

## When art, science meet Enjoy the chemistry

BY ROBIN TIERNEY

*Special to The Examiner*

Shelve those rare coins and stamps — some people have taken collecting to a bizarre new level.

Barton Lidicé Benes' quirky cabinets of curiosity display themed collections of celebrity refuse.

Tassel used to tie back drapery at Saddam Hussein's presidential palace? Check. Steamed cornhusk from Bill Clinton's 1997 Martha's Vineyard clambake? Check. Tag from a shrub on Martha Stewart's Katonah, N.Y., property? Check.

You can scrutinize "Better Homes and Gardens," "Foul Play" and other recent Benes assemblages in "Museum Muses," a fantastic new exhibit opening Sunday at the National Academy of Sciences (at 21st and C streets NW). It may sound like an odd place to get an art fix, but NAS has mounted visit-worthy science-inspired art exhibitions since 2000.

"Considering the large role science has played in defining our culture, it is not surprising that many artists focus on it in their work," explains Alana Quinn, outreach coordinator for the NAS Exhibitions and Cultural Programs. "We provide a venue for these artists ... [and] promote a dialogue between scientists and artists."

Once serving as private repositories for aristocrats and scholars, museums have evolved into hallowed havens of enlightenment for the masses. And amusement, when considering Benes' wicked mixed media works with their visually witty ornamentations and handmade frames.

Inspired by the art of collecting art, artifacts and scientific specimens, "Museum Muses" also features work by Justine Cooper, who spent two years photographing collections hidden in storage rooms of New York's American Museum of Natural History.

### SEE IT, SENSE IT:

**Sensing Terrains**  
Rotunda Gallery  
Feb. 12-June 16  
Artist's Reception: 1 p.m. March 19

**Museum Muses**  
Upstairs Gallery  
Feb. 12-May 1  
Gallery Talk: 1:30 p.m. April 30

**National Academy of Sciences**  
2100 C St. NW  
202-334-2436  
nationalacademies.org/arts  
All events are free; bring a photo ID

**Music, too ...**  
Visit the exhibitions on Sunday, the opening day, and can catch a free concert in the NAS auditorium at 4 p.m. The Marcus Roberts Trio will perform an impressive range of jazz from standards to original compositions.

Cooper's works include the large format digital print, "Blood-red Butterflies (*Cymothoe sangaris*)."

The insects' brilliant color endures despite being ages removed from fluttering in West African rain forests. "Bust Room" reveals a row of ape and human heads atop lockers. Enhancing the experience is the artist's original soundscape of babies gurgling, birds and crickets trilling. Cooper's well-acquainted with all facets of museum collection, having creations of her own displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Another NAS exhibition also opens Sunday: "Sensing Terrains," Patricia Olynyk's site-specific installation of colossal, imposing photographs with motion-activated audio. The artist juxtaposes her own micro-electron shots of sensory organs of various animals with images of ancient Japanese gardens. Designed to "tickle the senses," the compositions are astonishing in detail and form.

The closer you look at the extreme close-ups of organs — which range from mouse tongues to Olynyk's own retinas — the more they resemble intricate, exotic organisms roaming terrains from some faraway, surreal world.

Evoking sense of touch, a scanning electron micrograph of fruit fly feet could pass for a biotic crawfish. In "Cenesthesia: Taste," a gigantic taste bud bears likeness to a tight cluster of curled leaves, the pointed tips of which you can practically feel. "Cenesthesia," by the way, is "the feeling of inhabiting one's body that arises from multiple stimuli from various bodily organs." But don't worry: No in-depth knowledge is needed to appreciate the mysterious, fanciful, beauty of these images, most in high-contrast black-and-white, others such as "Orb" in an LSD cocktail of intense oranges and yellows.