National Center for Human Genome Research, he has remained at the forefront of research and policy-making in genetics and molecular biology.

Maurice Hugh Frederick Wilkins has been less publicly prominent than Watson since 1953. In a way this is surprising, given that as well as his work on the structure of DNA he was also involved with the development of the nuclear bomb — an innovation that might even dwarf the profile of the double helix in the public's perception of science in the twentieth century. Wilkins continues to teach and pursue his interest in social responsibility in science, and, at the age of 86, remains an active staff member at King's College, London.

Nick Campbell

References and links

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50TH ANNIVERSARY

The art of the helix

The beauty of the DNA double helix, together with the social and ethical issues that developments in genetics have raised, are the source of inspiration for many artists. The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the DNA structure has catalysed the organization of several art exhibitions with the theme of genetics.

Art can help scientists to communicate the advances that have been made in genetics, and to engage the public in debate about topics such as cloning, genetic modification and gene patenting. For example, an exhibition on the impact of the Human Genome Project — 'How Human: Life in the Post-Genome Era' (International Center of Photography, New York, 28 February–25 May) — that includes works by more than 30 artists and photographers, will reach more people than would ever visit the labs that are responsible for sequencing the human genome.

New York hosts a number of other exhibitions, including 'Genetic Expressions: Art after DNA' (Hecksher Museum of Art, Huntington, 28 June–7 September) and 'From Code to Commodity: Genetics and Visual Art' (The New York Academy of Sciences; until 11 April). The Graduate Center Art Gallery in New York also marks the anniversary of Watson and Crick's discovery with an exhibition in April entitled 'Genomic Issue(s): Art and Science'.

In February and March, the Universal Concepts Unlimited Gallery, New York, presented the work of five female artists in 'Women in Science: Genomically Yours' — an exhibition that was dedicated to Rosalind Franklin, who is also the subject of a play that was shown at the City University of New York in March. Artwork from The Santa Barbara Museum of Art's exhibition 'PhotoGENEsis: Opus 2', which aims to provide an artist's response to the genetic information age, was also exhibited in New York in February, coinciding with the Watson and Crick celebrations.

Outside New York, the 'Paradise Now' exhibition, which is the product of collaborations between artists and scientists, can be seen at the Tulane Museum, New Orleans (until May) and the McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas (June to July). The works presented in this exhibition, including an interesting example of how genetics can be used to develop technologies that are useful to the artist, can also be seen at the Paradise Now web site. Among the exhibitors are Ackroyd and Harvey, who use grass to produce wonderful, but short-lived, images. Photographic negatives are laid on grass and, over time, an image develops as the level of green photosynthetic pigments in the grass alters in response to the amount of light penetrating the negative. Geneticists at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Wales (UK) have produced a genetically modified 'stay-green' rye-grass that enables the artists to dry their grass pictures, so that they last for longer.

Image by Luisa Estanislao 2002

At the University of Cambridge (UK) — a short distance from where Watson and Crick solved the structure of DNA — the Whipple Museum of the History of Science will host the 'Representations of the Double Helix' exhibition throughout the year.

As well as being a source of enjoyment and discussion for scientists, artists and members of the public, these exhibitions might promote links between scientists and artists. Such links can only improve the ability of scientists to communicate their research and explore the ethical implications of their work.

Catherine Baxter

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WEB SITES

Genomic Art:
http://www.geneart.org/genehome.htm

Paradise Now:
http://www.geneart.org/pn-home.htm