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There are many longstanding connections between art and science, but often we see the two as separate, using different raw materials, tools, and spaces. The possibility of an exhibition in a structure like the Yale Wright Laboratory Particle Accelerator offers a chance to explore the profound connections between art and science in ways both literal and metaphorical.

Both art and physics are means of looking at the world and trying to make sense of it, using their own ontological structures, languages, and histories. Both have as one of their ultimate goals making the invisible visible, be it emotions and sensations, or atoms and quarks. Art may engage in this by breaking down larger structures into smaller components, like a pointillist dot of paint on a canvas, or a pixel in a digital photograph. Quantum physics attempts to discover the smallest particles that make up matter in the universe.

In that sense, a particle accelerator is but one tool in the belt of physicists, much as we might see a paintbrush for a painter. Both are devices which, through careful observation, application, and trial and error, allow for results that can transform the way we see the world and understand our very origins, and what it means to be human in ways literal and metaphysical.

The idea of using the particle accelerator as a site for the display of artworks is one that might seem curious at first. A logistical challenge to using the space of a particle accelerator for such an exhibition includes the difficulty, or in some cases impossibility, of installing traditional art in a curved, metallic space. However, this offers a unique opportunity to circumvent the traditional site of the “white cube” that gallery spaces often consist of. In a sense, a space like this speaks to the origins of some of the earliest-preserved human art, in the caves of France, India, and Somalia, which are not pristine white-walled structures but curved and organic, and which hold an equally reverent feeling to most of us today as would entering the interior of a particle accelerator.

Certain artists and art pieces which are highly “scientific” in nature might seem an appropriate fit for an exhibition of artwork inside a particle accelerator. However, I am more interested in gathering works which on the surface are much more abstractly related to physics, but instead are tangentially, metaphorically connected. Such artists would be a mix of emerging and established, all making important and significant work in the field of art today.

It would also be important to consider a series of performances organized within the space as well; this could include a range of genres including dance, classical music, and “noise” music. This would have its own issues of available space, time, and acoustics, but this would be part of the point, finding the unique opportunities and challenges of the space to work with it and create a truly unusual experience for the viewer.