2007 Visualization Challenge

SCIENTIFIC DATA ARE THE CURRENCY OF science, but they often buy little understanding outside science itself—or even outside the narrow confines of a single scientific discipline. But when data are brought to life through images, illustrations, computer graphics, and animations, they can stimulate excitement, awe, new ways of looking at things, and, above all, a broad appreciation of even the most esoteric scientific information. The stunning photograph on the cover of this week's issue of *Science* is a case in point. It reveals the humble and ubiquitous seaweed Irish moss (*Chondrus crispus*) to be an intricate natural construction that looks for all the world like an abstract painting.

For the past 5 years, *Science* and the National Science Foundation (NSF) have cosponsored annual challenges to encourage cutting-edge efforts to visualize scientific data. Our interest in supporting these competitions is based on our firm belief that bringing data to life visually will be increasingly important not only for public understanding of science and engineering but also for improving communication across scientific disciplines.

This year, we received more than 200 entries from 34 states and 23 countries representing every continent except Antarctica. A committee of staff members from *Science* and NSF screened the entries, and an outside panel of experts in scientific visualization reviewed the finalists and selected the winners. The winning entries appear on the following pages. (No awards were made this year for illustration.)

We encourage you to submit applications for next year's challenge, details of which will be available at www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/scivis/index.jsp, and to join us in celebrating this year's winners.

Susan Mason of NSF organized this year's challenge. Benjamin Lester of *Science*'s news staff wrote the text that accompanies the images in this special section, and Stewart Wills and Tara Marathe put together a special Web presentation at www.sciencemag.org/sciext/vis2007.

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