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BIOART SOCIETY

m/other becomings exhibition

Project Report

ARC HIVE

Co-funded by the
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1. OVERVIEW

Bioart Society selected *m/other becomings*, an international and multilayered curatorial platform for Bioart Societies Archive exhibition case study. This document will give an overview of all activities while the production-related documentation will only cover the exhibition.

The aim of *m/other becomings* was, to cultivate inter-generational and multispecies methodologies, make space for the investigation of domestic resistance practices, and probe technologies of reproduction, resilience, and recuperation, through durational collaborations between experimental cultural institutions, artists, and thinkers.

m/other becomings was a collaboration between Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology (DK), The Association for Arts and Mental Health (DK), Kultivator (SE), Art Lab Gnesta (SE), and Bioart Society (FI) during 2021/22.

The program realised by the Bioart Society included the production of two artworks produced during 2021 and 2022, a student course with Aalto University with a series of 6 lectures of which 4 were public online lectures during November and December 2021, a 5-day wet-lab workshop with 15 participants, two exhibitions with a total of 6 artists, and a 2-day symposium with 11 contributors on-site and online with a 3-day workshop at the Theatre Academy Helsinki prior to the symposium. Full details about all programs can be found via: https://bioartsociety.fi/projects/m-slash-other-becomings/pages/m-slash-other-becomings .

Within *m/other becomings* the Bioart Society collaborated with: students from the MA program in Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art of the Aalto University in the course Trans-Institutional Experiments and Collaborations during fall 2021, the Aalto University Biogarage and Biofilia laboratories, and the Aalto Design Factory.

Within *m/other becomings* have been realised activities and deliverables for Creative Europe projects Archive and Art4Med.

m/other becomings is co-funded by the Creative Europe Program of the European Union, The Ministry of Education and Culture Finland, Kone Foundation, the A.P. Moller Foundation, The Nordic Culture Fund and the Nordic Culture Point.

2. Curatorial Statement

Curatorial statement by Ida Bencke and Erich Berger:

Mothering bodies are boundary creatures; they inhabit a liminal space between the mundane and the strange. Mothering bodies may manifest ultimate gender conformity, but they are also portals into feral and messy morphologies, resisting the self-other divide so foundational to the epistemologies of Western modernity. As fierce, tired, vulnerable, heavy, and porous carriers in perpetual interconnection, perpetual attachment, mothering bodies swell, stretch, envelope, and leak in all directions, and challenge regimes based on linearity, progress, and subjecthood by foregrounding everyday, repetitive, and frankly unglamorous practices of sustaining life by confirming and continuing kinship.

Often, motherhood is enrolled in the sanctioning of Women as the biologically given front workers in regimes of care and reproduction. (White, heterosexual, able-bodied, affluent) Motherhood has been - and still very much is - weaponized in the often violent perpetuation of a political status quo, and utilized in the othering of marginalized bodies, practices, and cultures.

However, mothering as an action instead of essence, as the quotidian practices of cultivating, carrying, and caring for kin - holds radical potential as it opens toward relations and recuperation beyond the nuclear family, beyond its gender politics and its state-sanctioned economies of labour, consumption and affects.

With this project, we want to take a closer look at the im/possibilities of mothering, not as an essence, but as troubling practice and as a modest, utopian, and oftentimes exhausted precursor of hope. We want to ask what it means - and may come to mean - to make, to mend, to make space for kin in spite of and against the social reproduction of sameness and compliance, and the (bio)politics of gendered and racialized violence. We want to explore reproductive futures and how life sciences give an opportunity to transform and challenge our ideas and possibilities of reproduction and the maternal.

