

Curatorial Overview

Experimenta Life Forms reveals how contemporary artists are exploring notions of life, at a time when technological change and new research findings are making definitions of 'life' increasingly difficult to pin down. What new life forms are emerging through technological and biological adaptation and invention? Are our definitions of life shifting because of new scientific discoveries? How do First Nation's epistemologies influence ways of thinking and understanding life? How are notions of our place in the web of life changing now that research is identifying sentience in animals, plant-life, and perhaps soon in our machines?

Experimenta Life Forms features a diversity of artforms including robotics, bio-art, screen-based works, installations, participatory and generative art. The exhibition showcases 20 artworks by 26 leading Australian and international artists who are making a significant contribution to current dialogues about the changing notions of life, as we know it.

Curators: Jonathan Parsons and Lubi Thomas

Associate Curator: Jessica Clark

Artists: Daniel Boyd; Michael Candy; Brad Darkson; Donna Davis; Justine Emard; Anton Hasell; Floris Kaayk; Thomas Marcusson; Uyen Nguyen, Max Piantoni and Matthew Riley; Helen Pynor; Dominic Redfern; Theresa Schubert; Rebecca Selleck; Agat Sharma; Miranda Smitheram; PluginHUMAN; The Tissue Culture & Art Project; mOwson&MOwson; Laura Woodward; Kite and Devin Ronneberg.

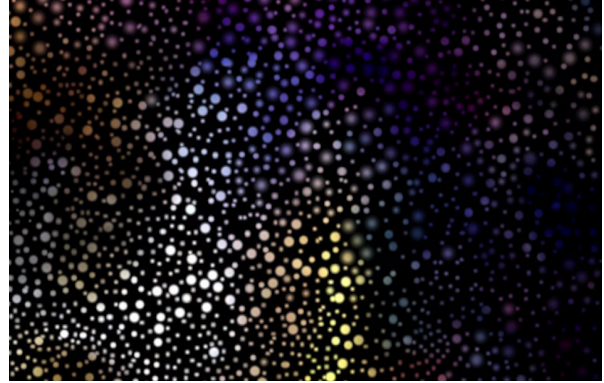
Experimenta's 8th national touring show will travel nationally until 2023.

Visit the website for presentation dates: www.experimenta.org/lifeforms

Artwork Overviews

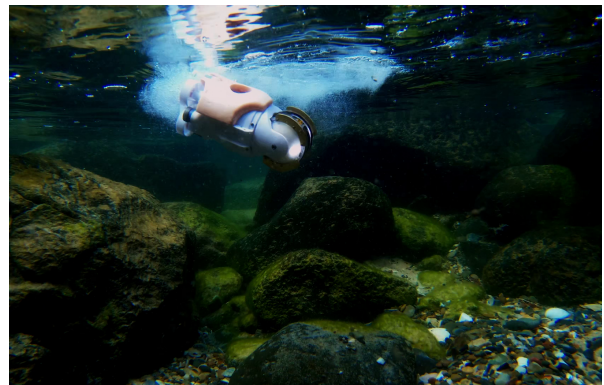
History is Made at Night by Daniel Boyd

Daniel Boyd's 'History is Made at Night' is an immersive video installation that engages in the histories of the influence of the stars, in particular our sun, on life-forming on earth. Central to Boyd's style is his technique of partially overpainting imagery. This technique is adapted to the video format to both reveal and conceal information, questioning the authority of perceived knowledge. By destabilising the imagery and the viewers perception of it we are asked to acknowledge the incomprehensible and that we do not have a full understanding of life and all its forms, let alone what life forms may exist in the vast ever expanding universe.



Little Sunfish by Michael Candy

Michael Candy's 'Little Sunfish' is a speculative story about a robot that escapes its human masters to roam the Pacific Ocean. Inspired by robotic technology used to investigate radioactive damage inside the Fukushima Daiichi reactors, this work is a new take on the narrative trope where robots develop their own agency. In this video the robot is seen exploring its new found freedom, yet it is inadvertently spreading radioactive material along its way. Next to the video we see our celluloid hero trapped in a perspex display case reminiscent of displays in natural history museum, asking us to consider how we may treat artificial life that has agency and perhaps even sentience.



