

Can Scientific Photographs be Art?

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Description: Ironically, photography was invented by a scientist and an artist. Early on in this invention process it was the scientists who realized the importance of this new and novel process to document and to elucidate their scientific activities. The idea of having objects draw themselves on a plate with-out the aid of an artist hand is a concept that is foreign to us now but that's exactly how one of the early inventors, William Henry Fox Talbot described his Calotype process. Scientific photography- especially microscopic subjects, are very rarely held with the artistic respect as other areas of "Fine Art Photography". This is because the subject matter often seems alien to most and therefore the viewer lacks a common visual reference. For the individuals who have scientific training, these images are often appreciated with wonder and awe. If it's the aim of the fine arts to give insight or inspiration, then the scientific image is worthy of consideration as an artistic medium. The sciences and arts share a common creative aesthetic. For example, there is a beauty in a well-designed experiment and many leading scientists are active in the creative process, whether it is an elegant solution to a scientific problem or writing, painting, sculpture or music, the so-called creative arts. The arts and sciences also share a common aesthetic of discovery through observation. Photography is not only a system for illustrating science; in many ways it's also a method for doing science. This talk will examine how the context in which a photograph is viewed can have an effect on how the image is interpreted.

Norm Barker MS, MA, RBP, FRPS is a Professor of Pathology and Art as Applied to Medicine at the Johns Hopkins University, School of Medicine. He specializes in photomicroscopy and macro photography. He is a Fellow of The Royal Photographic Society in Great Britain and the Biocommunications Association. His photographs are in the permanent collections of more than forty museums including The Smithsonian, The George Eastman Museum, The American Museum of Natural History, The Nelson-Atkins Museum and The Science Museum in London. He has published 7 books and numerous scientific articles. His latest book collaboration "Hidden Beauty: Exploring The Aesthetics of Medical Science" shows the beauty of medicine and the human body and will be going on a museum tour from 2014-2020.