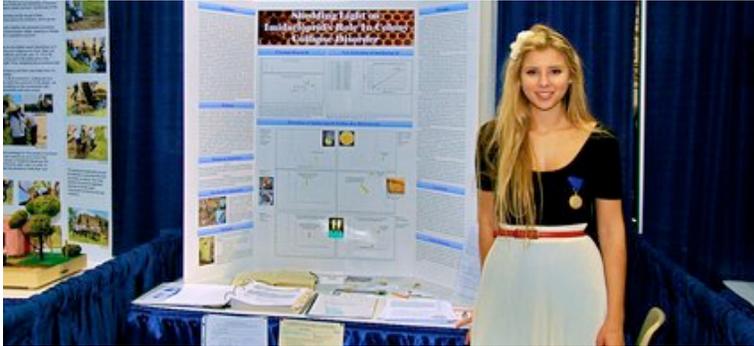


A passion for science on film

by **Katie Thompson**

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Eliza McNitt is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and scientist — and no, she's not a graduate student. McNitt is a Tisch freshman.



McNitt arrived at NYU this fall with prizes from the Connecticut Science Fair and the International Science and Engineering Fair already under her belt. A double major in film and television and environmental studies, McNitt has established herself as an accomplished filmmaker with her eclectic interests and natural storytelling ability.

"There are so many ways to approach storytelling at NYU," said Joanne Savio, Tisch professor of film and television who taught McNitt's frame and sequence class.

Her unique ability to use the art of filmmaking to communicate science is what makes McNitt stand out. "Requiem for the Honeybee," her documentary about the worldwide plight of the insect due to colony collapse disorder, won the 2009 C-SPAN StudentCam Documentary Filmmaking Contest.

"I wanted to tell the story [of the honeybees] as if it were a monologue; to take the science off my science fair poster and put it in people's imaginations," McNitt said.

The inspiration for the documentary came from her grandfather, who once told her not to eat an apple before washing it because of the dangers of pesticides.

"This incident awakened me to the use of pesticides through agriculture, and honeybees are the primary pollinator [of crops]," said McNitt.

In an independent research program through her high school, McNitt traced the migration of pesticides through the production of honey. She traced the pesticide "imidacloprid" through the pollination pathway and found its presence in the hive and on the extremities of the bees. Through this, McNitt was able to point out that the pesticide is possibly a contributing factor to colony collapse disorder — the name given to the disappearance of adult honeybees in large numbers from their hives, a worldwide agricultural phenomenon.

Savio said she saw great potential in McNitt's ability to inform the community of NYU.

"A true advocate for our environment, [Eliza's] stories often have the potential to have levels of understanding beyond the beautiful visuals she creates," she said.

Although McNitt began her film career through acting at four years old, science didn't appeal to her until her final years of high school.

"It wasn't a passion that I cultivated until the very end of my senior year," McNitt said. "I wasn't going to study science at all until I won the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair and I realized that this is something I should stick with."

Her win at the ISEF sent her all the way to Geneva, Switzerland. The cultural and scientific center presented McNitt with yet another opportunity to utilize science to tell a powerful story.

"I was there for five days, and I wanted to film a documentary about my experience," McNitt said.

"What I found as I was interviewing all of the students with me is that each had a strong cultural belief that they brought along with them. This film explores the journey we go on learning about science by colliding [the student's] values and cultural beliefs with the science that they encountered."

McNitt was intrigued by the way her companions seamlessly integrated science and religion in their personal beliefs. One example of a boy who was a creationist particularly stuck out in McNitt's memory.

"It was amazing that he was able to accept the science saying that Earth is 15.7 billion years old, but still keep his creationist belief that the earth is 4,000 years old as truth," McNitt said.

The example of the creationist is a parallel to McNitt's own life. But as McNitt's films prove, science and art do not necessarily negate each other. In fact, beautiful things can happen when the two merge.

"As Leonardo DaVinci said, 'Study the art of science, and the science of art' — that's my manifesto," McNitt said.

Katie Thompson is features editor.