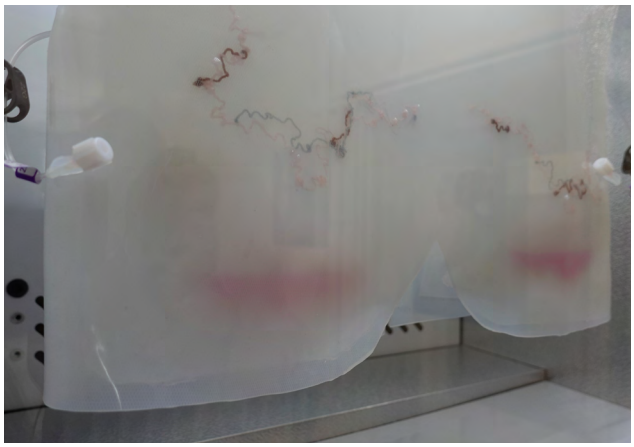
How may we come to mother, to host and to make a dwelling for each other in ways that cancel the brutal mechanisms of othering from within political and ecological landscapes enrolled in and wretched by ongoing necropolitics of coloniality and extractive capitalism? What happens when the technologies and politics of the maternal are unleashed from the affective and economic structures of heteronormative reproduction, from natality, and even from species' genealogies? *m/other becomings* will investigate junctions and leaky borderlands between motherhood and otherhood. Tentatively probing into the potentials of bringing forth an insurgent, but also non-innocent politics of care by investigating the strangeness of mothers as it pushes against conventional notions of body, self, family, and belonging.

3. PROGRAM

3.1 International public call for artwork production

A call for artwork production was launched on April 2021. The call was searching for artwork production proposals that explore reproductive futures and how life sciences transform and challenge our ideas and possibilities of reproduction and the maternal. A total of 72 applications have been received. The selected works by Lyndsey Walsh and Riina Hannula were included in the m/other becomings exhibition during spring 2022 in Helsinki. The artists also participated in other *m/other becomings* activities like the Aalto University course and the symposium.

Agential Guts by Riina Hannula at m/other becomings Instalment I exhibition



Self Care by Lyndsey Walsh at m/other becomings Instalment I exhibition

3.2 Curatorial student course

Interview to Riina Hannula by students.

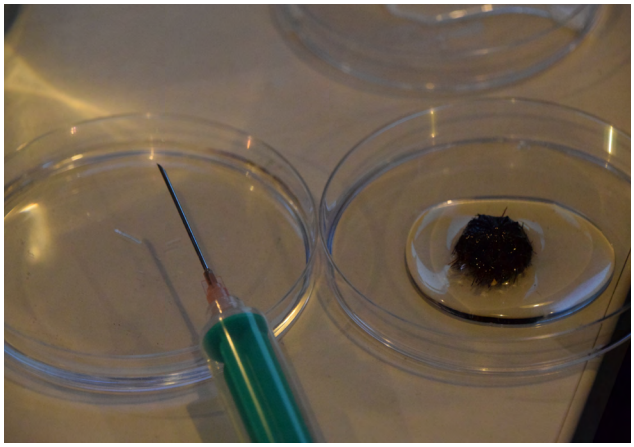
Curatorial collaboration with MA program in Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art of Aalto University Finland.

The course Trans-Institutional Experiments and Collaborations November and December 2021 was programmed together with the lecturer in curating Patrizia Costatin. It consisted of a general introduction to curating by Patrizia Costatin, an introduction to the curation of biological arts by Erich Berger followed by 4 public online lectures with curator Ida Bencke, and artists, Lyndsey Walsh, Riina Hannula and Signe Johannessen. The 10 participating students went through a complete curatorial and production process for the works by Riina Hannula and Lindsey Walsh for the *m/other becomings* instalment I exhibition. They have been working to produce artists' interviews with Lyndsey Walsh, and Riina Hannula, an annotated bibliography, and text material, and they participated in the m/other becomings activities. The aim of this

collaboration was to produce knowledge on working with living systems under gallery conditions. The course content went beyond the conventional questions of curating and producing, taking into account issues of life support, bio-safety, bio-security and how to deal with living systems during and after the exhibition.

