

Science and Engineering Visualization Challenge

Some of science's most powerful statements are not made in words. From the diagrams of DaVinci to Hooke's microscopic bestiary, the beaks of Darwin's finches, Rosalind Franklin's x-rays or the latest photographic marvels retrieved from the remotest galactic outback, visualization of research has a long and literally illustrious history. To illustrate is, etymologically and actually, to enlighten.

You can do science without graphics. But it's very difficult to communicate it in the absence of pictures. Indeed, some insights can only be made widely comprehensible as images. How many people would have heard of fractal geometry or the double helix or solar flares or synaptic morphology or the cosmic microwave background, if they had been described solely in words?

To the general public, whose support sustains the global research enterprise, these and scores of other indispensable concepts exist chiefly as images. They become part of the essential iconic lexicon. And they serve as a source of excitement and motivation for the next generation of researchers.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) and Science created the Science and Engineering Visualization Challenge to celebrate that grand tradition—and to encourage its continued growth. In a world where science literacy is dismayingly rare, illustrations provide the most immediate and influential connection between scientists and other citizens, and the best hope for nurturing popular interest. Indeed, they are now a necessity for public understanding of research developments: In an increasingly graphics-oriented culture, where people acquire the majority of their news from TV and the World Wide Web, a story without a vivid and intriguing image is often no story at all.

We urge you and your colleagues to contribute to the next competition and to join us in congratulating the winners.

Judges appointed by the National Science Foundation and the journal Science will select winners in each of five categories: photographs, illustrations, informational graphics, interactive media and non-interactive media. The winners will be published in a special section of the Sept. 26, 2008 issue of the journal Science and Science Online and on the NSF Web site. One of the winning entries will be on the front cover of Science. In addition, each finalist will receive a free, one-year print and on-line subscription to the journal Science and a certificate of appreciation.

Entries for 2008 are being solicited now. We urge all researchers and science communicators to participate in this unique and inspiring competition.

http://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/scivis/