

# Science in art reflects the art of science

BY MARGARET HAWKINS  
*Galleries*

Scientists in Korea announced they had cloned a dog a few weeks ago and every news station, publication and Web site in the country featured it, some going into detailed explanations about DNA and reproductive technology and others probing the ongoing ethical debate over cloning. In the meantime, a blockbuster show at the Museum of Science and Industry has tourists waiting hours in line to view flayed, plasticized human bodies, and for the first time the U.S. Senate majority leader is not a lawyer or a career politician but an M.D. Biological science, what used to be the preserve of an educated few, has increasingly become the necessary and universal language through which we understand our daily lives.

So it is no wonder that biology has begun to seep into and overlap visual art, not least because it is so fascinating to look at. Two artists who explore the visual side of science are now showing work together at the Noyes Cultural Center in Evanston, an out-of-the-way exhibition space worth traveling to just to see the show.

**Yvette Kaiser Smith** is an anomalous artist by any description. She's a sculptor who works in monumental scale but one who treats her materials as a fabric artist would, though she uses industrial materials and not cloth or thread. Smith crochets spooled fiberglass roving, using standard crochet hooks she buys at craft stores to make wall-size sculpture that looks like giant doilies or whole communities of underwater creatures.

One bulges out of the wall like a monstrous 10-foot lace bra, others look like fishing nets or cobwebs woven by spiders on steroids.

Smith, who was born in Czechoslovakia and came here

## BEVERLY KEDZIOR AND YVETTE KAISER SMITH: 'NARRATIVES OF BIOLOGY AND IDENTITY'

- ◆ Through Sept. 6
- ◆ Noyes Cultural Center, 927 Noyes, Evanston
- ◆ (847) 491-0266

when she was 11 years old, references lacemaking traditions from her homeland in her enormous crocheted wall pieces. Ambitiously, she seeks to connect this homey craft to the more mysterious structures in nature. Smith's idea is that lacemaking is patternmaking and that the impulse to make patterns is biological, something nature does on every level from the microscopic, cellular level to the macroscopic, cosmic level. The linking together of pieces that she arduously executes and displays in big, gooey-looking webs (though they are hard and dry, they are coated with polyester resin to look squishy and wet) mirrors the way nature reproduces cells within organisms, and not always with perfect accuracy. Further, cells can also be units within communities. Smith's webbing represents the structural connections among humans in a group as well as cells in a single body.

Lacemaking is also a craft, a form of labor, the kind of time-intensive handiwork that used to be the mainstay of how humans sustained themselves. Farming, cooking, building, repairing, making — these are all symbolized by Smith's workmanlike productions, which bear the marks of the homemade. They are intentionally clunky and ir-

regular, full of woman-made mutations, managing to look both fragile and tough at once.

The paintings of **Beverly Kedzior** are equally organic, though their origin in nature is perhaps more evident. She grabs bits and pieces from visual domains as diverse as Saturday morning cartoons and botanical and medical textbooks to come up with compositions that wiggle and writhe with intestine-like shapes that are both riveting and sometimes borderline repulsive.

Kedzior, in her artist's statement, cites the Frankenstein nature of state-of-the-art science as the inspiration for her imagery. "In the name of advancement, organs are transplanted, genes are manipulated, embryos are frozen and animals are cloned," she says. "Fruits and vegetables are manipulated to produce hybrids that never before existed and nature never conceived. Our ability to create is overshadowed by our inability to control the outcomes."

She makes it sound bad but her paintings belie her disapproval — they are more a celebration of weird science than a condemnation of it.

It is interesting that both artists are at the same time attracted by the glorious proliferation of nature and horrified but intrigued by the creative possibilities of science. This seems inevitable. Scientists have stepped beyond the role of observer and assumed the mantle of creator and maker. This was once the exclusive domain of artists, who in response are learning to be scientists, too, or at least to pay very close attention to scientific developments. At this point, both Smith and Kedzior seem to be taking an aesthetic position on biology, making lovely objects that borrow from it visually and conceptually but not yet engaging more radically in the science itself.

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