Artwork Overviews

Smart Object

by Brad Darkson

Brad Darkson's 'Smart Object' is a multi-media installation that questions humanity's obsessive pursuit of technology. The artwork reveals two simultaneous processes; a wooden plongi (club) carved by the artist and a looped 3D animation of the artist's avatar performing the carving process. By contrasting the physical and digital components, the artwork explores differing notions of time, cultural knowledge transfer, and the innate spirit or life force of and within things. Darkson critiques humanity's reliance on the digital that severs our spiritual connection to Country. He encourages us to reconnect with the sentient Country we are all a part of, in the real world.

An Experimenta & ANAT Commission



TRANSplant [becoming Kin]

by Donna Davis

Donna Davis is an artist whose work explores the intersections between art and science and often collaborates with ecologists, botanists and mycologists. 'TRANSplant [becoming Kin]' is a multi-media work that imagines the adaptations that flora may require to survive the ecological upheavals wrought through climate change. This work tells the tale of ten flora refugee species whose tropical mountain home is under threat from rising temperatures. The survival strategies woven through this work references moves by environmental activists seeking to effect change within our anthropocentric Western legal systems. In 2019 the ACT government legislated to recognise animals as sentient beings. Davis asks us to consider - What might a new paradigm look like where all species are considered as equal and valued life forms, perhaps even global citizens?

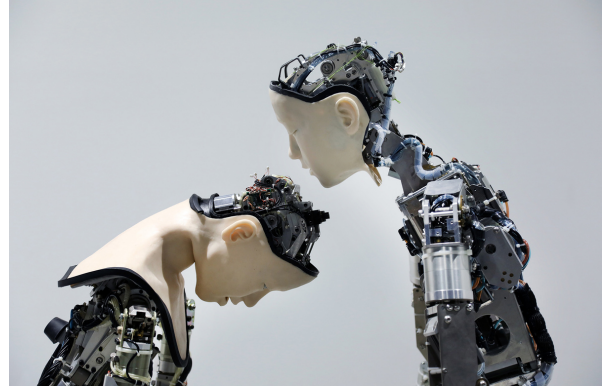


Artwork Overviews

Soul-Shift

by Justine Emard

French artist Justine Emard's 'Soul-Shift' is a video work that captures the possible meeting of two generations of the same groundbreaking robot design called 'Alter'. Developed by renowned Japanese roboticists, Hiroshi Ishiguro and Takashi Ikegami, their robotics research seeks to understand what it means to be 'life-like'. Emard's practice explores the emerging relationship between human life and technology. In this artwork she ponders the implications of the transference of 'Alter's' data between generations. Is there a spirit transferred from Alter to Alter 2? A form of reincarnation without flesh?



3D Printed Difference-Tone Bell

by Anton Hasell

Anton Hasell's '3D Printed Difference Tone Bell' pushes the boundaries of traditional bell fabrication. Through his research into bell acoustic effects by 3D printing in direct-metals, Hasell has achieved an innovation in design. This artwork invites audiences to contemplate the foundations of life beyond our human scale where all matter, according to String Theory, is composed of miniscule vibrating strings, made perceptible through resonance.



Artwork Overviews

The Modular Body by Floris Kaayk

Exhibiting for the first time in Australia, Dutch artist Floris Kaayk's 'The Modular Body' is a speculative fiction video work that asks us to consider the ethical questions involved in biotechnology research and development. The protagonist in the work is Cornelis Vlasman, a versatile biologist whose experiments with organic materials lead to the creation of a primitive organism called OSCAR. Originally conceived as an online project comprising 56 interconnected documentary clips, Kaayk has drawn on this material to create a multi-channel gallery experience. Playfully using documentary tropes, 'The Modular Body' explores the power of the visual to blur the lines between truth and fiction and considers the ethics of human manipulation of life by asking: 'what defines life?'



DJ Moss by Thomas Marcusson

In 'DJ Moss', Thomas Marcusson playfully responds to the ever-evolving spectrum of machine vs human-made entertainment. Being neither algorithm nor person, 'DJ Moss' brings a new type of living entity to the decks - living, breathing moss. Performing live in the gallery, this strange and haphazard performance prompts us to reflect on the agency of plant life, their societal networks and systems of communication, as well as our relationship with non-human and non-biological systems.



