



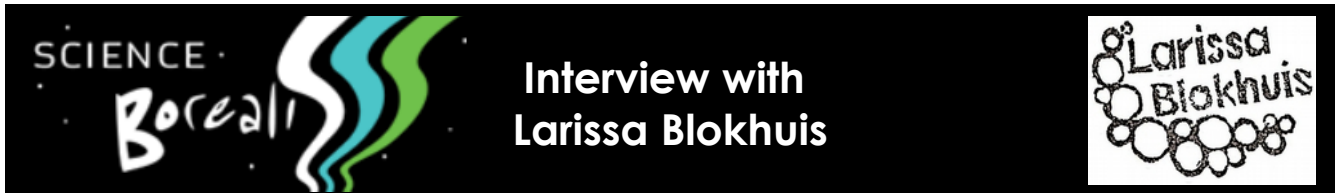
Interview conducted by **Katrina Vera Wong** and **Raymond Nakamura**, as research for "How to look at (and appreciate) SciArt," published 8 April 2019.  
<https://blog.scienceborealis.ca/how-to-look-at-and-appreciate-sciart/>

In Huisje, you structure a discussion around an art critic's rubric for criticizing art (correct me if I'm wrong). Tell us how you decided on following that particular set of instructions. Do you think it would be sufficient for criticizing/evaluating sciart, or should something be changed or added to it?

Using that rubric was the result of a very short session of internet search. In 2014, I hosted a critiquing workshop as part of a 2-artist exhibition I had at Leigh Square Community Arts Village. In terms of the amount of space I had to fill, I had not previously taken on such a big exhibition. Most of my focus was on creating the work, and I selected a critique for my community engagement because I figured I could find a list of steps online by searching 'steps to critique art.' I had regular critique experience throughout four years of art school (AUA), and was familiar with the basic process. When I read Edmund Feldman's 4 Steps to Critiquing Artwork, it was exactly what I was looking for, so I went with it. For that workshop, we just used the form without any additional critique process.

To use the form in 2017 for Huisje (how-sh-ye), I thought about the structure of critique beyond the form. Participants look at the artwork first, critique using the form, read the artist statement, critique again, and then the artist responds and enters the conversation. I think this mimics the way people look at art on their own time, only reading the artist statement if the work is compelling visually. It also allows the artist to hear how the different levels of information affect the interpretation of their work. Having a form was convenient, but the overall structure was what I focused on. There was a bit of awkward wording in the original, which was geared towards 2D art. Hope Forstenzer, a friend and sculptor who attended the first ever Huisje, offered to make a few alterations so that it would fit my purpose a little better in terms of wording.

A sciartist might intend to present their work to a very specific audience, or be looking for high-level feedback on the accuracy of their interpretation of scientific concepts. In that case, an artist can be quite selective in who they invite to participate. The first step of the critique form is for viewers to make direct observations about what they are seeing, and how people see an object is influenced by their experiences. If the artist invited a group of scientists to use the critiquing form to give feedback, I think the conversation would naturally turn to scientific elements in the work right from the first step. Step 3 is Interpretation, where viewers are asked to address the theme and



meaning of the work. The existing questions should point the viewers toward recognising any scientific content, if that content is expressed effectively.

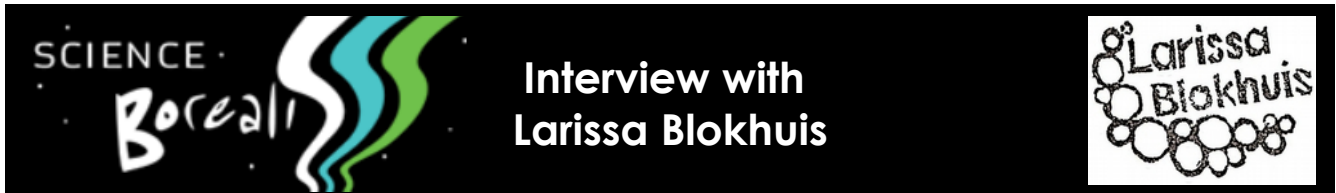
For a group of general public participants, specific questions about science may be outside their range of knowledge, and could create a barrier for engagement. When I'm leading a critique, I ask questions based on what participants have already discussed, whether I'm asking for further clarification, or asking about something I feel hasn't been addressed yet. If the artist doesn't hear that viewers are making a connection to science, then it may not be communicated clearly by the work, or it may not be important to the viewers. It can be emotionally challenging as an artist to not get the desired feedback, but that is an opportunity for the artist to learn and to recalibrate. Questions that direct the viewer too much can interfere with that process.

The critique form is a tool I use for my overall critique process, and part of that process is Q/A with the artist at the end. This is where the artist answers questions, but also has the opportunity to ask questions of the participants. This is the ideal point for the artist to seek specific feedback about scientific accuracy. For the part of the critique where I'm using the form, the artist must only listen so that they don't influence the critique. The Q/A is where the artist can have the sort of in-depth discussion needed to clarify anything that might be off in their interpretation of the science being expressed.

### What is the value of criticizing/evaluating sciart?

One of the pillars of the science - art spectrum is critical thinking. Using a formal critique method helps individuals organise their thoughts around a piece of artwork in order to think critically. In my experience, people who don't engage regularly with art and science can feel too intimidated to engage fully with the concepts presented. By breaking critique down into a few simple steps, it makes the process accessible. When speaking with art-lovers at exhibitions, I have often observed a lack of confidence in their interpretations. People want to talk about art, but they don't want to get it 'wrong.' Part of being a good critique leader is to empower participants to feel like their contribution is valid. With sciart, I believe this feeling can transfer to a recognition that independently learning about science is also valid.

Discussing sciart helps strengthen the sciart community, and creates a space where new ideas can percolate. Science is cultural; what questions are asked, how they are asked, how results are interpreted, and what is funded are all influenced by the culture around the scientist. Participation in the sciart community opens another avenue for scientists and artists to think creatively about what we need to learn, and how we need



to move forward. Critique is a great setting to start new discussions.

Is there something about sciart (vs art) you think discussion participants would respond to?

Including scientific concepts in an artwork gives participants another point of connection to the work. For me, what differentiates between art and hobby is the intention to publicly show what you made. Artists can make work that is deeply personal, but for the public to respond, there has to be a connection to something outside of the artist. Creating sciart helps ensure there is a connection to the realities of others.

Scientific papers can seem dry to the public working outside of the field of study, but they can also contain vital information. I think people are naturally curious, they want to learn, and they want to find information that is presented in a meaningful way. Creativity is necessary for the process of scientific discovery, and should also be used when presenting the results of those discoveries. Sciart enlivens seemingly dry topics and allows the public to see how truly fascinating science is when the method of presentation is humanised through art.

What do you hope sciart inspires?

I hope that sciart inspires everyone to engage with the process of discovery, and to think about the role of science and art in their lives. Artists and scientists are motivated by many of the same things: a desire to learn, to interpret and share what we've learned, and hopefully to see the result of improved quality of life for the public. Sciart can help with finding delight and joy in learning, and is well positioned to help people see new connections and possibilities.

Academically, science and art are still artificially separated in most institutions, and this does a disservice to both fields. In my experience, focusing too intently on one thing can cause stagnation, because you forgo outside influence and input. Sciart pushes back against the inaccessibility and entrenched attitudes created by an insular approach. Reuniting science and art gives curious people the opportunity to see themselves wherever they belong on the sci-art spectrum, and I hope that inspires them to create their best work.