

SELF-REFLECTED: AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. GREG DUNN

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“Art and science are more similar than they are different,” according to Dr. Greg Dunn. Kids are taught, from a young age, that being able to draw or paint (technique) is what makes a good artist; but being successful also requires a larger perspective, and a willingness to explore, which science also requires. “It is important not to conflate technique with quality of ideas,” he says. On October 18th, join us at PACCAR Theater, where Dr. Dunn and his colleague Dr. Brian Edwards will be displaying their interactive and artistic model of the brain, *Self-Reflected*, to show how art and science can work together to illustrate complex ideas.

Art is bringing a subjective idea (like an individual emotion) into objective reality so other people can experience it. For example, a love song takes a factual event (two people meeting) and describes it in a way that allows the audience to be “in on” the feelings of attraction between the subjects. Science, conversely, uncovers a reality that’s already existed, like when Isaac Newton first described gravity. Dr. Dunn describes photorealistic painters as scientists. They are experimenting by using objective data: the exact color of a blade of grass and the precise shape of a subject’s nose. Abstract artists are almost the opposite: they use your subjective reality so others can see it. Most artistic projects are a mixture of the two. This, according to Dr. Dunn, is how we create our voice.

Dr. Dunn considers some artistic painters to be scientists, as well. “The impressionists were hacking the brain, figuring out how you can arrange colors to imitate what we perceive.” Art teaches you to refine ideas which is helpful with anything you do. Medical illustration still uses artists. Because photographs are “ beholden to the true reality;” for example: you can’t remove a piece of bone to show an organ underneath, even if that is what the surgeon is operating on. Art can often more clearly communicate an idea because the artist chooses to show what is important in that moment.

Most scientific ideas are shown with written concepts distilled down to be easily digested by readers. “You lose some of that visceral understanding through this technique,” Dunn emphasizes. We get used to seeing simplifications. *Self Reflected* is a piece that challenges this idea; it shows everything at once. It shows the brain as an active organ, with all complex anatomic layout. “People often don’t know what the brain really looks like.” This piece is designed to communicate through emotions and perceptions, not just data. Numbers and statistics are nearly useless when we don’t have a background. A tangible, physical object like this piece shows an audience what these numbers look like, and what they really mean.

What’s the benefit of remaining rigid? Where can we bend the rules to demonstrate in-depth scientific ideas but in a more emotionally aesthetically appealing way? Capturing people’s emotions helps them learn. Science and art can be used together to more effectively communicate an idea. Join us on October 18th to learn about the relationship between the two.