An Experimenta Commission

Artwork Overviews

You, Me, Things

by Uyen Nguyen, Max Piantoni
and Matthew Riley

'You, Me, Things' is a playable, sound-responsive installation that invites audiences to 'feed' a fantastical virtual world with their non-verbal sounds. Different sounds generate distinct digital animations, and the more that people interact with the work the more dynamic the virtual ecosystem becomes. Through 'You, Me, Things,' Australian artists Uyen Nguyen, Max Piantoni and Matthew Riley investigate how our sonic world can be harnessed creatively to construct new experiences?



An Experimenta Commission

Habitation

by Helen Pynor

'Habitation' explores how animate-inanimate boundaries are collapsing due to the widespread use of medical prosthetics, and was prompted by Pynor's recent hip replacement surgery. The artwork takes up Monika Bakke's notion of 'lithic intimacies': life's relationships of exchange, and inter-species companionship with minerals. Pynor obtained her surgically removed bone and to honour it, she has used it to make a bone china femur head, which sits alongside earthenware pelvis and femur bones, representing the bones that remain in her body. Accompanying these ceramics are lightbox images evoking her transformation through surgery. This artwork seeks to challenge perceptions of the body as a passive recipient of human engineered implants.

An Experimenta Commission



Artwork Overviews

first forms

by Dominic Redfern

Dominic Redfern's 'first forms' is a multi-screen installation exploring cyanobacteria, the single-celled life form that created the conditions for complex life to arise on earth 800 million years ago. Redfern's practice is engaged with urban waterways, and the investigation of the relationship between human and non-human histories. Continuing to work with water but taking a deep dive into pre-history, 'first forms' highlights the shared history of all multi-celled life forms.

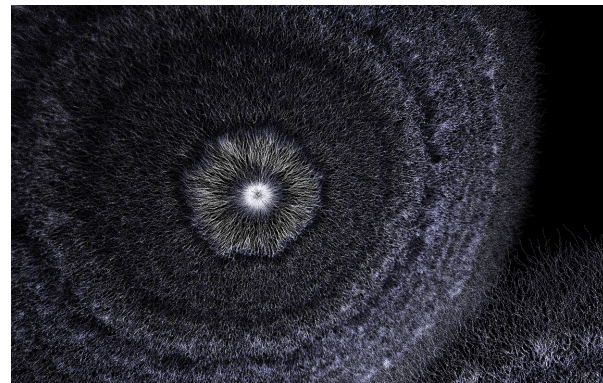
An Experimenta Commission



Sound of Fungi

by Theresa Schubert

Exhibiting for the first time in Australia, German artist Theresa Schubert's 'Sound for Fungi. Homage to Indeterminacy' began as a laboratory experiment to see the effect of sound frequencies on the growth patterns of fungi mycelia. Audiences can experience an interactive video installation that simulates Schubert's laboratory experiment, and influence the digital 3D environment which shifts between macro and cellular level perspectives. This work offers us a glimpse into the complexity of the underground network of microbes that connect the 'Wood Wide Web'.



Supported by the Goethe-Institut

Artwork Overviews

Snow Rabbits

by Rebecca Selleck

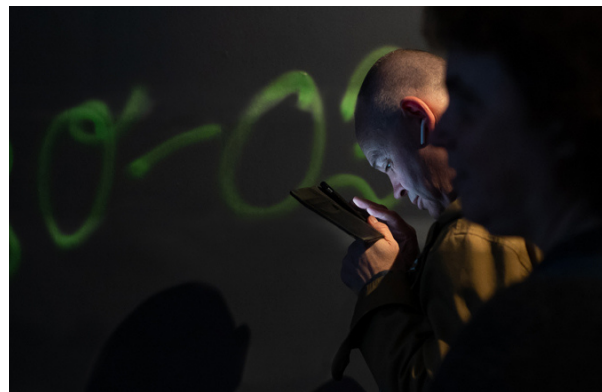
Rebecca Selleck's 'Snow Rabbits' is part of an ongoing series that deliberates on our fraught colonial history with introduced species and reflects on the complexity of animal and environmental ethics. Animatronic rabbit-like forms appear to 'breathe' while gathered under a replica of a Snow Gum tree. These uncanny rabbits allude to the evolutionary processes involved in species' adaptation to new environments. The inclusion of the eucalypts highlights the tensions between invasive and endemic species. The merging of a familiar domestic scene with its external landscape point our human culpability in these environmental changes.



