

# Drawing from the Natural World

CSUMB Welcomes Renowned Science Illustration Program

BY RENEE BRINCKS



CSU Monterey Bay digital media instructor Amadeo Bachar created this art of bull kelp while he was a student in 2004. He has also done work for *National Geographic* and *Scientific American* magazines.

**W**hile double majoring in geology and art at Smith College, Jen Christiansen came across a flyer for a science illustration program on the California coast. Intrigued by its broad natural science base, distinct from more focused medical illustration programs, she applied.

"Often, folks think science and art are kind of weird things to put together," says Christiansen. "But I spent a full year with people who got it. That was validating and fun."

Today, Christiansen is assistant art director for *Scientific American*, and this fall the science illustration program she attended relocated from the University of California

Extension, Santa Cruz, to California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). The new home ensures easy student access to field sketching sites such as Point Lobos and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. It also provides new community outreach opportunities, including an exhibition

partnership with the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History.

"We really want this to be a practical experience and an enriching experience, so the students who go through here feel confident that they've run into most everything," says Program Director Ann Caudle.

That means classes in black-and-white techniques, field sketching and information graphics, plus color illustration, zoological and biological illustration and digital media instruction, all taught by Program Coordinator Jenny Keller and instructor Amadeo Bachar. Complementing the skills-based courses are lessons on copyright, contract law and other

real-world issues. Students produce business cards and build portfolios while discussing the best ways to pitch new clients and publishers.

Guest speakers and internships round out the one-year curriculum, often opening the door to job opportunities.



"My first two jobs out of the program were a direct result of having met an art director who came out to speak to us," says Christiansen. "[Art directors at *Scientific American* and *National Geographic*] wouldn't have known me or been familiar with my work if I hadn't met them at the program, and I doubt I would've cold-called either of them that early in my career. The networking was amazing."

Christiansen now hosts science illustration program interns in her office; other students have worked with the Smithsonian Institution, LucasArts Entertainment Company, California Academy of Sciences, and Sally Ride Science. The host organizations are as diverse as the students themselves.

"We're not training all 15 people for the same jobs. We really want them to go through the process of identifying who they are, what it is they love and what they're really good at. Then, they find places who can use that work," Caudle explains.

John Muir Laws, a 2002 graduate, created *The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada* for his final project. He believes he couldn't have produced the guide, which features 2,710 original watercolor illustrations, without completing the program.



(Above) CSUMB student Annette Felice works as Program Coordinator/Instructor Jenny Keller and Program Director Ann Caudle look on. (Right) Student Christine Elder creating field sketches. (Below) Student Emily Cooper depicted future Mars missions for an online magazine.



"This was the best art program that I have encountered in my life—everything from the specifics of the techniques, to the details of understanding, anatomically, what you're looking at so you can draw it accurately, to the supportive nature of the classroom environment. It all came together to make a beautiful, outstanding program," he says.

CSUMB President Dr. Dianne Harrison praises the quality of graduates' work, as well as the program's national reputation.

"It matches the standard of excellence we expect from all of our academic programs," she says. "By combining science knowledge with artistic ability, it is also consistent with our university's belief in the value of interdisciplinary study."

That interdisciplinary approach both challenges students and prepares them for career success.

"Because of the broad range of skills, and their versatility and flexibility, our graduates have quite an edge out there," Caudle says.

For more information on the CSUMB program, please go to <http://scienceillustration.org/>.

