Artist in Residence: Franziska Schenk

Franziska Schenk, artist in residence at the Schools of Bioscience and Physics, investigated the complex interrelationship between fine art painting and the natural sciences – in particular evolutionary biology and optical physics.

Click image to enlarge (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/images/College-LES-only/biosciences/franziska/LargeImages/cuttlefish.jpg)

The natural world is the focus for an exploration of fundamental natural principles, such as evolution, predation, colour adaptation and camouflage; and their respective relevance to contemporary fine art thought and practice.

The artist's fascination with the varied textures, patterns and shifting kaleidoscopic colours that have evolved in Nature, has led her to extensively research and experiment with unconventional biomimetic painting techniques, including the latest nature-inspired colour-shift technologies.

In the eye of the beholder: the art of evolution

Building on artistic work inspired by the coelacanth, chameleon and cuttlefish, Franziska Schenk has recently turned her attention to butterflies - notably, iridescent species featuring astonishingly realistic eyes on their wings.

Click image to enlarge (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/images/College-LES-only/biosciences/franziska/LargeImages/eyespotpage2.jpg)

These so-called eyespots (together with Darwinian theories of eyespot development and evolution) provided the central artistic leitmotiv for a series of new artwork shown in Glasgow and Birmingham during 2009, the year of Darwin.

Details of the Artist in Residence project here (/schools/biosciences/research/artists-in-residence/beholder/index.aspx)

This work has been commissioned by the Wellcome Trust as one of its **Art of Darwin Initiatives (http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Achievements-and-Impact/Initiatives/Public-engagement/Darwin-200/The-art-of-Darwin/index.htm)** forming part of the **Darwin 200 (http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Achievements-and-Impact/Initiatives/Public-engagement/Darwin-200/index.htm)** celebrations.

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Converting nature's iridescence to the painter's palette

Ms Schenk's sustained effort to adapt and adopt novel iridescent colour technology in the context of painting has led to a series of related arts & science projects, including an Arts Council funded residency and show at the National Marine Aquarium at Plymouth (2004-5), and the subsequent AHRC-funded research project 'Sea Change'. The latter, a residency at the Natural History Museum (2007), involved collaboration with Professor Andrew Parker, the Museum's leading expert on iridescence in the natural world.

The artist continued her research at the University of Birmingham, initially during a prior placement (Jan – June 08) that formed part of 'Interact: Artists in Industry'- a nationwide Arts Council of England initiative.

The 'Interact' Placement (/schools/biosciences/research/artists-in-residence/interact/index.aspx)

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For further information visit the **'Interact: Artists in Industry' (http://www.interact.mmu.ac.uk/placements/profile.php?artist=29)** website.

Franziska Schenk website: **www.franziskaschenk.co.uk (http://www.franziskaschenk.co.uk/)**

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