3.3 *m/other becomings* workshop

The workshop took place from the 7th - 11th of March 2022 at the Aalto Design Factory and Aalto Biogarage. The workshop was hosted by Marta de Menezes with 14 participants. In a diverse program which switched between theoretical input and hands-on sessions wanted to take a closer look into what happens when the technologies and politics of the maternal are unleashed from the affective and economic structures of heteronormative reproduction, from natality, and even from species' genealogies. A separate package features the workshop, its program, participants and production in more depth.



Sea urchin embryology.

Body scent extraction, phisical workout.

3.4 *m/other becomings* exhibitions instalment I + II

The exhibition which was showing works by six different artists was presented in two instalments:

m/other becomings instalment I with Lyndsey Walsh, Riina Hannala, and Rian Ciela Hammond was shown from the 5th – 28th of May 2022.

m/other becomings instalment II with Marta de Menezes, Margherita Pevere, and Pekko Vasantola was shown from the 9th - 30th of June 2022.

Lyndsey Walsh: *Self-Care*

Self-Care by Lyndsey Walsh confronts the inheritance of bodily trauma and the impact of the medical gaze and medical surveillance on the so-called female body. Embedded in personal narrative and bodily exploration, the work seeks to question bodily identities associated with disease, gender, and care. Self-Care sets out to queer these notions by rearticulating

bodily relationships and the horrors associated with bodily potentials in the face of genetic-based disease diagnostics and familial histories of cancer.

Lyndsey Walsh is an American artist, researcher, and writer based in Berlin, Germany. They are half of the feral art collab Crawlers, half of the music and arts collective I'm Daddy, a professor of practice at various institutions, and a visiting scholar at the Department of Experimental Biophysics at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin in collaboration with the UniSysCat Cluster of Excellence.

Self Care by Lyndsey Walsh at m/other becomings Instalment I

Riina Hannula: *Agential Guts*

Agential Guts by Riina Hannula speculates how to embody multispecies situations beyond utility value with goats that are perceived as domesticated livestock. Hannula's more-than-human practice of care is an affective kin-making and a standpoint to create knowledge within human-goat-microbe-soil assemblage. Intra-acting with companion goats can also become soil care. Attuning to others' needs they are learning to let matters circulate for multispecies flourishing where soil also cares for. Agential Guts produce a shared gut and try to make sense of ancient microbial wisdom within. The project is looking at how also affective bonds can be mediated by microbes. Focusing on the companion microbes that bind animal bodies together makes space for becomings that escape the traditional hierarchies of species and human/animal and matter/meaning etc. dichotomies. Artworks are produced together with goats by following their creative worlding.

Riina Hannula are an artist working with video, sound, live situations, and installation. They are also doing a PhD in social sciences in the Microbial Lives: Practices of New Human-Microbial Cultures project. Hannula's doctoral thesis combines science and technology studies with art-based research in the emerging field of microbial sociology.

Agential Guts by Riina Hannula at m/other becomings Instalment I

Rian Ciela Hammond: *Root Picker & Molecular Female*

Molecular Female by Rian Ciela Hammond is a virtual exhibition exploring a lesser-known history: in the mid-twentieth century, American scientists, funded by the government and with pharmaceutical interests, scoured the world to find plants that could be used in the development and production of synthetic hormones. Using images of these expeditions as a starting point, Hammond questions the romanticism of these 'discoveries' and shows that narratives of scientific progress are inevitably intertwined with colonialism and empire.

Root Picker by Rian Ciela Hammond is a queer nature documentary focused on a family of wild yams found throughout the Americas. The work celebrates the queerness of molecules produced both in our bodies as well as in people across species divisions: plants, bacteria, birds, fish, and mammals. Narration flirts with the third person omniscient voice of the nature documentarian: speaking in geopolitical and industrial ecologies the yams have been absorbed into, weaving through trans feelings, and unwinding some of the colonial formations that have coalesced around their hormonal molecular gifts.

