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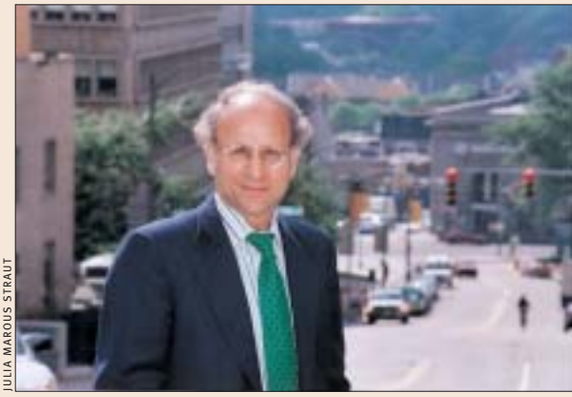
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JULIA MAROUS STRAUT

Recently, I had dinner with Dr. Antonio Gotto, dean of the Cornell Medical School, who described a new course in his school whereby medical students spend time each week in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, learning how the painter's view of life can inform the scientist and the clinician. This accords with my own experience: For all of the days of my marriage, I have come home each evening and spent my first few moments studying the art that my wife, a painter, has created that day. Her work is abstract and, I believe, quite elegant—not unlike the contemporary distillate and aesthetic of the cell biologist. In ways that I cannot always articulate, I see in each period of painting a way of viewing our world that seems to have also informed the science of the time. In fact, the scientist and artist are more similar than not. I don't say this just because literature, writing, and theatre took up so much of my interest and effort in another, earlier, life. I'm speaking of the two species more transcendently. Many observers have noted that the works of both the artist and the scientist are measured by the height of their creativity. Even our parlance finds common ground. The tools and theories that scientists use to understand and describe the world are, ideally, "beautiful" or "elegant." And in the end, both pursuits seem to me to be attempts to get beyond our own mortality. Both the artist and the scientist seek to defeat their common antagonist by elaborating meaning in what otherwise appears to be an indescribable void, "a universe of apparent meaninglessness," as neurosurgeon and poet Michael Salcman noted. Or as the great social anthropologist Ernest Becker put it, "the wellspring of all human activity is the fear of dying."

Whether or not you subscribe to the idea of a *Zeitgeist*, that there is an evolving social intellect explaining how, for instance, Picasso's new spatial realities arose just as physics was independently spawning relativism, it's hard to deny that art and science are enriched when they pay attention to each other. I challenge any choreographer not to become entranced by the exquisite ballet that takes place when membranes traffic within a cell. And themes of time certainly suffused the artistic mindset of Einstein's generation, just as the helix, figuring prominently in the work of many post-impressionists, surely did not escape the notice of Watson and Crick.

Many of our own medical students don't need to be reminded of what the arts offer them. In this issue, you'll meet students who sing with the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh, and there are many others who've made sure that the arts continue to be a part of their lives. Singing, dancing, sculpting, or writing no doubt provide a much-needed release from the often frenetic pace of med school. Moreover, the imprint of the arts on the imaginative mind surely fosters "thinking out of the box"—a characteristic of our best diagnosticians. I wonder though, what other fruits these pursuits will bear. Perhaps someday we'll hear about how the harmonic interplay of Brahms' Requiem or Bach's *Kunst der fugue* inspired a young academic physician to, for example, build an accurate model of channel gating that finally reveals just how anesthetics work their molecular mysteries.

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