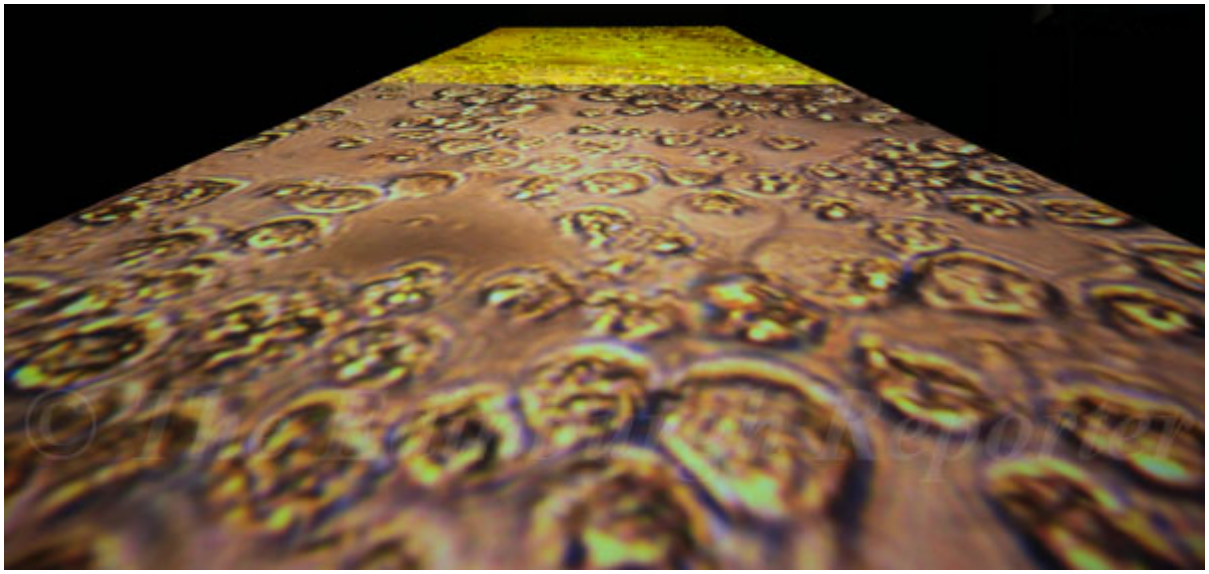
Bio Artists at the Edinburgh International Science Festival

Summerhall hosts Bio Art Exhibition ‘Synthetica’



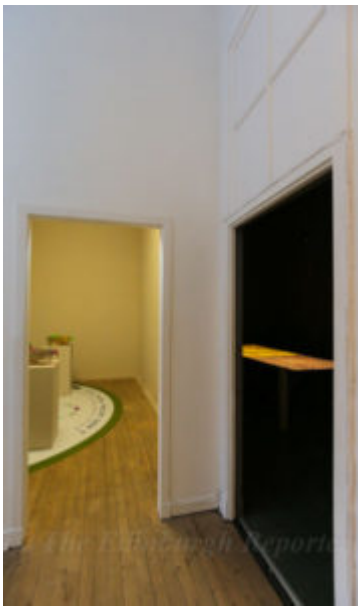
A special contemporary art exhibition co-curated by Edinburgh International Science Festival, Summerhall and ASCUS Art & Science, ‘Synthetica’ will showcase the work of established international artists working in the field of bioart, including renowned artists Marta de Menezes, Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr, Tarsh Bates and Ting-Tong Chang. Through works derived using the tools, techniques and often living tissues of scientific research, ‘Synthetica’ will explore how our notions of the natural and the artificial may need to change in an era in which hybrid and synthetic life forms have come into existence.

As human beings, we have an incredibly strong sense of what we define as ‘alive’. We grow plants in our garden and know that they are alive. We skim our fingers across the ridged surface of a wooden counter top and know that it is not alive. Yet, as scientists study the nature of living things, working on the frontier that separates living things from everything else, the lines become blurred.

Now more than ever, the definition of life is a vital question that holds implications for vast branches of synthetic biology, genetic engineering and ultimately the search for life elsewhere in the Universe. We live in an exciting time where life has become a raw material, for scientific and artistic purposes, and the possibilities for human health and human society are seemingly endless. But how do our culture, our society and even our language come to terms with these new ideas of life. Are we re-writing the working definitions of what is ‘alive’?

Portuguese artist Marta de Menezes explores the intersection between Art and Biology, working in research laboratories demonstrating that new biological technologies can be used as new art medium. In 1999 de Menezes created her first biological artwork (Nature?) by modifying the wing patterns of live butterflies. Since then, she has used diverse biological techniques including functional MRI of the brain to create

portraits where the mind can be visualised (Functional Portraits, 2002); sculptures made of proteins (Proteic Portrait, 2002 – 2007); and DNA (Innercloud, 2003; The Family, 2004). Her work has been presented internationally in exhibitions, articles and lectures.



Oron Catts is an artist, researcher and curator whose pioneering work with the Tissue Culture and Art Project which he established in 1996 is considered a leading biological art project. In 2009 Catts was recognised by Thames & Hudson's "60 Innovators Shaping our Creative Future" book in the category "Beyond Design", and by Icon Magazine (UK) as one of the top 20 Designers, "making the future and transforming the way we work".

Dr Ionat Zurr is an award winning artist and researcher, Zurr formed, together with Oron Catts, the Tissue Culture and Art Project. She is considered a pioneer in the field of biological arts and her work has been exhibited internationally. Zurr specialises in biological and digital imaging as well as video production.

Tarsh Bates earned a Master of Science (Biological Arts) in 2012 after living in a public art gallery for 3 months with eight other scientific model organisms, exploring the aesthetics of care and alterity.

Ting-Tong Chang creates large-scale installation works that look to analyse the relationship between science, technology and society. His practice reflects on his time growing up in China, which he describes as industrial and focussed on

manufacture. Yet, now living in London, he also recognises the opposite end of this consumerist lifestyle and its repercussions, for example, in the environment. In reaction to this Chang creates machines, but not ones associated with traditional mechanics, built for productivity and efficiency. These machines are much closer to the human being – describing them as anxious, quirky, idiosyncratic, and often unproductive. He uses every day and found materials in an obscured manner to provoke a renewed view of contemporary consumerism.

A full listing of Science Festival events is [available here]