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Biological Media and the Unsettling Role of Documentation

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**BIOLOGICAL MEDIA & THE UNSETTLING
ROLE OF DOCUMENTATION**

Biological art is one of the most recent manifestations at the intersection of art, science and technology, that has been highly productive for some time. Now, technologically augmented life, such as in vitro fertilisation and genetically engineered life forms, have come under the scrutiny of bio art in particular. By their very nature, biological media, being living systems, provoke a number of difficulties related to the production, exhibition and conservation practices of bio art.

It is significant that this emerging genre of artistic expression does not operate on the level of representation, but on the level of presentation involving actual interventions into living systems. However, in some cases organising the presentation of a living art work in a public space is difficult or in fact impossible, which leads to substituting the actual art work by its documentation. Yet, such substitution practices are not accepted by those artists whose goal it is to provide audiences with a unique opportunity to encounter unusual forms of life as art works (wet works, entities still alive or once alive) in a gallery space. This attitude requires the curator not only to arrange suitable conditions for living art works outside the laboratory but also to obtain bio-security permissions. Another option for audiences to gain an opportunity to experience actual lab life is to follow the artists' instructions and join a do-it-yourself biotech movement. In this case, documentation plays the role of both instruction and evidence.

Bibliography: see p.55