GOOD SCIENCE AND GOOD ART

CAMDEN, ME -- "Good science and good art are the same," David Eagleman, a neuroscientist with a near rock-star following, said in a booming, enthusiastic voice as he sipped a decaf soy latte in the late afternoon.
Eagleman, dressed in trim black jeans and a dark T-shirt, and I were sitting in a cozy cafe on one of the main commercial streets in the small coastal town in Maine where the PopTech conference takes place annually.

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"Science and art are both creative processes where you make leaps and have some way of filtering them," Eagleman said. "A good creative person, scientist or artist, generates lots of ideas and has the capacity to throw a lot of them out."
Throughout PopTech, numerous speakers working in traditionally "left-brain" fields, such as neuroscience and robotics, revealed evidence of crossing over into right-brain territory to enhance their methods of finding and refining fresh ideas.
Onstage, Leila Takayama, a research scientist with Willow Garage, a Menlo Park, CA-based maker of personal robots, discussed how the company collaborates with PIxar animator Doug Dooley to infuse lifelike qualities into machines. Jay Silver, a Maker-in-Residence at Intel and a creator of , a simple invention kit, shared how the sculptures of artist Andy Goldsworthy has affected his work and ideas. In the introduction to Eagleman's presentation on the potential impact of brain research on the legal system, PopTech's curator and executive director Andrew Zolli highlighted Eagleman's creative writing success, urging the audience to read the neuroscientist's fiction best-seller Sum.

In a workshop on creating compelling data visualizations, the New York Times' artist-in-residence, Jer Thorp, encouraged attendees to simply "hire an artist if you have a novel problem." That's because "Artists are trained to face novel problems," Thorp said. And then he added, "Software engineers are not." And to formalize the current wave of such cross-disciplinary innovation, the organizers of PopTech unveiled a new fellowship in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation that would mix artists with businesspeople, scientists, and social innovators to "facilitate unconventional collaboration," as its website describes.
By **Reena Jana** | October 27, 2012
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