



Miller-Urey experiment recreated in art-science exhibit

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EAST LANSING, Mich. — How did life begin on Earth and other planets? A Michigan State University professor has combined art and science to explore that question.

Adam Brown's "Origins of Life Experiment #1.2 [http://museum.msu.edu/Exhibitions/Current/Life_Experiment.html]" is a recreation of the Miller-Urey experiment of 1952, considered to be the classic experiment on the origin of life. Brown's work simulates what is thought to be Earth's original atmosphere by combining hydrogen, ammonia and methane in a glass chamber. Add lightning and the result is amino acids.

"This experiment has the potential to reveal some of the underlying mechanisms of how life began on this planet and others," said Brown, associate professor of electronic art and intermedia in the Department of Art and Art History. "But at the same time, we're practicing science and creating an art piece. It's a true hybrid."

Brown's art/science piece will be at the MSU Museum through May, after which it will travel to Vienna, Austria, for the science, art and film festival "Bio: Fiction." His is an open source science experiment that will travel the world, asking other artists and scientists to contribute.

"Artists are good at making problems while engineers and scientists are good at solving and understanding them," Brown said. "So when there's a reciprocal relationship, there can be really good outcomes."

And that's the premise of MSU's new [electronic art and intermedia concentration](http://eai.art.msu.edu) [<http://eai.art.msu.edu>] within the Department of Art and Art History. Intermedia is the merging of various types of media, said Brown, who directs the program.

"If we want to encourage new forms of creative expression, new forms of academic discourse — then we have to break outside the walls and crossing disciplines allows you to do that," Brown said. "How can that ever result in anything other than innovation?"

Brown is also the artist in residence for the [BEACON Center for the Study of Evolution in Action](http://beacon-center.org/) [<http://beacon-center.org/>]. The National Science Foundation-funded center crosses disciplines to study evolution in action — in natural and artificial systems.

"NSF is increasingly trying to figure out ways to take the information learned in the sciences and make it available to the public," Brown said. "And that's what artists do. So as the artist in residence, I give people at BEACON the chance to view things through a different lens."

To foster such discussion, the EAI program will host the [Form From Thought Symposium](http://eai.art.msu.edu/?page_id=1332) [http://eai.art.msu.edu/?page_id=1332] March 30-31, a free public event at the MSU Union. There also will be an open house for the new Form From Thought Laboratory, a state-of-the-art multimedia space housed on the ground floor of Kresge Art Center. This is where students will conduct intermedia research.

The symposium will bring together artists and scientists from campus and elsewhere to discuss the intersections among art, science and technology. The event will include a panel discussion with Michael Rush, the newly appointed director of MSU's Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum.

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Adam Brown directs MSU's new electronic art and intermedia concentration. Photo by G.L. Kohuth



Adam Brown, associate professor of electronic art and intermedia (far right); Robert Root-Bernstein, professor of physiology; and Maxine Davis, instructor for Lyman Briggs College; work on "Origins of Life Experiment 1.2" at the MSU Museum. Photo by G.L. Kohuth



On display at the MSU Museum, "Origins of Life Experiment 1.2" is a blend of art and science recreating Miller-Urey experiment of 1952, considered to be the classic experiment on the origin of life. The exhibit was created by Adam Brown, associate professor of electronic art and intermedia. Photo by G.L. Kohuth

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Related Links

- "Origins of Life #1.2" [http://museum.msu.edu/Exhibitions/Current/Life_Experiment.html]
- [Adam Brown](http://adamwbrown.net/) [<http://adamwbrown.net/>]
- [Electronic art and intermedia](http://eai.art.msu.edu) [<http://eai.art.msu.edu>]



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