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Philadelphia's Basser Research Center for BRCA to unveil commissioned sculpture by artist Mara G. Haseltine, entitled "Homologous Hope"

Combining science and art, the sculpture echoes the optimism surrounding recent breakthroughs in breast cancer research.

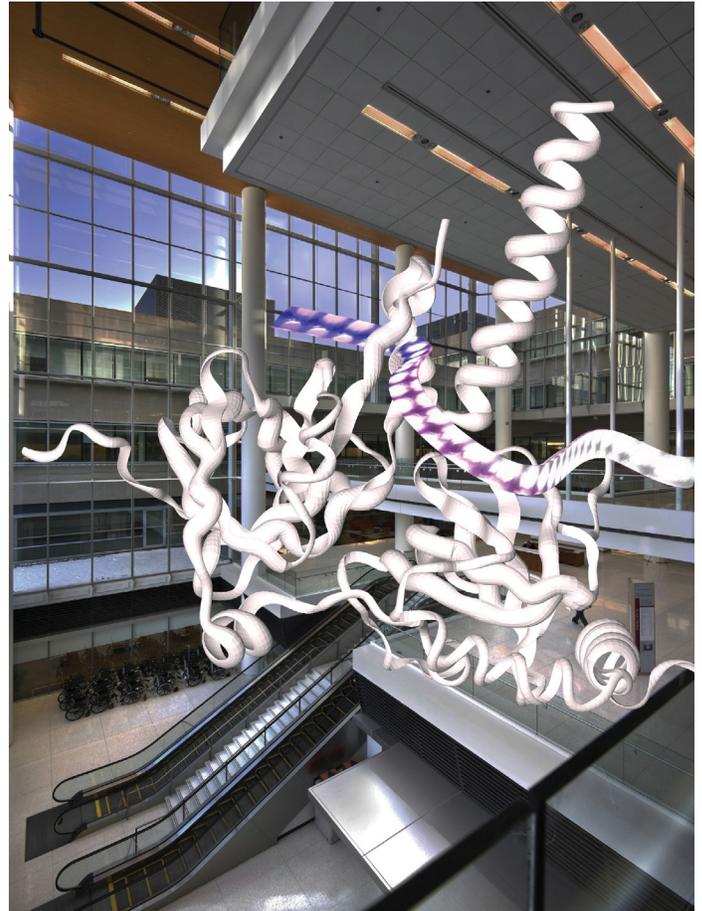
NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 28, 2014 — On March 12, 2014, the Basser Research Center for BRCA, at the Ruth and Raymond Perelman Center for Advanced Medicine in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, will unveil "Homologous Hope," a dramatic sculpture commissioned from internationally renowned artist Mara G. Haseltine.

An elegant expression of both science with art, the sculpture depicts the BRCA2 gene, which is associated with breast cancer, in the act of "homologous recombination," a process in which DNA strands to repair damage in sister DNA strands that can lead to disease. The discovery of the BRCA1 gene in 1994 was a breakthrough that led to the screening and individualized treatment programs that now aid thousands of women at extremely high risk of cancer.

"The viewer sees the protein at work in a healthy cell," says Haseltine, "which gives an intimate view how DNA is repaired that causes breast, ovarian, and prostate cancer in a healthy cell. The word 'homologous' means 'similar or same in terms of structure.'"

It was actress Angela Jolie's discovery that she was carrying the "faulty" BRCA1 gene, and thus at extremely high risk of breast cancer herself, that prompted her to opt for preventive mastectomy in 2013—an event that brought the protein into the limelight. The Basser Research Center for BRCA provides education, and support for individuals and families with BRCA1 and BRCA2 genetic mutations, which are responsible for many hereditary breast and ovarian cancer syndromes.

In creating the visually arresting sculpture "Homologous Hope," Haseltine worked closely with the scientists at UPenn to learn about how BRCA1 and 2 work on a cellular level. Then, using accurate sub-molecular data from the protein databank as her armature, Haseltine constructed a nest of sinewy ribbons depicting the protein in motion, made of digitally milled foam, carbon fiberglass, and metal, literally aglow with a programmed LED display which depicts the act of homologous recombination. The work is suspended like a delicate cloud above the Basser Research Center's "light box" atrium, designed by world-famous architect Raphael Vinoly. Not only beautiful, "Homologous Hope" can be used as a teaching tool, says Haseltine—"for scientists and non-scientists to learn about how BRCA2 functions. "



"Homologous Hope," sculpture by Mara G. Haseltine: rendering of installation view at Philadelphia's Basser Research Center for BRCA



Sculptor Mara G. Haseltine (photo by Carlos Sosa)

Mara G. Haseltine is an internationally renowned artist known for her sculptural renditions of microscopic life forms. She was an early pioneer in the translation of bio-informatics into three-dimensional forms. She is an ardent environmentalist. In 2011, Haseltine was an artist-in-residence at University College of Dublin in Ireland and Tara Oceans. She was awarded Flag 75 from the Explorer's Club for their three-year voyage around the world studying the ocean's relationship to climate change. Her current body of work combines microscopy and reef design of microscopic oceanic life forms. She was an artist-in-residence for Imagine Science Films for the years 2012-2013, Haseltine frequently collaborates with scientists, technologists and engineers to practice Geotherapy-- art which heals the planet.

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