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Northumbria scientists win national photography prize

Researchers from Northumbria University, Newcastle have won a prize in a prestigious national science photography competition with a stunning image depicting their work into smart surfaces.

Senior lecturer Dr Ben Bin Xu and PhD student Ding Wang's photo, entitled *Not all wrinkles are unwanted*, won third prize in the Eureka and Discovery category of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's (EPSRC) annual competition.

The image shows formations on the surface of a thin elastic material which was heavily compressed as part of the pair's research.

The EPSRC's Science Photography Competition is now in its fourth year and is open to researchers who have received EPSRC funding for their work. This year the competition attracted more than 100 entries across five categories – Eureka and Discovery, Equipment and Facilities, People and Skills, Innovation, and Weird and Wonderful.

Dr Xu and Mr Wang are both members of the Smart Materials and Surfaces Lab in Northumbria's faculty of Engineering and Environment. They are currently researching the micro-mechanics of soft materials such as gels and silicone elastomers and how to use these mechanisms for future engineering applications. This research has been funded with a grant of more than £97,000 from the EPSRC.

Explaining how the photo came about Dr Xu, a senior lecturer in Mechanical and Construction Engineering at Northumbria said: "While the wrinkling, buckling and folding of the surfaces of thin films, such as aging skin or the crumpling of a thin film device, are traditionally seen as faults, this wrinkling can actually be used to improve multifunctional chip devices for use in biology, tissue engineering and chemical engineering.

"The photo captured by Ding Wang during our research is a wonderful visual representation of the work we are carrying out and for it to be recognised in this very prestigious national competition is a fantastic achievement."

One of the competition judges was physicist, oceanographer and broadcaster Dr Helen Czerski, Lecturer at University College London, who said: "Scientists and engineers are often so busy focusing on the technical details of their research that they can be blind to what everyone else sees first: the aesthetics of their work.

"Science is a part of our culture, and it can contribute in many different ways. This competition is a wonderful reminder of the emotional and artistic aspects of science, and it's great that EPSRC researchers have found this richness in their own work."

Congratulating the winners and entrants, Professor Tom Rodden, EPSRC's

Deputy Chief Executive, said: “The quality of entries into our competition demonstrates that EPSRC-funded researchers are keen to show the world how beautiful and interesting science and engineering can be.

“I'd like to thank everyone who entered; judging was really difficult. These stunning images are a great way to engage the public with the research they fund, and inspire everyone to take an interest in science and engineering.”

For more information about the competition and to view the winning photographs, visit

<https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/newsevents/news/sciencephotocompetition/>

The EPSRC is the main funding agency for engineering and physical sciences research and invests £800 million a year in research and postgraduate training, building the knowledge and skills base needed to address the scientific and technological challenges facing the nation.

For more information about Mechanical and Construction Engineering courses at Northumbria please visit <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/mechanical-and-construction-engineering/>

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

If you have a media enquiry please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk or call [0191 227 4571](tel:01912274571).

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