



Janet Echelman's ephemeral art

Audrey Niffenegger
explores the paranormal

In the kitchen with
Chef Marcela Valladolid

“Mother’s Guilty Pleasure”

The National Medal of Science



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President Barack Obama bestows the National Medal of Science on Dr. Joanna Fowler, Dr. Elaine Fuchs and Dr. JoAnne Stubbe.

Women shine at National Medal of Science Awards

Most people would fall asleep just reading the job descriptions of three women who recently won the National Medal of Science, one of the nation's most coveted awards. As unintelligible as their work might seem to the scientifically-challenged souls making up 99.9 percent of Earth's population, synthesizing medical imaging compounds and establishing the mechanisms of ribonucleotide reductases are top priorities in improving the health and life expectancies of the average American.

Leading the way for scientists, engineers, mathematicians and computer wizards across the globe are a handful of women and men who consistently push the limits of endurance, intelligence and luck to find new ways of looking at old problems. The National Medal of Science recognizes those firebrands who have made outstanding, lifetime contributions to those aforementioned fields.

"This award is both humbling and gratifying," Dr. Joanna Fowler said after the reception ceremony at the White House. "It recognizes the importance of chemistry and imaging in advancing our knowledge of the human brain, particularly as it is affected by drugs, disease and aging." Fowler is a senior chemist and director at the Radiotracer Chemistry, Instrumentation and Biological Imaging at the U.S. Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Fowler's work on medical imaging has been a major contribution to understanding addiction, studying neurological and psychiatric diseases and to diagnosing cancer. In her most recent work, she has focused on changes in brain circuits that are disrupted during drug addiction. Her studies shed light on why certain drugs are so powerfully addictive. Since addiction is directly related to more tangible problems found in nearly all communities — domestic violence, highway fatalities, homelessness and crime — Fowler's research is providing critical information that might help solve issues that most everyone can understand.

Dr. Elaine Fuchs is the Rebecca C. Lancefield Professor and head of the Laboratory of Mammalian Cell Biology and

Development at Rockefeller University. Fuchs earned her award for the pioneering use of cell biology and molecular genetics in mice to understand inherited diseases in humans, and she has made contributions that further the understanding of skin disorders, including cancer.

Fuchs' most recent research explores skin and hair—two very distinct structures that develop from the same skin stem cell. By unraveling the biology of skin stem cells, she hopes to answer a question that has intrigued her for more than two decades: How does a skin stem cell decide to become skin or hair?

Understanding skin stem cells' normal behavior is also helping Fuchs learn what happens when their growth goes awry. Her studies have already uncovered the genetic basis of blistering skin diseases and clues to the way skin cancers and inflammatory skin disorders develop. Fuchs' work has also illuminated how cells rejuvenate tissues throughout life and repair them after injury.

MIT biochemist JoAnne Stubbe received her National Medal of Science for her contribution to understanding DNA replication and repair. "It's a little overwhelming, and a great honor," said Stubbe, the Novartis Professor of Chemistry and a professor of biology. "For the first time, everybody in my family is excited about what I do." Well, there's a clue to where this story is going.

Stubbe's work over the past four decades has had profound impacts on fields ranging from cancer drug development to synthesis of biodegradable plastics. One of her major accomplishments is unraveling the mechanism of ribonucleotide reductases, which play a key role in converting nucleotides to deoxynucleotides — thereby allowing DNA to be copied and repaired. Stubbe also discovered the structure and function of bleomycin, an antibiotic used as a cancer drug. She is now working with MIT biology professor Anthony Sinskey to use bacterial enzymes to produce biodegradable thermoplastics, a potential alternative to traditional oil-based plastics.

Catching her breath

Janet Echelman's sculptures breathe, but not in the imagined way that skillfully cut statuary looks like it could inhale a great lungful and leap from its pedestal.

Echelman's artwork is ephemeral. Her pieces catch the Earth's breath and incorporate it as part of a diaphanous, billowing spectacle.

She creates colossal lacy sculptures of net that float far overhead, and morph constantly as Mother Nature tickles them with wind, sprinkles them with snow and bejewels them with ice. Each of the Earth's sighs, gasps, pants and puffs influences the shape and sway of the structure. Echelman cannot choreograph the wind, but she creates a show with its dance.

