

### *Smile of a Stem Cell: A Dialogue between Science and Society*

The exhibition *Smile of a Stem Cell* comprises 54 pictures collected from scientists working in the research network ESTOOLS ([www.estools.eu](http://www.estools.eu)).

Supported by the European Union's Sixth Framework Program, ESTOOLS investigated embryonic stem cell, science, ethics and law across 10 different European countries. Aiming at improving integration and coordination in the European area, geographically dispersed research institutes shared their experience to foster development in both science and ethics. As part of the project, a large emphasis was placed on the production of outreach tools able to match and mingle with different cultural and religious contexts.

Scientists involved in the project selected their pictures following aesthetic criteria. The caption of each image is comprised of a fantasy title and a condensed scientific detail. Scientists looked at their everyday research from an external and unusual perspective. They imagined something beyond the meaning they attribute to pictures in their everyday laboratory activities: a cell or a fluorescent marker might become a fairy, an astronomical phenomenon or a mundane urban activity. The focus of the exhibition was to present science in a neutral way. Each picture is expression of a scientific activity and contributes to foster debate, promote enthusiasm and perplexity, though purposely avoiding influencing the observer from an ethical perspective. *Smile of a Stem Cell* tries to use art as a universal form of communication and – just like art does – it makes visible what the naked eye would not usually see, highlighting the role of interpretation. One of the aim of the exhibition was to attract the lay public to a scientific event. In these occasions, people often fear they will face complicated and incomprehensible scientific data, something bound to remain in the domain of few experts. *Smile of a Stem Cell* does not require any scientific background: whoever is interested or attracted by either science or art can appreciate it.

Art and science cannot be the same thing but both work as lenses or mirrors to know more about the universe. The exhibition triggers the power of imagination and displaces the perspectives of observers making them aware of the need for interpretation, in an attempt to deal with the issue of visibility and to pave the way for public debate.

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