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Living Art on Show at the MoMA *Tissue Culture and Art Project*

Life is on show at The Museum of Modern Art in New York as part of the *Design and the Elastic Mind* Exhibition, organized by Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, and Patricia Juncosa Vecchierini, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design.

Of two hundred works presented in this seminal exhibition, one piece requires feeding to survive. The semi-living sculptures of The Tissue Culture & Art Project (Oron Catts & Ionat Zurr) are designed to provoke and stimulate discussions about our changing understandings and perceptions of life in the light of rapid developments in the life sciences and their applied technologies.

In *Victimless Leather-A Prototype of Stitch-less Jacket Grown in a Technoscientific Body*, embryonic mouse stem cells were seeded over a miniature jacket like shape made of bio-degradable polymers. Positioned inside a specially designed perfusion system, the *Victimless Leather's* cells are not only kept alive, but also grow, whilst on show in the MoMA. *Victimless Leather* requires ongoing care and maintenance for the duration of the exhibition; such is the nature of exhibiting living forms.

Whilst in New York Catts and Zurr worked in the laboratory of Associate Professor Helen H. Lu, Biomedical Engineering at Columbia University. Since the artists returned to Australia, scientists within her lab are responsible for the ongoing care of *Victimless Leather*, travelling to MoMA every week to feed the cells.

The audience is confronted with the delicate process of cell growth and the prevention of contamination. Even more importantly, the audience is led to question the use, and in many cases, the exploitation of the lives of others.

Is the possibility of growing/constructing leather like material without the slaughtering of animals feasible, or is it an ironic piece that comments on our technologically mediated victimless utopia; a future in which technology may not eliminate the victims but rather push them further from our sight? At this stage the cells still require animal derived materials for their survival and growth.

Ionat Zurr states, "Exhibiting *Victimless Leather* at the MoMA is particularly exciting for the Tissue Culture and Art Project as the history of bioart puts Edward Steichen's exhibition of delphiniums at MoMA in 1936 as the earliest example of western art manipulating living systems. Yet the prospect of showing a modified



life form as art in the 1930's held controversial implications in a political period where eugenics was taking hold as a "cure" for societal ills."

The Tissue Culture and Art Project is an ongoing research group at Symbiotica: The Art and Science Collaborative Research Laboratory, located within the School of Anatomy and Human Biology at The University of Western Australia. Symbiotica is dedicated to the research, learning and critique of life sciences. It is the first research laboratory of its kind, in that it enables artists to actively engage in wet biology practices in a biological science department. Symbiotica hosts residents, runs workshops, produces exhibitions and organises symposiums as part of its core activities.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.tca.uwa.edu.au/>

<http://www.symbiotica.uwa.edu.au/>



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