Djerassi Resident Artists Program provides monthlong residencies in a wild and remote environment. In its 40 years, more than 2,469 artists and scientists have been encouraged to take risks, pursue their individual practices and explore new collaborations. There is no work product requirement. But in the hands of the passionate creator, idle time is never really idle.

Five years ago, the Djerassi program created a partnership with Leonardo/ISAST, a relationship that now includes support from the National Endowment for the Arts [1], National Academies Keck Futures Initiative (NAKFI) and private donors [2]. This made perfect sense for us. The late Carl Djerassi, cofounder of the Program and eminent scientist and playwright, had initiated several art/science projects including plays, operas and books in the Program’s early days. Formalizing a science/art residency was the next logical step.

Selected from more than 200 applicants and nominees, 11 experimental souls [3] arrived as strangers in June and left as friends in July. They included an astrophysicist, a bioengineer, writers, a chemist, visual artists and media artists. Renaissance men and women, all. They came from the east and west coasts of the United States, from England, Switzerland and Chile. All new relationships are tentative, but 30 days turned tentative into tenacious. The residents performed, read and created for each other. They interviewed a bestselling science fiction author for inspiration for their own sci-fi novel. They created ceramic sculptures in riverbeds and performed cello and bass concerts on massive ancient redwood stumps. I have no doubt they and their predecessors are changing the world in seen and unseen ways.

Please enjoy this glimpse into the creative process experienced on our mountaintop retreat. Find the residents’ contemporaneous blogs [4] and share them. I particularly hope those of you who educate young scientists and artists can use the participants’ experiences to break down the either/or of scientific and artistic disciplines. Let’s bend the rules of the academy to reward rather than pigeonhole big thinkers. Discoveries that change the world are often the work of the brave people working on the edges.

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References and Notes

1. The project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which allows us to document and create presentations about the residency. See www.leonardo.info/artist-scientist-residencies/2018 for the complete SDM blog postings along with other documentation of the residency.

2. Fellowships in 2018 were provided by the John D. and Susan P. Diekman Fellowship, the James and Suzanne McElwee Annual Family Fellowship, the Anne and Rodney Pearlman Fellowship, the Gerald Oshita Memorial Fellowship from the Phaedrus Foundation and the Steve Wilson Fellowship made possible by generative systems artist Sonia Sheridan.

3. The participating artists and scientists were: Barbara H. Berrie, chemist (Washington, DC); Alan Bogana, visual artist (Geneva, Switzerland); Sarah Rosalena Brady, media artist (Los Angeles, CA); Judith Dancoff, writer (Los Angeles, CA); David S. Goodsell, biologist (San Diego, CA); Eleanor Holmes (pen name Eliot North), writer (Tyne and Wear, U.K.); Amy Landesberg, media artist (Decatur, GA); Dasha Lavrennikov, dance artist/researcher (Barcelona, Spain); Hideo Mabuchi, physicist (Menlo Park, CA); Sebastián Pérez, astrophysicist/musician (Santiago, Chile); Thomas Skalak, scientist (Bainbridge Island, WA); and Anya Yermakova, composer/media artist (Cambridge, MA).

See Ref. [1].