Selling point: David Goodsell

Thomas Söderqvist

The covers of most major scientific journals are plastered with beautiful, realistic pictures taken with the latest advances in microscope technology—and this month's *Nature Medicine* is no exception. But few of these images have the qualities of David Goodsell's works of art.

Goodsell, 48, based at the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California, creates hyperrealist paintings that render the molecular world not as an abstract, diagrammatical space as we know it from biochemistry textbooks, but as a teeming, chaotic, dense and beautiful mess. They are simple, yet they portray the complexity and distinct organization of subcellular life in a way that no 'real image' can. For example, Goodsell's pseudocolor depiction of HIV—shown here in cross-section and incorporating all current information from structural biology and electron microscopy—gives a much-maligned pathogen a unique artistic quality.

Reminiscent of those of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and the Austrian symbolist Gustav Klimt, the hybrid ornamental-organic style of this and Goodsell's other paintings give the molecular world a retro feel, bringing the cell and its contents closer to us and our lives. The challenge of putting biomedicine on display in museums and engaging the public at large is to make connections between the abstract visualizations of the molecular world and the lived existence of the postgenomic individual. It's one of Goodsell's great contributions that he offers a way to bridge this gulf.

Thomas Söderqvist is a professor in history of medicine and director of the Medical Museion at the University of Copenhagen, which recently commissioned Goodsell to paint an insulin receptor motif for a forthcoming exhibition on the history of metabolic research.