Brachiation on the Phylogenetic Tree

by Agat Sharma

Showing for the first time in Australia Agat Sharma is an Indian theatre maker and artist who explores the connections between the uncanny and the banal, the natural and the artificial. 'Brachiation on the Phylogenetic Tree' is an interactive work that playfully adapts automated Call Centre technologies to create a speculative fiction artwork about the entanglements between humans and microorganisms. Beginning in the gallery participants can continue to engage with the work via their smartphones.



Artwork Overviews

Macro/Micro_Whakapapa by Miranda Smitheram

Miranda Smitheram's 'Macro/Micro_Whakapapa' is an installation that speaks to First Nation's perspectives of the world where all matter is understood as lively, relational and interconnected. This artwork grew from Smitheram's collaboration with Māori contemporary dance company, Atamira Dance Company, her background in fashion and design and her experimentation with motion capture technologies. In the artwork, an animated digital cloth has become inhabited by whakapapa (genealogy or line of descent): a shape-shifting geology, topography and map that is both cartographic and imbued with energy that speaks of the interconnectedness of all matter.



PULSE: The Life Force of Trees by PluginHUMAN

PluginHUMAN's 'PULSE: The Life Force of Trees' is a light sculpture whose shifting light and sound scape is driven by environmental data from significant trees in the Amazon, Panama, Taiwan, India and Australia. The LEDs at the core of the work are controlled by data collected from each tree's location including recordings of; soil moisture levels, temperatures, barometric qualities, movement and light. The work ruminates on the sentience of trees, asking audiences to contemplate our relationship with the complex landscape in which we live.



An Experimenta Commission

Artwork Overviews

Biomess

by The Tissue Culture & Art Project
(Oron Catts & Ionat Zurr)

'Biomess' celebrates the diversity of natural and designed life and challenges our perceptions of its strangeness. The artwork is part of a significant body of work by The Tissue Culture & Art Project (Oron Catts & Ionat Zurr) whose practice pioneered the Bioart genre, an artform where artist's work with life or living systems as a medium for artistic expression, both as a material and as subject matter. In this installation, specimens sourced in collaboration with curators of natural history collections are encased within immaculate luxury retail display cases alongside a bioreactor used in biotechnology research.



feeler

by mOwson&MOwson

'Feeler' is an installation composed of dismembered octopus tentacles, whose skin is embedded with patterns inspired by microscopic images of agricultural and zoonotic pathogens, that emit pulsating light.. The artwork forms part of mOwson&MOwson's ongoing artistic research into motherhood, and the reproductive manipulation and control of non-human life forms. The potential to farm octopuses for meat drives current research into their breeding. This work us to consider the impact of intensive agricultural systems including their association with the emergence and amplification of disease.



Artwork Overviews

Planet

by Laura Woodward

Laura Woodward's 'Planet' is meditation on the interplay of water, air and light – the building blocks of life. The central element of the work is a water filled sphere, where the water acts as a lens that shifts perception and understanding. The sphere represents a drop of water, the planet we stand on, the moon we see and the sun that warms us. This finely engineered installation can also be read as an experimental life-support machine. Woodward is an artist whose kinetic sculptures experiment with looped systems and their inherent logic.



Itówapi Čík'ala (Little Picture)

by Kite and Devin Ronneberg

Kite and Devin Ronneberg's 'Itówapi Čík'ala (Little Picture)' is an interactive installation that reveals an Oglála Lakǰóta (a First Nations people of North America) world view on the relationships between human and non-human entities and intelligences. Through Oglála Lakǰóta ontologies, even materials such as metals, rocks, and minerals can be capable of volition. This artwork invites us to engage with its interactive braided strands by bending and moving them in different ways to affect a sound response. It is through this interaction that a conversation between human and non-human entities takes place.

