

Collide: a cultural revolution

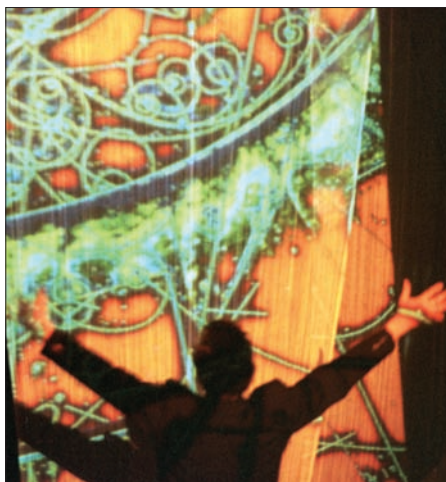
Ariane Koek makes the case for an arts residency programme soon to be established at CERN.

Would you employ me to run the LHC? Or perhaps to run an experiment at CERN with antimatter? After all, I have an abiding interest in physics – ever since an inspiring science teacher sparked my imagination with the Van de Graff generator and the laws of gravity. I have no expertise and little experience in physics – just a school girl's love of equations combined with joyful enthusiasm and a wish to understand and engage with what it is that makes the world work.

Now turn this question round: would you ask a physicist to devise an arts programme or CERN's first cultural policy for engaging with the arts? What would your answer be? All right, I admit it. This is deliberate provocation. So let me explain.

Much has been written about the two cultures – art and science. It is a false distinction, which was imposed in the Age of Enlightenment and which in the 21st century we are finally beginning to shake off. Leonardo da Vinci made no such distinction between art and science. Aristotle most definitely did not. As the physicist-turned-poet Mario Petrucci says: "I have found that the rigour and precision of the scientist is not foreign to the poet, just as the faith-leaps of poetry are not excluded from the drawing boards of science." The arts and science are kissing cousins. Their practitioners love knowledge and discovering how and why we exist in the world. They just express it in different ways.

Where there is a distinction between art and science – which has contributed to the this misunderstanding of how intimately related they really are – is in the ways in which people's work is judged and evaluated. Cultural knowledge and expertise in the arts can seem totally mystifying. Why is one artist judged as great, and another not? There are no equations to evaluate and therefore no



A scene from The Oracle at Delphi, an interaction between CERN and the arts in a production by the Miméscope company a decade ago.

absolutes. The arts seems to be a muddy water of individual will, taste and whimsical patronage. But this is a simplistic distortion of a more complex and nuanced picture.

Arts specialism is all about knowledge and understanding. It is about knowing inside-out the history of art forms – whether dance, music, literature, the visual arts or film – and possessing the expertise to evaluate contemporary work; to spot the innovative and the boundary-bursting, as well as the great and exceptional. History lies at its heart – arts knowledge exists on a space-time continuum of reflection and understanding of the creative processes. Moreover, at the heart of this is what every scientist understands: peer review. Experts who are used to working with artists, who know what they are realistically capable of, as well as understanding the past and therefore the present and the future, choose and select projects and individuals for everything from exhibitions and showings, to competitions and grants, for example.

Which takes us to a new bold and brave experiment at CERN and my presence there. Don't worry. I am not tinkering with the LHC. The collisions and interactions that I will be working with are all of the cultural kind. My expertise, knowledge and experience is in

the field of arts and culture – 25 years of working in that arena, working with science too. The director-general, Rolf Heuer, has the vision and the wish to express the crucial inter-relationship of arts and science that makes culture. To do this, I am raising the partnerships and funds for "Collide" – an international arts residency programme at CERN – in which artists will come every year from different art forms to engage with scientists in a mutual exchange of knowledge and understanding through workshops, lectures and informal talks, and to begin to make new work. Who knows what the artists will create? Or the scientists for that matter? A spark chamber of poetry? A dance that defies gravity? Light sculptures that tunnel into the sky? Who knows? That depends on the serendipity of who applies and how they interact with whom and what is at CERN.

Crucially, the artists in residence will be selected by a panel of leading scientists working alongside leading arts specialists – directors, producers, curators, artists – so that mutual understanding and appreciation of how cultural knowledge works, and how expert judgements are made, can develop and be exchanged. This is one of the key strategies of a new cultural policy for engaging with the arts that I have devised for CERN. After all, great science deserves great art. Nothing less will do for the place that pushes knowledge to beyond known limits.

Nevertheless, at the heart of the arts at CERN is the critical connection between the lateral and logical minds that artists and scientists both have. "Collide" will be a way of showing this, of encouraging scientists and artists to work together in a structured programme of interplay and exchange. It will also be a way of creating an all-encompassing vision of CERN to the outside world and on different platforms – from stage and screen to canvas and the orchestra – showing CERN's status as a major force in culture, as befits the home of the LHC and what some consider is possibly the biggest, most significant experiment on Earth.

Ariane Koek, CERN. Follow her blog at <http://www.beautyquark-beautyquark.blogspot.com>.



The image shows two Agilent U1056 series Acqiris high speed cPCI digitizers. On the left is a vertical U1056A module with multiple connectors. In the center is a horizontal U1056B module with a front panel featuring numerous connectors. They are set against a background of a green-tinted synchrotron tunnel and a stylized atomic model.

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