The 2008 AEIMS (Association Européenne des Illustrateurs Médicaux et Scientifiques) Congress took place over October 16th to 18th 2008 at the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands. This year’s theme was ‘Scientific Illustration as a Passion’, and there was a wide variety of speakers presenting what it is that makes them passionate about their work. Delegates had travelled from all over Europe to attend this year’s conference and represented a broad range of careers including, medical/anatomical art, natural history/botanical illustration, anaplastology/prosthetics and archaeological/palaeontological reconstruction.

The conference opened on the Thursday with a workshop in 3D computer modelling and an exhibition of art work by members and students alike. The University of Maastricht runs a two year masters programme in Scientific Illustration and there was the opportunity to look around the course and talk to the students about their studies.

The conference proper got underway on the Friday morning with a talk by Jan de Cubber entitled, ‘Closing the Circle’, where advanced computer technology and the production of cranio-facial epitheses meet’. Jan founded the Centre for Cranio-facial Epithetics, active in both Belgium and The Netherlands, producing around 140 facial epitheses each year. His talk discussed the use of surface scanners, CT data and 3D technology in allowing him to work on his patients in a virtual environment. He was followed by Phil Dobree, director of Jellyfish Pictures, who talked about how he and his company had gone about producing the BBC documentary ‘Fight for Life’ last year. Fight for Life told the story from the inside as well as out, as real individuals fought to overcome life threatening injury and illness. Phil discussed how they completed the work and the challenges that they met in making the inside of the human body blend seamlessly with shot footage from the outside.

After the AGM the afternoon session began with Belgian scientific illustrator/sculptor Jaap te Kiefte talking about, ‘The making of “Willem-the-rat”’. Jaap had graduated from the Postgraduate Course in Scientific Illustration in Maastricht in 2005 by making a 3D model of the urogenital system of a male laboratory rat. The model was based on 23,700 transverse sections of a rat. A selection of these sections was used to create a graphic 3D-reconstruction and a stereo-lithographic prototype. As a result of his research the Microsurgical Developments Foundation gave him the opportunity to develop a prototype of the complete rat. At the end of this year, he anticipates that the model, which is 4x lifesize, will be available.

The last talk of the day was given by Margot Cooper, former president of AEIMS and owner of the Bristol based medical modelling company, ‘Limbs and Things’. Her talk focused on the changing approaches toward the development and the production of models and simulators for the training of ‘hands-on’ skills in medicine. She discussed...
the transformation from traditional craft based solutions, to the incorporation of computer aided design. She stressed however, that there are still features of anatomy which are beyond the capability of the computer to adequately model, and which must be addressed by the sculptor.

The conference dinner was held that evening in one of Maastricht’s many wonderful restaurants. Entertainment came in the form of a mime artist who both guided us to the restaurant and as well as providing us with after-dinner amusement.

The Saturday morning began with a series of presentations by representatives from the ‘Schools of Europe’, i.e. those Universities and Colleges with Scientific Illustration courses. There are not many such courses worldwide and I was there to promote the new MSc’s in Medical and Forensic Art here at the University of Dundee. Also represented was the Masters Programme in Scientific Illustration at the University of Maastricht and le Diplôme Supérieur des Arts Appliqués in Illustration Médicale et Scientifique at École Estienne in Paris. Following this, several of the students from the Maastricht programme gave short presentations on their final research projects. There was a good range of subjects, including the depiction of Spina Bifida, its various forms and how to communicate the aetiology and treatment options to parents.

We were then lucky enough to hear a talk by Berlin based medical artist Karl Wesker. Karl produced over 3000 new illustrations for the Thieme Atlas of Human Anatomy ‘Prometheus’. Although they look in many ways like traditional water colour illustrations, they were in fact all created entirely with digital media, mostly through using Adobe Photoshop with a Wacom tablet. He talked through some of his thoughts on digital illustration compared to traditional methods.

The final talk of the morning came from Jan-Maarten Luursema, PhD Student at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. After working as a medical artist for a number of years, he started to be increasingly interested in the psychological aspects of medical learning and surgical training. He researched the use of Virtual Reality training technology in these fields and gave an overview of this research, as well as discussing the opportunities and challenges that this technology represents for medical artists.

The afternoon session began with a talk by Aart Walen of Creatures & Features. Aart is the leading dinosaur modeller in Europe. His work usually involves the replication of enormous dinosaur skeletons and his casts can be seen in museums all over the world. He has also been involved in reconstruction work, working with palaeontologists to re-create Rhabdodon, a small plant eating dinosaur that was discovered in Romania, “muscle” by “muscle” from the skeleton. The afternoon session continued with an on-screen workshop on Adobe Illustrator, followed by a talk on the role of natural history illustration in a museum context.

The conference concluded at the end of Saturday with everyone heading home inspired and I think passionate about their roles in scientific illustration.

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