some level. Science brings us discoveries, advances and solutions to problems large and small. There's a fundamental comfort, it seems, in the belief that science, somehow, can "fix" things, and therefore, it has value.

Art has value as well. In fact, I'd guess that if asked, a random sample of citizens would likely suggest that art – given its uniqueness in every piece – has a greater societal value than science. And most researchers would probably agree.

Science drives our curiosity and hope, but the arts feed our soul.

Why then is there so often a tug-of-war between the two? Too often we believe that people can either be inclined towards art or oriented towards science. Why do we have to choose? Why do we place the two on opposite ends of the spectrum?

Even in academic programs – including those labeled "arts and sciences" – we inevitably force students to choose between the two. While science students must take some introductory arts courses, and vice-versa, they're

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routinely persuaded that a sprinkling of understanding of the opposite fields is sufficient.

In truth, the arts and the sciences feed on each other. Who's to say which is better: **da Vinci's** science or his art? Would he have accomplished as much if he had been forced to choose? Researchers have long recognized the **mathematics of Mozart**. And electronic musicians couldn't function without physics.

As a people, we preferentially cling to our affinities and avoid our weaknesses. One person "can't understand the science" while another is puzzled by what is labeled as "art." Psychologists will tell us that this is natural, simply an effort to remain in our comfort zone. But I doubt that it helps us grow, either as individuals or a community.

When they doled out the artistic talent from my family's gene pool, I wasn't at the table. Instead, I suckled on science at an early age, and it has served me well. But one wonders what might have happened if one interest had been better balanced by the other.

Today's world grows in complexity by the hour, fed largely by the increase in newly acquired knowledge, and science adds its massive share to that pile. Perhaps art is the context through which we will cope with this onslaught, a reminder that humanity cannot dine on one food alone if it is to survive. *Earle Holland*

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[...](#) // Aug 4, 2008 at 2:35 pm

[...] Gardening by Sandy wrote an interesting post today onHere's a quick excerptArt vs. Science . . . Posted on August 4th, 2008 by earle holland Sunday's story in the Columbus Dispatch introducing Ohio State's new "arts ambassador" raised a fundamental question in my mind, one of those philosophical quandaries that seemingly arise from nowhere and then plague your thoughts all day. "Why do we see art and science as being so very different?" The Dispatch story explained how Karen Bell, a former dean of the College of Arts at OSU, is now the institution's chief arts pro [...]

[Maria Palazzi](#) // Aug 25, 2008 at 11:03 am

There is a newish book, "ARTSCIENCE Creativity in the Post-Google

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Generation" by David Edwards which is worth a read. In it Edwards examines the catalyst that makes learning and innovation happen. He does this by presenting examples of creators who ignore disciplinary boundaries to discover new ideas. He also questions why it is so difficult to create institutional environments that foster this type of collaborative multidisciplinary innovation. All of the examples he presents rely on both the Arts and the Sciences to inform the idea and the researcher.

Maybe we could consider bringing Edwards to OSU to discuss these issues and to help us consider better ways of fostering multidisciplinary research?

Lise Worthen-Chaudhari // Aug 25, 2008 at 3:35 pm

Thanks for the great post questioning the divide between the complimentary fields of art and science.

Also thanks to Maria Palazzi for the tip about the David Edwards book and for brainstorming ways to seed multidisciplinary collaborations here at OSU!

Unfortunate that the arts are so underfunded in comparison to science. Not that science is all that well funded. Cuts to NIH have hit us hard. But cuts to NEA have hit our arts communities even harder.

[Custom Essays](#) // Feb 14, 2009 at 5:45 am

Thanks for your information. Most of the posts in the blog is really valuable. Regards

[College Research Paper](#) // Apr 16, 2009 at 12:08 am

great post, the image is really cool and impressive

[Pamelaburn](#) // May 23, 2009 at 12:22 pm

Useful information , great post . Thanks for sharing !!

[dania1](#) // Jul 7, 2009 at 4:29 am

good blog

[dania1](#) // Jul 13, 2009 at 2:22 am

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Nice blog, its great article! ...informative post, thanks for sharing it.
Thanks for the information!

[One24](#) // Apr 6, 2011 at 4:46 pm

“Why do we see art and science as being so very different?”

Exactly...take a look at everything in nature and the universe for that matter.

Textbook ArtScience... 😊

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