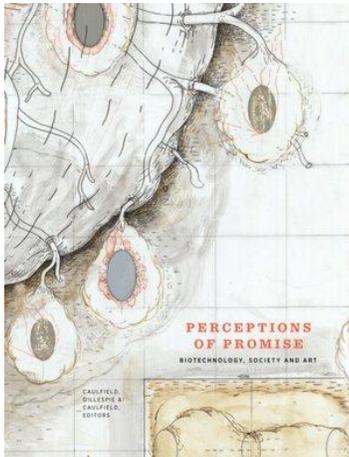


**Perceptions of Promise: Biotechnology, Society and Art**, ed. by Sean Caulfield, Curtis Gillespie, and Timothy Caulfield. University of Alberta, dist. by University of Washington Press, June 2011. 98 p. ill. ISBN 9780969989844 (pbk.), \$35.00.



Collaboration is truly the watchword of this publication: in the foreword, the editors explain how participants' varied approaches created "an emulsification of art and science." Indeed, the essays throughout are written by a spectrum of academic and creative types working in fields like bioethics, painting, critical museum theory, fiction, drawing, stem cell research, and multi-media art. While this diversity allows for some wonderful and surprising writing, it also creates a decentralizing effect on the book as a whole. The collection sometimes feels a bit tossed together, a bit raw, and the pace tends toward jumpiness.

An initial offering from Trudo Lemmens outlines the ethical issues raised in the Pedro Almodovar film *Talk to Her* but seems an ill-fit for an introduction to the central issues being discussed. A much better way to dive into the huge concepts of art and science can be found only a few pages later where Gail Geller's essay "The Paradox of Promise and the Purpose of Art" defines how scientific advances can generate a "tyranny of hope" before going on to discuss how the creation of art can function as a way to draw out insights from medical patients. Perhaps the best essay is buried at the end of the collection: Timothy Caulfield's "Monsters in the Media." Mr. Caulfield humorously and sensitively engages with the ethical and moral implications of cloning, drawing from his own personal experiences with the media while also making connections to pop culture representations of controversial scientific developments. The tone consistently maintained by all these writings is snappy, direct, and engaged. Technical speak rarely rears its indecipherable head.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the exhibition catalog portion of this book seems too involved, too cerebral. Lianne McTavish's essay prefacing the images does an excellent job of tackling complicated issues concerning biomedicalization's impact on the perception of the human body. Her writing is lucid yet companionable. The faltering point in McTavish's work lies in the extended descriptive notes accompanying the images of works in the exhibition. Too frequently she tends to over-interpret the work for the viewer, embedding assumptions alongside more practical information.

Clocking in at less than one hundred well-designed pages, this volume provides an enticing (if occasionally oblique) view of how the worlds of art practice and biotechnology can create a confluence of creative thought and artistic output. The uneven quality of content in the essays might leave some scholars scratching their heads, but in general, this book frequently couches difficult questions in the context of fairly accessible scenarios. There is a general tone of reflection, inquiry, and curiosity at work in this book which, when coupled with handsomely-produced imagery, could make this book particularly appealing to artists and non-artists alike.

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