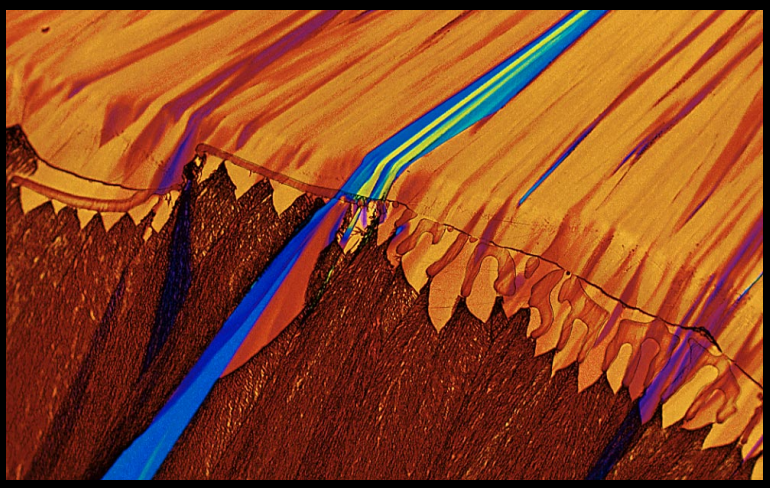
LIFE

MICRO

MASTERPIECES



VITAMIN E
Davidson struggled for months to create a crystal form of this oily nutrient. The resulting waterfall pattern inspired a maker of trendy neckties to produce cravats with images of folic acid, niacin and the like. Royalties-$25,000 so far-go to the lab.

The creation of abstract art is not the aim of Florida State University's new National High Magnetic Field Laboratory, which attracts Nobel laureates investigating the basic properties of matter. And yet there is an art to science, as the photographs of Michael W. Davidson show. A biophysicist, Davidson began creating his photomicrographs in 1987 while working with DNA samples. Experimenting with film processing to enhance colors, he discovered not only truth but beauty beneath the microscope. Now he captures cutting-edge research on superconductors-and continues to add to his collection of molecular fantasies.

DNA
The building blocks of life take on a sculptural quality while they crystallize, their color changing from purple to yellow as the substance thickens. This sample contains all the genetic information necessary to create a cow. The dots are microscopic air bubbles beneath the crystals.

MICROSCAPES
In addition to photographing single subjects, Davidson experiments with combinations. He created these extraterrestrial visions with sulfur crystals, protein crystals and a blue filter (top), and vitamin C, epoxy resin and a red filter (bottom). They've already started appearing on calendars and postcards.

TAXOL
Recently approved for treatment of ovarian cancer, this rare compound can be derived from the needles of yew trees. Davidson took this photo as the crystals were growing. To his surprise, the complicated molecules formed tiny spheres, as do many simpler structures when solidifying.