Rian Ciela Hammond is an artist and biologist who creates bio-technical performances, media-expansive artworks, and transdisciplinary texts that invite people to examine the

interactions between technology, power, and ways of knowing and being a body. Hammond's work can be found in the online publication PUSH/PULL: Trans Family Archive (2020) and has been exhibited at Albright-Knox Art Gallery (New York), Vox Populi (Philadelphia), El Museo (New York) and Gas Gallery (California). Hammond is based in Lenapehoking, USA.

Root Picker & Molecular Female by Rian Ciela Hammond at m/other becomings Instalment I

Marta de Menezes: Anti-Marta

Anti-Marta is an installation exploring the limits of human individuality in the face of an increasingly biotech-based society. It represents the relationship between an artist and a scientist, but also the boundary between art and science, and the limits of our own identity. Marta and Luis, an artist and an immunologist, have a pact for life: mated, married, united. Their search for an artistic representation of such a pact led to the transplantation of skin grafts. In both cases, the outcome was a tension between their individualities and their bonding. The skin transplants were also rapidly rejected, given the immunity differences. Yet, in both cases, the pact can live on. The immortal cell lines can co-exist in virtual space, where video projections of living cell cultures intersect in the installation. On the same note, the rejection of skin has led to the production of molecules (antibodies) that forever will be able to identify the other, like the acquisition of a sixth sense that can be visualized through the isolation of appropriate antibodies. Anti-Marta shows how we can bond with another and yet maintain a strong sense of identity. In Anti-Marta, it is not only a woman and a man who assert their relationship and identity but also an artist and a scientist, who demonstrate the connection between the two disciplines while maintaining their uniqueness.

Marta de Menezes is a Portuguese artist with a degree in Fine Arts from the University in Lisbon, and an MSt in History of Art and Visual Culture from the University of Oxford. She has been exploring the interaction between Art and Biology, working in research laboratories, and demonstrating that new biological technologies, DNA, proteins, and live organisms can be used as an art medium. Her work has been presented internationally in exhibitions, articles, and lectures. Besides her work as an artist, de Menezes curated major international exhibitions. She is since 2005 artistic director of Ectopia – Experimental Art Laboratory and from 2009 onward director of Cultivamos Cultura – Association.

Anti-Marta by Marta de Menezes at m/other becomings Instalment II

Pekko Vasantola: ***An attempt to keep my friends alive***

An attempt to keep my friends alive is a series of living bio-sculptures. The material of the works is artificial tissue made of cells of my friends and family members. The works are not traditional portraits representing the subject by their looks, but portraits focusing on the materiality of their subjects. The portrayed people are used as material themselves. Vasantola collected the cells of his friends by using a non-invasive method, scraping the epithelial cells from their cheeks. After culturing the cells in the laboratory, Vasantola combined them with extracellular matrix mimicking hydrogel, to form artificial tissue. This tissue, made of each depicted person, will be alive and growing for the duration of the exhibition. In this exhibition, the sculptures are paired with a video tutorial on How to grow pieces of your friends?, teaching the viewer to repeat the process of extracting and culturing epithelial cells of a friend. Vasantola would like to thank Brinter Oy for their collaboration

and for letting him use a bioprinter manufactured by them. Vasantola would also like to thank The Arts Promotion Center, The Finnish Cultural Foundation and Kunstventures Oy for supporting his work.

Pekko Vasantola is a visual artist based in Helsinki, Finland. Common themes in his work include personal data, new technologies and portraiture. He often makes data-based portraits, which reflect today's technologically enhanced perception. Media he uses range from granite sculptures to AI software to cell culturing and bioprinting. He graduated from Turku Arts Academy in 2019. Currently, he is finalizing his studies at Aalto University's Master Program in Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art. Vasantola's works have been shown in several exhibitions in Finland and abroad, including solo shows in Sculptor Gallery and Porvoo Kunsthalle, and group shows in Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art and Helsinki Kunsthalle.