"We don't think of it this way, but air is a fluid, just like water," according to Echelman. "There are always patterns moving in the air, and though they are invisible to the human eye, we can show them. My work enables us to see the fluid nature of air."

In the gloaming when night creeps in, her concoctions change still further, as their color takes flight with carefully calculated lighting. It's more than a decade since she's considered herself a painter, but with her sculptures, Echelman paints the night sky with otherworldly pigments.

How is it that an artist shifts from canvas to recyclable, high-tenacity, polyester-braided twine netting?

"It was during a trip to India in 1997 as a Fulbright Senior Lecturer in Painting," she says. "I had shipped paints, but as the deadline for my show approached and my paints didn't, I realized I had a problem. In the meantime, every afternoon I would walk to the beach for a swim and watch the fishermen, fascinated by the way they folded their lengths of net into large volumes. It suddenly dawned on me that this was a different way to approach volume, and I was reborn a sculptor."

Today the most noted of her sculptures are flights of engineering fancy that levitate at the waterfront plaza

"Vanderwarker" by Janet Echelman



"Valentine Berechet" by Janet Echelman

in Porto, Portugal, and hover above Civic Space Park in Phoenix, Ariz.

At 160 feet by 300 feet by 240 feet and just yards from the sand, "She Changes" is a great soft red and white dish that greets the sea from the center of a highway roundabout, where Porto's residents and tourists can appreciate it from every angle. Suspended from three poles, its wind dance belies its true heft: "She" weighs more than 20 tons, yet is engineered to withstand hurricane-force winds.

Five thousand miles away and 100 feet in the air, "Her Secret Is Patience" throws shifting shadow drawings on the ground. It is designed to endure the Arizona desert's 90-mile-per-hour monsoon winds, and like an enormous floating desert bloom, it will maintain its vibrant beauty in the face of the incessantly pounding sun.

The team of engineers, complicated computer calculations, machine-loomed and hand-knotting required for each design and installation are quite simply mind-boggling.

And it continues. Echelman recently installed "Water Sky Garden," a work that features soaring red net lanterns, at the Richmond Olympic Oval, an official venue for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games.

With three new commissions under way in the States, she barely has time to catch her own breath. Her newest creations will lift insights and eyes at the United States Courthouse in Jefferson City, Mo.; at the Matthew Knight Arena taking shape in Eugene, Ore.; and at the new roost for Virgin America airline, a regenerated Terminal 2 at San Francisco Airport.

For more information on Echelman and her lofty fabrications, please visit www.echelman.com.



"Family Play, Act 1" by Roslyn Rose

A palette of times and places

Women's History Month, which is observed every year during March, continues to increase consciousness and knowledge of the contributions of both notable and ordinary women. Following in this tradition of recognition, this month's edition of *Unity* pays homage to three unique women artists.

In the stories that follow, Roslyn Rose, Bettie Eubanks and Chris Osborne make note of the symbolism surrounding their work and how the finished pieces relate to them as women. These masterpieces show a unique blend of history and remembrances, a snapshot of what each loves about being an artist and a woman.

Roslyn Rose

Roslyn Rose was born in New Jersey and has lived in Hudson County for the last 25 years. She has studied art at Rutgers University, the Pratt Institute and Skidmore College.

Rose is well known for her etchings and assemblages, but recently she has concentrated on using digital manipulation to create beautiful works of photographic montage, obviously with a high degree of success.

"Integrating early 20th-century

statement is apparent in *Unity's* cover art, "Generations," which depicts three generations of strong women searching for different lifestyles. The montage uses portraits from Old English pictures fused with various views of renovated American barns. As part of a photographic montage trio, Rose's artwork, "Family Play, Act 1," tells "a story of a woman's search for individuality within a family structure" using pictures of lavish interiors.

Rose's creativity is "inspired by female myths and histories that connect modern individuals with the past," she says. Her work continues "to represent art as an expression and interpretation of those facts and legends."

Bettie Eubanks

Bettie Eubanks is best known for her passionate expressions of color that are inspired by her garden in Martha's Vineyard or her trips to the Florida wetlands. She is a graduate of



"Buddy Bolden's Dream" by Chris Osborne

portraits with contemporary images suggests intimate moments in time and places," Rose remarks.

