

Art Remembering Science

DIFFERENT KINDS OF INTERACTIONS exist between Art and Science. Artistic creations have inspired scientists to make discoveries. Scientists enlist artistic creations to make abstract scientific concepts accessible to a broader audience. The 50-year-old *Leonardo* has contributed much and significantly to fostering these interactions. In this editorial, I mention yet another aspect—when art assists science and the public in remembering scientists and scientific discoveries.

I find there is a fundamental difference when credit is assigned for artistic and scientific creations. Every artistic creation is unique; it could not have been made by anybody else, and its author's name remains assigned to this creation forever. In contrast, except in a very small number of examples, the names of discoverers disappear soon following their scientific contributions. Usually a scientist makes a discovery as the time becomes ripe for it; if one scientist does not succeed, another will sooner or later. The fate of discoveries is that they tend to become bricks in the edifice of science: the layers build onto others' work, and the names of the bricklayers tend to disappear in oblivion. As time goes on, remembering the names of great and even lesser scientists not only gives tribute to them but also helps future generations value and know the past. Art plays a great role in erecting proper memorials that serve a purpose and are visually appealing.

With Magdolna Hargittai, I have surveyed and photographed the memorials of scientists in Budapest [1], New York [2] and Moscow [3] (Fig. 1) and have embarked on similar projects for London and Washington, DC. In fact, the project involves far more than cataloging memorials. The memorials have their own stories, as obviously do the scientists and the discoveries they commemorate. Each city lends its own flavor to its scientist memorials. Budapest has been the venue of numerous scientific achievements and the cradle of the many scientists born in this city and who gained world renown both here and, even

more notably, elsewhere. New York, known as a world center of many areas of human endeavor, is less known as a world center of science—which it is. Many more milestone discoveries have occurred in New York than there exist memorials of scientists that, incidentally, may have worked in New York or elsewhere in the U.S. No city in the world has had such a concentration of science as Moscow, and Moscow has many more memorials of scientists than any other city in the world.

Many factors play a role in who is commemorated and who is not. These factors may include politics, the efforts of devoted pupils or family members, financial considerations and suchlike. Thus, no reliable science history could be compiled on the basis of the memorials. Nonetheless, having awareness of the existing memorials and visiting them enhances our outlook about science and may even call attention to the *absence* of memorials that we might judge should also exist. Scientists, no less than politicians and military leaders, deserve to be part of our collective memory, and this can be accomplished through artistic creations.

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References

1. I. Hargittai and M. Hargittai, *Budapest Scientific: A Guidebook* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015).
2. I. Hargittai and M. Hargittai, *New York Scientific: A Culture of Inquiry, Knowledge, and Learning* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).
3. I. Hargittai and M. Hargittai, *Moscow Scientific: Memorials of a Research Empire* (forthcoming).

Figure 1. (left) Alajos Ströbl, 1906: statue of obstetrician Ignác Semmelweis (1818–1865), “the Savior of Mothers,” who introduced disinfection following autopsy before examining patients, in front of St. Roch Hospital, Budapest. (middle) Detail of the Hall of Fame of Great Americans in the Bronx; of 99 busts, 42 depict explorers, conservationists, scientists, innovators, educators and medical scientists. (right) I.M. Rukavishnikov, 1971: monumental head statue of Igor V. Kurchatov (1903–1960), the Soviet “atomic tsar,” Kurchatov Square, Moscow. (Photos © Istvan and Magdolna Hargittai)

