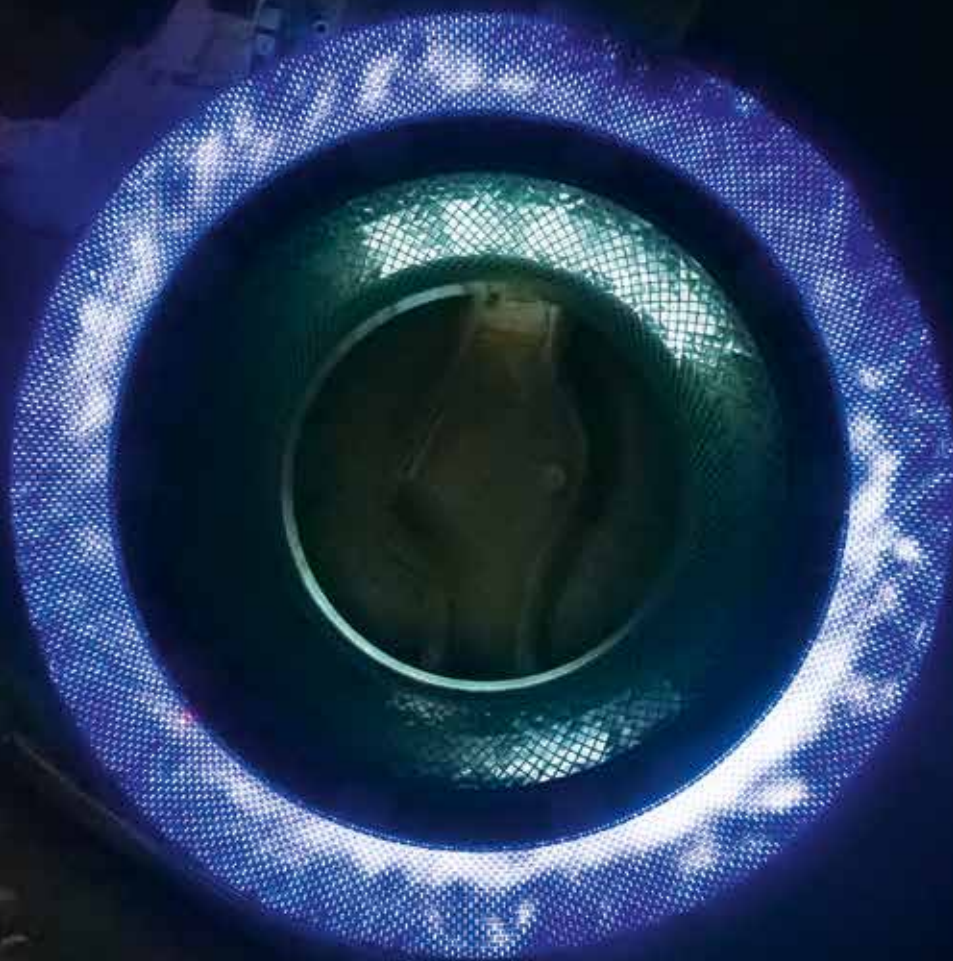


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Live.

The Novartis Pavillon: A fresh look at the pharmaceutical industry



 NOVARTIS

Science and sensibility

With its thousands of LEDs, the roof of the Novartis Pavillon will serve as a digital canvas for three visual artists who will be among the first to play with the media mesh structure developed by Basel-based iart. Their work has the potential to both capture and transcend the world of science and be an inspiration for researchers and art lovers alike.

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Daniel Canogar's approach to art is inextricably linked to individual experience, a realization he made early on in his career when he was still using photography as a medium for his artistic expression. "Being in the darkroom with the red light and seeing how with the help of chemicals I was able to make pictures come to life was more intense and important to me than the pictures I took," Canogar explained.

Rather than focusing on the output as most photographers would do, Canogar discovered that process trumps product and that experience is an artistic expression per se – an idea that is bringing art back to the beholder, centering it firmly on one's innermost self.