A stunning display of this



"Silver Lining," "Morning" and "Morning Sail" by Bettie Eubanks

the Newark School of Fine Arts and throughout her lifetime has received numerous awards and recognition for her artwork. Eubanks also shares her love of art through the tireless pursuit of volunteer service projects.

Eubanks' featured works are mixed media that use layers of color to create texture. The piece "Silver Lining" is the essence of the phrase "more than meets the eye." A silver illumination of light can be seen underneath the blue with the artist's hope that viewers will be inspired to seek the silver linings in their own lives. "Morning Sail" embodies the solitude and simplicity of a lone sailor, evoking peace and reflection. The orange vessels in "Morning" hold "a place in time for reflection in the morning sunlight," Eubanks explains.

Eubanks encourages her viewers to "take a voyage within the subject." She states, "I believe that art is an awakening ... it stills the heart and brings joy to the soul. My paintings are my personal response to the sisterhood of women."

Chris Osborne

Raised in New Milford, Conn., Chris Osborne received her BA in art from Bard College and an MFA in printmaking from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Osborne says key elements in American culture that inspire her

to the depth of her work. In "Buddy Bolden's Dream," a vibrant tribute to the legendary jazz coronet player, the young boy admiring the horn is Louis Armstrong. The title suggests Bolden would have enjoyed posing with a grand Cadillac even though he could not afford one.

"Emma in New Milford" is in honor of Osborne's mother.

The library and town hall in which her mother worked, as well as her father as a young soldier, appear in the background. The combination of themes and endearments speaks volumes in this personal and sentimental piece.

Some viewers are surprised that a woman created the Chris Osborne collection because "the focus on the automobile tends to lean towards a stereotype," the artist notes.

"I read biographies of my subjects and ponder a wider view of their life and personality. I think this sensitivity may reflect my perspective as a woman," says Osborne, and looking carefully at her work, many of us may agree.



"Emma in New Milford" by Roslyn Rose

are the American automobile, the Hollywood Golden Age and her love for jazz and blues. Her addition of people and buildings in the backdrop lend

Mother's guilty pleasure

by Betty Laster, published poet and author of "The Parson's Kids"

Let's face it — 21st-century hoopla aside, the kitchen is still a place where women generally wear the pants. And why not? Today's "modern" woman is not so far removed from mothers and grandmothers who could ring a chicken's neck or bake an apple pie blindfolded. As a woman who has enjoyed more than a few decades tinkering with recipes and kitchen gadgetry, I have my own mother to



My mother, center, cooked many meals over the course of her 95-year life and shared with me the secrets of the kitchen. She was born in 1907, my dad in 1877, just 12 years after the Civil War. No need to point him out. Your humble writer is on the left.

never ended in Mother's mind, or at least, the thought that another one was imminent. She had lived it, survived it, but never forgot it. So shortcuts and substitutions seemed to be her motto in her Southern kitchen. Being a chef was not her ambition. Her goal was to provide a family of six with nutritious meals as inexpensively as possible. May I say she was frugal? OK, so she was seriously frugal. Allow me to illustrate.

In my teen years, Ivory Soap was popular for the bath, but as with other bar soaps, it was rendered useless when the bar approached the thickness of a shoehorn. Did she trash the unusable portion? Nay, nay. She shredded it in her trusty Salad Master shredder and used the pretty little white strands for the laundry. This was fully accepted by those of us who knew her procedure. However, once an older sister came home for a visit, saw the dish of shredded soap on the counter and proceeded to steal a fistful of shredded "coconut." The result of that mistake does not require a written description.

Mother was the first person to my knowledge to make strawberry dumplings. From the wild strawberries I picked, she added a slight amount of sugar, cooked them lightly and added thin strands of biscuit dough and voila! For a nominal cost and a minimum of time, we had a delicious but simple dessert for dinner usually topped with a dollop of soft butter. If a recipe called for ingredients she considered expensive, she avoided it.

However, there is one dessert on which she never skimped, nor would she substitute less-expensive ingredients. She had found a rather bland recipe for a prune cake and by tweaking it a bit, she developed a masterpiece and called it Old-Fashioned Prune Cake. What an absolute culinary delight! The combination of spices, fruit, and light and easy glaze topping made it a winner. Try it and enjoy the flavor of a time when things were so much simpler, but every bit as fulfilling.

thank for inspiring my love for cooking.

