

**WETWARE:**  
**ART | AGENCY**  
**ANIMATION**



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## KLAUS SPIESS AND LUCIE STRECKER: SPITPARTY & HARE'S BLOOD +

In their genetic performance project *Spitparty*, this duo critically addresses and reenacts commercial home genetic testing, known as 'direct-to-consumer genetics' or DCG. Companies offering these products market them for their putative ability to predict individual health risks based on the analysis of saliva sent in by consumers. Taking as their point of departure documentary material from 'Spitparties' to which DCG companies invite celebrities during fashion weeks for promotional saliva-based DNA analyses, Spiess and Strecker stage performers and a geneticist to arouse the audience's interest in their own unique genomes, under the slogan "free speech and free spit." They hand out tubes and an 'informed consent form' asking for permission to harvest saliva and invite spectators to have a gene mutation from their own DNA analyzed in real time and visualized as large images of DNA bands. Then, participants are encouraged to bodily interact with their individually projected DNA images by assuming various poses before them. In addition, audience members are asked to kiss each other to mix their saliva, thus producing fused DNA images that subvert the very idea of individual DNA identification and turning consumerism into a collectively produced work of art. Finally, Spiess and Strecker freeze and archive the mixed saliva samples.

With *Spitparty*, Klaus Spiess & Lucie Strecker emphasize how neoliberalism constructs biopolitics. Rather than meeting genuine health needs, DCG entices people to mimic models of technological self-optimization. While media response has called for the free flow of information, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has, in some cases, suspended DNA analyses using DCG unless direct medical consultancy could be provided, owing to consumers' possible misinterpretation of the identified health risks.

*Spitparty* was developed with the support of the Einstein Foundation Berlin, Tanzquartier Vienna, Open Science Vienna, Berlin University of the Arts, Medical University Vienna, and the Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Chancellery of Austria.

The core of the biotechnological live performance and installation *Hare's Blood +* is a specifically designed artistic *biobrick*, a standardized genetic sequence, that Spiess and Strecker manufactured to allow their audience to speculate on the increasing value of bio-banked parts of 'artistic animals.' In order to question the exploding prices of artworks that incorporate animal relics in the light of a counter-economy as envisioned by Joseph Beuys, the artists opened one of the two hundred multiples in which Beuys himself had shrink-wrapped hare's blood. They, then, isolated the gene coding for catalase from the blood—a key antioxidant enzyme in the body's defense against oxidative stress which protects against aging—and spliced it into living yeast cells. After having engineered a synthetic gene from the hare's blood and its host's DNA, they programmed a peroxide-driven interface able to specifically activate the synthetic gene. The transgenic Beuysian creature was then put up for public auction to act as an 'eco-political agent,' whose life would now be governed by the commercial interests of the auction attendees. With the prospect of DNA engineering

becoming the non-trivial task of bringing the past back to life to lead an unpredictable future, the auction in *Hare's Blood +* evokes concepts of 'living money' and property rights over bio-banked animals in art, science and beyond. The installation consists of the original, opened Beuys multiple, *Sublation I* and *Sublation II*, the cooled transgenic yeast with 67% surviving and 33% apoptotic cells, tracing the actual decomposition of the cells at the moment the winning bid was submitted.

*Hare's Blood +* has been developed with the scientific support of the Mark Rinnerthaler group and Reinhard Nestelbacher at the Department of Cell Biology and Genetics at Salzburg University.

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*Klaus Spiess and Lucie Strecker began developing trans-disciplinary performances and installations that address biopolitical issues five years ago. Together, they run the cross-disciplinary Arts in Medicine program at the Center for Public Health at the Medical University of Vienna. A former endocrinologist and psychosomaticist, Klaus Spiess is an associate professor at the Medical University of Vienna. Lucie Strecker is an artist and stage director. She is currently a research fellow at the University of the Arts Berlin and holds a senior postdoc position at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. They performed at Budascoop Kortrijk, Tanzquartier and Belvedere/21er Haus, Vienna; their installations have been shown at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, and the OK Center, Linz, where the duo has been awarded an Honorary Mention (2015) at the Prix Ars Electronica. They have published articles on their trans-disciplinary performances in Performance Research, Kunstforum International, Springerin, and The Lancet, among others.*