While starting out as a photographer, Canogar would later experiment with other visual media such as video and be among the first artists to experiment with LEDs to create dynamic works of art whose stunning beauty can only unfold through participation in the process. Unlike traditional paintings or photography with their static focus on a specific object or even video, which usually follows sequential logic, many of Canogar's works are living things which permanently change in color and form.

While onlookers may be fascinated by this interplay alone, the movements are dictated by scientific data. In one of his most recent installations, *Billow* from 2020, Canogar used data from Google's search engine and translated it into colorful moving displays that behave in seemingly magical patterns. "The idea is to give big data, which is mostly hidden and intangible, a form, thus allowing the viewer to have a sensual experience of our algorithmic reality," Canogar explained. "It gives the public an alternative experience of data, a phenomenon that we have little or no access to despite being such a dominant force of our times."

Digital stained glass

A similar idea also attracted Canogar when he participated in the competition for a digital artwork that would run on the LED-studded roof of the Novartis Pavillon. Alongside Swiss artist Esther Hunziker and British duo Semiconductor he will create an artwork that will run on the media mesh constructed by iart.



Daniel Canogar standing in front of one of his works at Galerie Wilde in Basel.

Inspired by the stained-glass windows that emerged during the Renaissance and were ubiquitously used to depict scenes from the Bible, which reigned supreme at the time, Canogar wrote in his exposé for the competition: “What are the fundamental themes of today that should be featured on the technologically updated stained-glass window at Novartis? I believe climate change is the defining subject of our times. And just like in the vaulted ceilings of planetariums and astronomical observatories of the past, we look upward, towards the skies, for clues to better understand our rapidly changing climate.”

Canogar, who lives and works in Madrid and in Los Angeles, is still working on the project together with members of his studio, which includes programmers who are developing the intricate algorithms. As part of the project, he will also connect with several key Novartis scientists and Chief Sustainability Officer Montse Montaner to discuss which data to use that will serve as the basis for his artwork.

A black-and-white dress

Esther Hunziker, an artist from Basel, is taking a different approach. A media artist, who is working with video, photo and the internet, Hunziker has centered much of her work on the development of a formal black-and-white visual language. For the Pavillon project she plans to create a video, which will later be translated onto the digital network and performed through the LEDs.

In the development of her work, she is using a bespoke tool from iart to see how the video will perform on the round roof and to test the effects. While this kind of work is novel for her, Hunziker has never shied away from experimenting with new technologies.

“I have a background as a dressmaker and fashion designer and later I studied video art, thus moving from the analogue to the digital, making interactive, multimedia art on the internet, where I could combine all the multimedia elements like sound, text, videos, graphics and animations in a non-linear way,” she said.

While many of her works are studies in black and white, such as the video and image series *Layer* from 2021, which shows an amorphous cell-like structure suspended in mid-air, Hunziker is also experimenting with colors where the effect can be startling, such as in *Projection*. As if taken out of an alien world, we can see a worm-like creature unfurling in space, creating a sensation of disgust and curiosity.

For her Pavillon project, Hunziker will stick within a black-and-white frame and dive into the worlds of the macro- and microcosm, focusing on playful forms rather than scientifically exact figures, partly also because of the low resolution. Although the Novartis Pavillon roof is an impressive piece of art and technology with some 14 000 inward- and outward-pointing LEDs that can create stunning visual effects, compared to a normal screen with its millions of pixels, the resolution is comparatively weak.

“Rather than being scientifically correct – which is not possible due to the limited resolution that will be provided by the LEDs – I have opted to

work with forms that move between the miniature world of cells and microbes and the macroworld of the universe to create an esthetic experience,” she explained. As she outlined in her exposé: “My aim is to explore, in an experimental and playful way, the hidden universe of the micro- and macroworlds that surround us, trying to reveal and connect some of its subtle and usually hidden narratives.”

Her experience as a dressmaker is set to shine through in her work: “For the digital media façade, I like the metaphor of a dress. A dress you wear for a specific time, for a specific occasion. A good tailor-made dress should always reinforce the personality and the confidence of the person. I learned how to tailor a dress for the human body. To tailor a dress for a building is a new exciting challenge.”