She was born more than a hundred years ago, but I remember vividly my childhood days learning tips and tricks from her that I still use today preparing meals for my children and my grandchildren.

My mother was born in 1907, and she was profoundly influenced by the Great Depression. You see, the Depression

Old-Fashioned Prune Cake

For the cake

- 1 cup Wesson Oil
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups unbleached plain flour
- 2 teaspoons each of ground cloves, cinnamon, allspice and nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon soda
- 1 cup chopped black walnuts
- 1 cup prunes cooked, drained, pitted and chopped

For the glaze

- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons corn syrup
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon soda
- ½ cup buttermilk

To make the cake, mix well the oil, sugar and eggs in a large bowl. Sift together flour, salt and all spices. Mix buttermilk and soda. Add dry ingredients alternately with buttermilk to oil, sugar and egg mixture, then add prunes and nuts.

Bake 1 hour at 350 degrees in a tube or Bundt pan that has been greased and floured.

While the cake is in the oven, prepare the glaze by mixing the buttermilk and soda in a 2-quart pot, then mix together the remaining glaze ingredients and cook over medium heat 15 to 20 minutes.

Remove the cake when it is finished cooking and cover it with the glaze while both are still warm.



Light and lively

Two years after signing a contract with a major publishing house, Chef Marcela Valladolid's first cookbook made its way to the masses. "Fresh Mexico" has been in my head since I was 19 years old and worked as a recipe stylist for Bon Appetit magazine," Valladolid notes on her Web site, www.chefmarcela.com.

"Fresh Mexico: 100 Simple Recipes for True Mexican Flavor" is just one of Valladolid's many endeavors, and it's a safe bet that this advocate for healthy Mexican meals hasn't had much time to savor her literary accomplishment.



Chef Marcela Valladolid's latest cookbook

From a culinary standpoint, though, Valladolid's greatest achievement to date is her first cooking show for the general market. She taped one episode in late 2009. "I still can't believe it," Valladolid blogs on her Web site. She's not at liberty to say much about the new show or the episode that's been taped, except that viewers can expect to see her prepare Roasted Beet Salad with Jalapeno Chile Oil, Arugula and Gorgonzola.

While growing up in Guadalajara, Valladolid was surrounded by family members enamored of good food and adventurous cooking. Her grandfather taught her to cook and her namesake aunt opened one of the first cooking schools in Baja California, where Valladolid was a teenage teaching assistant.

Valladolid is a proponent of using the freshest, most organic and healthiest ingredients in her dishes, whether they're prepared at home or at work.

"Mexicans feel that I need to tell (the audience) that it's just not mariachi music (and food) drowning in yellow cheese ... I think this huge Mexican population in the U.S. wants to be represented accurately in terms of food," Valladolid told Hispanic magazine in fall 2009.

Chef Marcela Valladolid with her favorite pastime, Fausto



A native of the Baja California border region, Valladolid runs a catering company and teaches private culinary classes in Tijuana and San Diego. She has hosted a show on Discovery en Espanol titled "Relatos con Sabor" — where she takes viewers into the kitchens of Hispanic homes across the country to show how traditional family recipes are being revived and preserved — that has aired in the United States and Latin America.

She has demonstrated her recipes on "The Today Show" and "The Martha Stewart Show." And Valladolid is the mother of young Fausto, "a kid with a palate of a three-star Michelin chef."



Isabella's Chile-BBQ Ribs

"My niece Isabella is one of my favorite persons, and she's a finicky eater. She loves these ribs, and they are fairly simple to prepare. Add half or none of the chile to keep them sweet.

This recipe makes 4 servings.

- 1 cone piloncillo (panela)
- 1 cup soy sauce
- 1 tablespoons Asian sesame oil
- 1 bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, finely minced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 ½ tablespoon fresh ginger, minced
- 3 pounds St. Louis-style pork baby back ribs
- ¼ cup minced green onions

Whisk piloncillo, soy sauce, oil, pepper, garlic, ginger and ¼ cup water in a heavy medium saucepan over low heat until piloncillo dissolves.