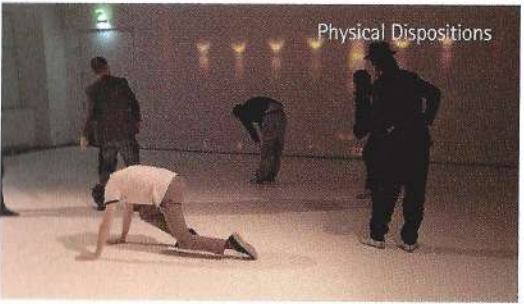
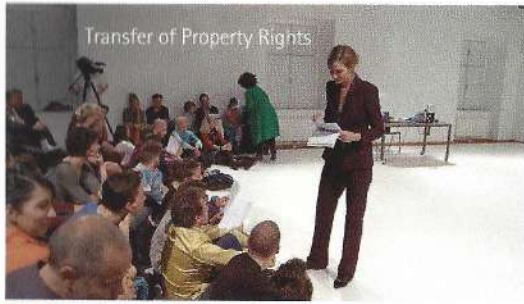
*Hare's Blood +*, Performance video and installation, 2014/2015



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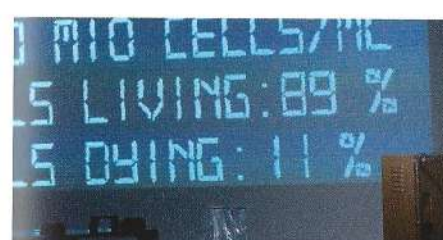
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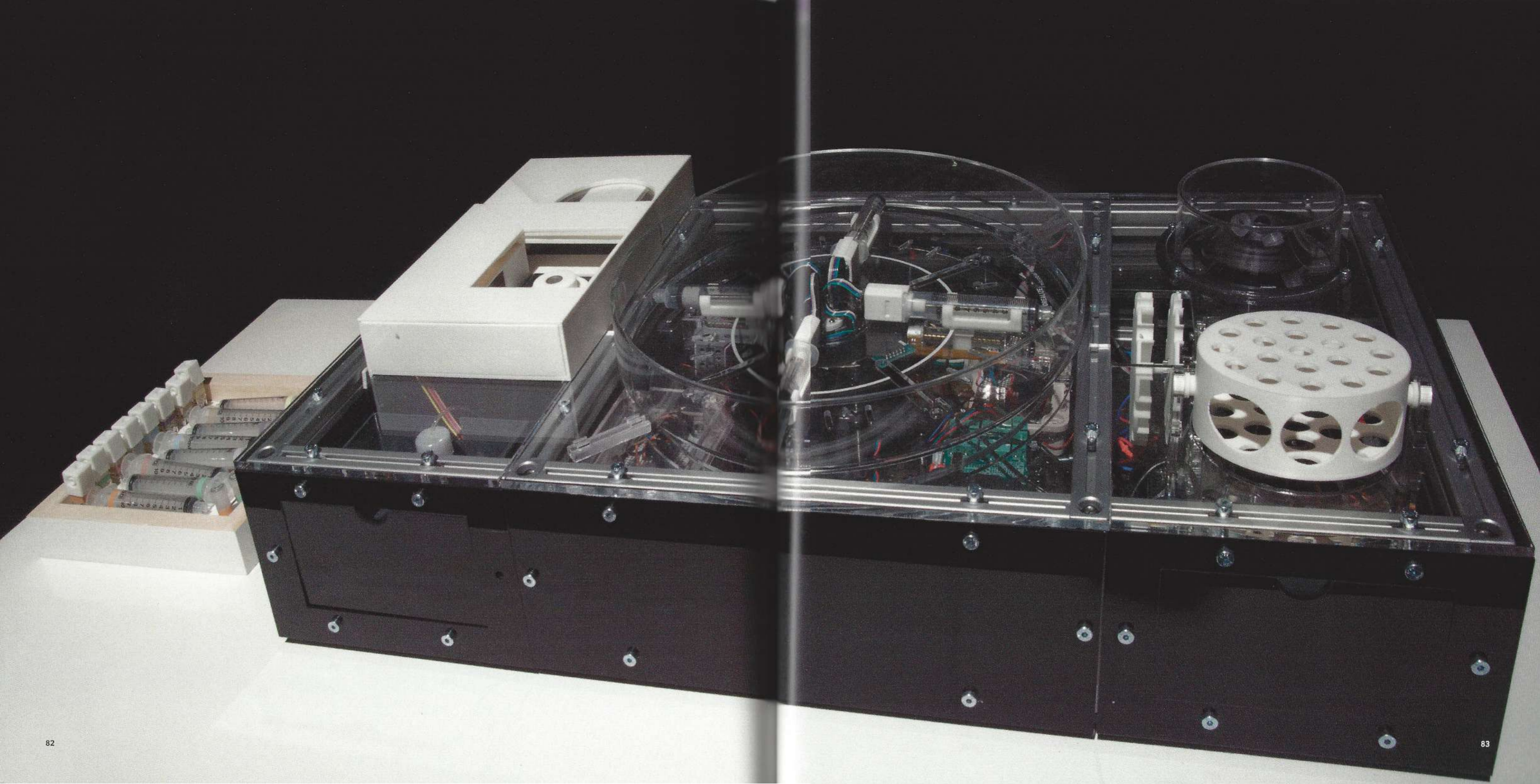


