

ART RESEARCH AFRICA CONFERENCE 2022

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

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WORKING TITLE: The scientific lab as studio/the studio as scientific lab: exploring practice-led art-science collaborations in a decolonial context

UNDER THE THEMATIC: Art-Science and the spaces of unknowing

As Mark Roughley, Kathryn Smith and Caroline Wilkinson (2019:226-227)¹ note, collaborations between artists and scientists are increasingly a feature of the global artistic and cultural landscape. Traditionally this relationship is seen as art in the service of science whereby creative practitioners use their skills to visually communicate scientific ideas, objects or forms and the artist merely serves a technical role.

However, a hybrid form of Practice-Led Research (PLR) in the form of Art-Science collaborations has emerged in the global North over the last 30 years where artists and scientists collaborate to explore the creative possibilities and speculative futures represented by the intersection of these two 'cultures.' Working under the umbrella term 'creative bio-art, artists engage with scientific processes, using living matter as media. Biological materials such as cells, tissues, microbes and other living organisms are explored using a combination of artmaking processes and scientific procedures and protocols. Creative bio-research has grown from a niche interest to a legitimate field of inquiry, producing many interdisciplinary creative collaborations, textual publications (some of which include PLR-based approaches to writing) and the establishment of new art-science postgraduate degree programmes in Higher Education institutions.² Creative bio-research is therefore an interdisciplinary praxis: a critical and creative visual response to the development of bio-technologies and theoretical debates taking place in contemporary scientific discourses, as well as in visual arts disciplines, and in the intersection between the two.

In this paper, I analyse selected bio-artists' work, including examples from my bioart praxis, through the lenses of post-humanist post-anthropocentric, and New Feminist Materialist theory. I draw on the writings of Rosi Bradotti, Karen Barad, Marietta Radomska and Donna Haraway, in which they advocate for an understanding of life as a material, dynamic, and excessive force of transformation that traverses the divide between the living and non/living, organic and inorganic, human and non/human ... as they are currently conceived"³ (Radomska 2016:32). Matter is understood as a discursive production, wherein the materialisation of bodies and the production of meaning are

¹ Roughley, M, Smith, K and Wilkinson, C. 2019. Investigating new areas of art-science practice-based research with the MA Art in Science programme at Liverpool School of Art and Design. *Higher Education Pedagogies* 4:1: 226-243.

² Devic, R. 2017. The #postARTandSCIENCE symposium. Wellcome Collection, September, London. See also Malina, R. F. 2016. Art-science: An annotated bibliography. *Art Journal* Fall. Accessed November 28, 2018: <http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=7855>

³ Radomska, M. 2016. *Uncontainable Life. A Biophilosophy of Bioart*. PhD thesis submitted to Linköping Studies in Arts and Science, no. 666, Department of Thematic Studies – Gender Studies:32.

interdependent. Such enmeshment contributes to a decentering of the white, heterosexual male and Eurocentric notions of speciesism, as it calls into question clear-cut binary oppositions between human and 'nonhuman'; 'self' and 'other'; mind and matter; and emotion upon which western discourse is based. The western notion of 'humanity' is considered as a concept that can be reconstituted in ways that favour multiple forms of humanities in trans-species alliances that are based on diversity, complexity, and hybridisation.

Although recognised internationally, creative bio-research is a relatively unexplored field in South Africa. It therefore offers enormous possibilities for the emergence of decolonial PLR-led forms of creative praxis, that, if introduced in ways that pertain specifically to the South African context, and more broadly, the African continent, could contribute to a re-imagining of an Africanised future.

Biographical note (not exceeding 50 words) email address and phone number of presenter/s.

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