An attempt to keep my friends alive by Pekko Vasantola at m/other becomings Instalment II

Margherita Pevere: *Wombs – W.02 & W.03*

The series *Wombs* meditates on sexuality and hormonal contraception from an environmental, more-than-human perspective. Wombs reclaims the importance of hormonal contraception and therapy. Sex steroids in hormonal contraceptives modulate human sexual organs to prevent pregnancy. Yet, the same molecules may trigger the endocrine system of other organisms. Wombs wonders how the progestine-based contraceptive I take may link my body to other, more-than-human bodies. By reclaiming vulnerability and toxic embodiment, Wombs prompts a critical rethinking of sexuality and contraception as a human-only experience enclosed in one's own body. In W.02 and W.03, terrestrial slugs

are hermaphroditic allies in the exploration of inner and outer ecologies of fleshy desire. Commonly considered pests to be exterminated, different slugs species display elaborate mating behaviours, such as hanging choreographies or shooting love darts into the partner's body. Wombs interweaves queer ecologies and bioart and performance practice and takes on the feminist idea of leaky bodies – bodies that are never sealed and fully enclosed – and contextualises it in today's surging environmental disruption. Wombs prompts to embrace vulnerability as a contemporary political and ethical gesture.

Margherita Pevere is an internationally acknowledged artist and researcher whose practice glides across biological arts and performance with a distinctive visceral signature. Her inquiry hybridizes biotechnology, ecology, environmental politics, gender and death studies to create arresting installations and performances that trail today's ecological complexity. Her body of work is a blooming garden crawling with genetically edited bacteria, cells, sex hormones, microbial biofilm, bovine blood, slugs, growing plants and decomposing remains. She would not be the artist she is today without the many collaborations across art, science and humanities. Together with Marco Donnarumma and Andrea Familari, she co-founded the artists' group Fronte Vacuo to realize performances made of bodies, symbionts, sounds, machines and images. She is a member of the Finnish Bioart Society, The Queer Death Studies Network and The Posthumanities Hub. She is completing a PhD at Aalto University in biological arts and queer studies.

Wombs by Margherita Pevere at m/other becomings Instalment II

3.5 *m/other becomings* symposium

The *m/other becomings* symposium was held 9th - 10th June at the Aalto Design Factory.

The *m/other becomings* symposium concluded the two-year spanning *m/other becomings* collaboration between cultural institutions, artists, and thinkers which hosted a program of exhibitions, workshops and lectures in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland.

Over the course of two days with keynotes, panels, and with other formats we took a closer look at the im/possibilities of mothering, not as an essence, but as troubling practice and as a modest, utopian, and oftentimes exhausted precursor of hope. We want to ask what it means – and may come to mean – to make, to mend, to make space for kin in spite of and against the social reproduction of sameness and compliance, and the (bio)politics of gendered and racialized violence. Likewise, we explored reproductive futures and probed if and how life sciences allow us to challenge and transform our ideas and possibilities of reproduction and the maternal.

The program included keynotes by Ionat Zurr (artist, Symbiotica), Lesley-Ann Brown (writer, Blackgirl on Mars), and Tiia Sudenkaarne (researcher) as well as presentations and panels with Ida Bencke (curator, LabAE), Margherita Pevere (artist), Signe Johannessen (artist), Emilia Tikka (designer), Lyndsey Walsh (artist), Riina Hannula (artist), and Chessa Adsit-Morris (theorist, Center for Creative Ecologies).

Prior to the symposium Lesley-Ann Brown held a 3-day workshop at the Theatre Academy Helsinki on the topic realm of *m/other becomings*. The students produced Zines and participated in the symposium.

m/other becomings symposium: Response to the day and Q&A with Margherita Pevere.