Transfer to bowl and cool completely. Add ribs and toss to coat. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour or overnight.

Heat oven to 450 degrees. Remove ribs from marinade and place curved-side up on a rack set over a rimmed foil-lined baking sheet. Roast for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, stir the marinade in a heavy medium saucepan over medium-high heat 20 minutes or until thick and syrupy.

Flip the ribs and cook, basting frequently with reduced marinade, until ribs are tender, about 20 more minutes. Transfer ribs to platter and sprinkle with green onions.

Supernatural success

One might assume that the author of a book about a librarian with the ability to cross dimensions would be quite partial to the paranormal.

In the case of Audrey Niffenegger, who penned the blockbuster tale “The Time Traveler’s Wife,” such an assumption would be a mistake.

“I don’t believe in the supernatural at all — it’s just this fantastic thing that happens in books,” Niffenegger told *Poets & Writers* magazine in fall 2009. “... What I love is all the kooky things people dream up, and the things people need to comfort themselves when somebody dies.”

Speaking of kooky things, Niffenegger’s west-side Chicago home is a testament to her love of taxidermic “pets”: A one-eyed groundhog, a badger wearing a paper crown and a mongoose in the deadly embrace of a cobra. That’s just for starters. Her collection is due in part to editors and others associated with the publication of “The Time Traveler’s Wife.”

Niffenegger’s first books were printed and bound by hand in editions of 10. Among them are two that have been commercially published, but her artistic career is rooted in printmaking, an ancient art that she started doing in 1978. Her interest grew and led her to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she trained as a visual artist. She later received her MFA from Northwestern University’s Department of Art Theory and Practice in 1991.

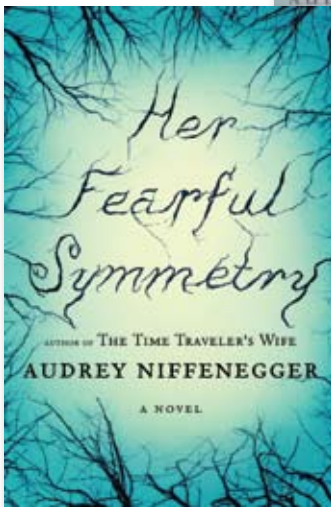
In 1994 an assortment of book artists, papermakers and designers united to found a book arts center, the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts. Niffenegger was part of this group and taught book arts as a professor in

Audrey Niffenegger, Photo by Stephen DeSantis



Columbia College’s MFA program in Interdisciplinary Book and Paper Arts. She still teaches there.

Three years after co-founding the Center for Book and Paper Arts, Niffenegger had an idea for a book about a Chicago librarian who suffers from a condition that



In 2009, “Her Fearful Symmetry” hit book shelves and Niffenegger’s first book, “The Time Traveler’s Wife,” was made into a movie.

causes him to involuntarily travel through time, repeatedly disrupting his happy marriage.

At first, she was intent on making the book into a graphic novel but came to realize how difficult it would be to represent sudden time shifts with still images. She began to work on the project as a novel and published “The Time Traveler’s Wife” in 2003. On the big screen in the U.S., “The Time Traveler’s Wife” opened in third place and, days later, in first place in the U.K., in August 2009.

Six years after “Time Traveler’s” was published, Niffenegger’s “little-engine-that-could” book has attained an enviable level of ubiquity. Not surprisingly, Chicagoans are often seen reading the book during their commutes aboard a Chicago Transit Authority vehicle (Niffenegger rides a CTA train at least once a week). But Midwestern commuters aren’t the only ones passing the time with her tome: Niffenegger told one reporter that she once spotted a man reading “The Time Traveler’s Wife” in the London Underground.

The Illinois native’s second novel, “Her Fearful Symmetry,” was published in 2009. Meanwhile, Niffenegger recently made a serialized graphic novel for the *London Guardian*, “The Night Bookmobile.”

Other current projects include an art exhibit at Printworks Gallery in September 2010, and a third novel, “The Chinchilla Girl in Exile.” The book’s main character, Lizzie, is a 9-year-old orphan with hypertrichosis, a condition that causes hair to grow excessively on the body. The plight of the book’s main character might sound a bit farfetched, but this time, there’s nothing supernatural about it.