Lab work

Semiconductor is British artist duo Ruth Jarman and Joe Gerhardt, who take yet another approach to the unusual canvas. Used to working with scientists in the lab, both have been interested in science for many years, having started out with a science residency at the NASA Space Sciences Lab in Berkeley in 2006.

“We always wanted to work with scientists early on in our careers since we both have a great curiosity in the materiality of things, in science and technology and everything that is beyond human experience,” Jarman explained. “Although we aren’t scientists, we love to be around them and talk and see what they are up to and how they decipher our world.”

During their projects, they would usually install themselves in a lab and start conversations with scientists and infuse themselves with information to generate a clearer picture about the research conducted in a lab. “These are really interesting processes,” Gerhardt said. “We often encounter people who are very open and curious about what we are doing, while others seemingly ignore us. I remember that in one instance one of the scientists came to us at the end of our residency and asked us why we didn’t talk to him.”

Their work, which came out of the NASA collaboration, created huge interest in the art scene as their film, *Brilliant Noise*, with its grainy black-and-white images of the sun, which stood in sharp contrast to the polished images NASA uses to showcase its work to the public, gives viewers a raw experience of our home star.

This alienation effect seems to be what Semiconductor is after when they try to reach beyond our ordinary experience and find a language which breaks with our everyday perception and biases and offers viewers a new perspective on life.

For their work in the Pavillon, Semiconductor will start from “the generation of cell-like forms which evolve from visual noise to readable patterns and back again,” as they explained in their exposé. “The artwork explores self-organization as a contemporary research method applied in biomedical research for creating an understanding of the larger picture; how biological entities interact, evolve and function as a system.”

While Semiconductor would have loved to work together closely with lab scientists but were held back partly by the pandemic, they might visit the Novartis Campus in future, like when US media artist Lynn Hershman collaborated with a NIBR scientist to work on a biological sculpture, which will also be shown in the Pavillon.

Art and science

While art was always part and parcel of the culture at Novartis, this relationship was strengthened during the construction of the Campus around the turn of the millennium, when it was decided that art should become an integral part of the site and serve as inspiration for associates.

Besides a massive sculpture from Richard Serra, an LED installation by Jenny Holzer, the Campus also sports artworks by Dan Graham, Ólafur Eliasson, and has recently added a mural of 57.6 x 21.1 meters by Swiss artist Claudia Comte, among others.

“Art and science are both working on the edge of the known,” said Martin Furler Bassand, who heads the company’s extensive art collection and has orchestrated the contest for the Pavillon art project together with Sabine Himmelsbach, the director of the House of Electronic Art in Basel (HEK). “In many ways, they are similar as they force us to look at the world with new eyes and upend habitual ways of perceiving the everyday.”

Furler Bassand, who also helped organize the first participation of Novartis in the Art Basel Parcours show on the Novartis Campus during Art Basel in 2021, is convinced that this symbiotic relationship will continue to grow over time and that the works of Semiconductor, Hunziker and Canogar are set to drive substantial interest beyond Novartis.

“In future, you will be able to see the light on the Pavillon roof from many different parts of the city, and I hope that this will serve as an inspiration not only for our associates but for thousands of people in Basel who will be able to view it from afar,” Furler Bassand explained. “With the opening of the Basel Campus this may well start a new chapter for the city and for Novartis and underline the idea that art and science aren’t separate but are two sides of the same coin.”

Furthermore, Furler Bassand points out that art and science are set to converge even more over time and intensify their dialogue. “Today’s big societal challenges – from healthcare to environmental protection – are themes that both drive science and art, which will bring both closer together and increase their touchpoints in the years ahead.”

Against this background, Furler Bassand is already working on a presentation during the next Art Basel of 25 artworks created for Novartis by 25 emerging artists from around the world, who are centering their work around the Novartis values. And there is more to come ... 



At the pulse of science. The artist duo Semiconductor.