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## The Unstable Ground of Low Hierarchies

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## The Unstable Ground of Low Hierarchies

### Abstract

Broad Vision is a collaborative project between the Sciences and Arts. It involves students and lecturers from six different departments, across three schools at the University of Westminster, London, UK. In the first year of the project we worked with the microscope as the locus for our interconnections.

### Keywords

Art, Science, STEM, STEAM, Looking, Research, Laboratory, Performance, Gallery

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## **The Unstable Ground of Low Hierarchies**

Joshua Dinsmore

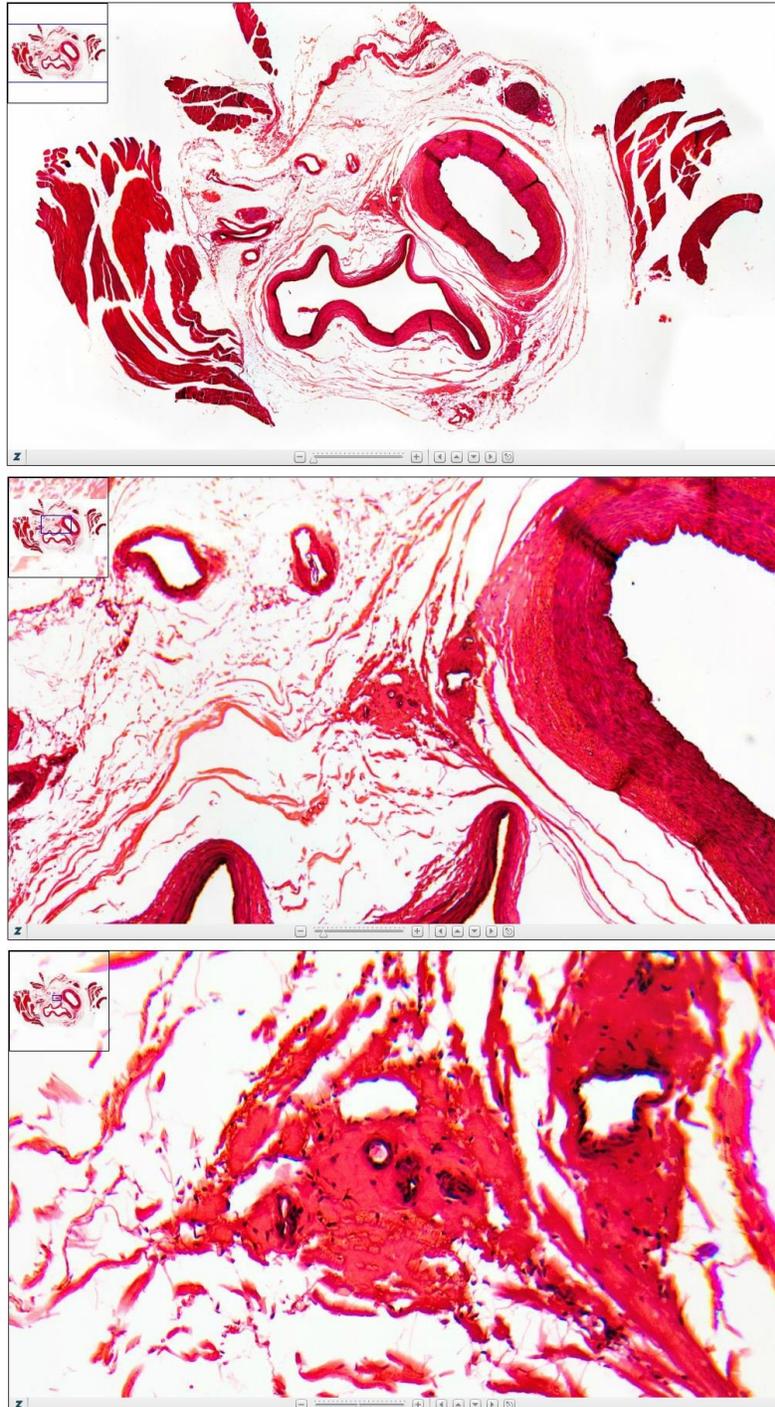
When I walked into the classroom they told us we were ‘Researchers’. At the time I was a third year Photography undergraduate about to embark on an interdisciplinary project working with a diverse set of students and academics.

Broad Vision is a collaborative project between the Sciences and Arts. It involves students and lecturers from six different departments, across three schools at the University of Westminster, London, UK. In the first year of the project we worked with the microscope as the locus for our interconnections.

The project operates with a low hierarchy, assigning all students and lecturers the title of ‘Researchers’ – a factor I believe is pivotal to successful interdisciplinary projects between scientists and artists. What we want from collaboration is fresh perspectives, accidental discoveries and an outpouring of creativity. These are not things which can be scheduled in the traditional, top down hierarchical systems. Instead, what Broad Vision aims to provide is time, energy and structure in which unforeseen interactions can take place.

There is no such thing as a typical research project because each art-science collaboration between student and staff researchers took its own form. One example would be the ‘Anatomy of the Eye’ project, in which a few of the Life Science researchers staged a dissection, which was itself a piece of performance and then became material which was discussed and recorded by Illustrators and Imaging Scientists. This scientific practical inspired illustrations, which hold greater depth with the knowledge learned from the experience; a video piece, created by Imaging Scientists, and an energetically illustrated highly communicative diagrammatic poster. Another example would be a project I dreamt up whilst in one of the workshops. The first time I worked

with microscopes I was struck by the way in which you navigate the microscope slide by moving the stage. This phenomenological experience seemed to be metaphorically similar to using online maps – ‘this feels like this’ as an analogous method of reasoning often used in creating artworks - so we set up a project which produced large (billion pixel) images and used an interactive map-like interface to navigate them. There is a loop here from science through art and back into science. I found myself looking at scientific content – a microscope slide – through scientific equipment but with an artist’s mode of reasoning; “how can I recreate or capture this experience?” Drawing on practical skills learnt during art practice I created workflow. Then this workflow in turn could be useful to scientists displaying their research in the future.



**Navigable screenshots from an online outcome of Broad Vision**

Beginning the project with the role of all those involved being ‘Researchers’ allowed for more than just a bland magnolia of democracy but rather a shifting dynamic of portable hierarchies. Artists as researchers and a myriad of possibilities allowed for a fertile ground for truly transdisciplinary work to take place. This has been, and continues to be, a very powerful and exciting way of working. I feel that the two most influential factors of Broad Vision’s successful first year were the low hierarchy between staff and student researchers and the most exciting words I ever heard in an introduction to a project: “We don’t know what will happen, but...”

**Joshua Dinsmore** is a Student Facilitator on Broad Vision and graduated (honors) with a Bachelors of Photographic Arts, at the University of Westminster, London, United Kingdom. To learn more about Broad Vision see [www.broad-vision.info](http://www.broad-vision.info)