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## Cultural Center program explores intersection of art, science

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[BY THERESA BOEHL](#)

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While it's not something taught in Chemistry 101, the intersection of art and science can actually be quite interesting

And delicious.

That was the idea behind The Chemistry of Cooking, a program that took place before a packed audience last week at Chicago's Cultural Center. It is part of a series of conversations and salons called Ars/Scientia taking place at the center over the next few months.

Last week, chef Homaro Cantu of Moto restaurant in Chicago teamed with biologist Linda Kawano to explore how much science actually contributes to the art of cooking.

The two collaborate at Cantu Designs, a Chicago-based food design firm. Kawano also works in the intellectual property office at the University of Chicago.

Cantu is a well-known pioneer in molecular gastronomy, which brings lab techniques into the kitchen. His restaurant features edible menus, aromatic utensils, and sauces served in pipettes -- small tubes used to measure liquids in the lab.



Chef Homaro Cantu and biologist Linda Kawano at the Chicago Cultural Center. / By Justin Goh

Another spinoff from laboratories is Cantu's use of a laser, which vaporizes ingredients like orange peel and vanilla bean. With a wine glass, he then captures the fragrances that are emitted, which enhances the flavor of the wine once it's poured in.

"As a kid, I always wanted to invent things," Cantu says. "I just didn't have the time or the resources."

He says it's all part of the "transmogrification" that his food creations undergo. However, Cantu stresses that he uses common ingredients, and supports local farmers and markets for his unique creations.

"The only different between our food and everyone else's is that it looks a little different," Cantu says.

Cantu's dishes may seem like a new-age form of culinary art, but Kawano explains that chemistry has always been a part of the kitchen. For example, she says, in 1909 a Japanese chemist patented the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate, or MSG.

Barbara Koenen, the director of Chicago Artists Resource in the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, says the series is designed to expand traditional ideas about art and science.

"Art is also what we eat," she says.

Upcoming conversations and salons will continue to address the idea of melding science with art. All [Ars/Scientia](#) events are free and are scheduled for 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Mondays.

The next event, "Structuring Change," is scheduled for Feb. 9 at the Cultural Center. It will feature a conversation between artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, technology artist Siebren Versteeg, and Mark Hereld, senior fellow at Argonne National Laboratory and University of Chicago.

The salons are designed as an opportunity for artists and scientists who have not collaborated to meet with the general public to interact and share ideas. The "Ars/Scientia" conversations and salons are part of the larger, yearlong [Science Chicago](#) series of programs and events spearheaded by the Museum of Science and Industry.

More than 140 Chicagoland-area institutions are partnering to provide programming for the celebration of science, which began in September 2008.

"Chicago is a science city," says Cheryl Hughes, executive director of Science Chicago. "We're really happy with the outcome, and we're not even halfway through."

Much of Science Chicago's programming is aimed at young people ages nine to 18. The goal, organizers say, is to get more kids interested in science and math.

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