Sotheby's  
 LOT 5      £ 4,400,000  
 USD 7,937,1  
 EUR 5  
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Hare's Blood +  
 A Performance Project by  
 Klaus Spiess & Lucie Strecker



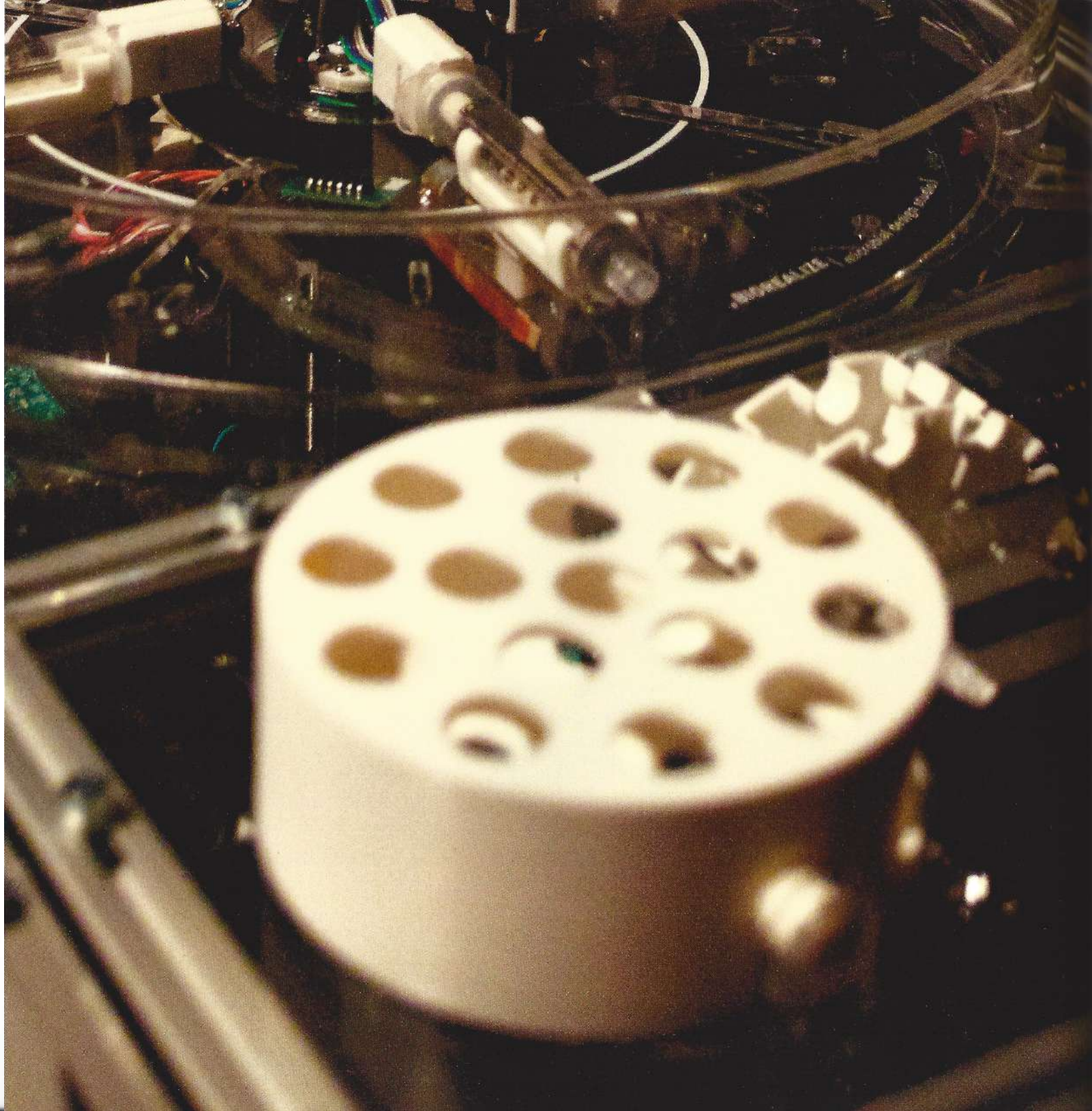


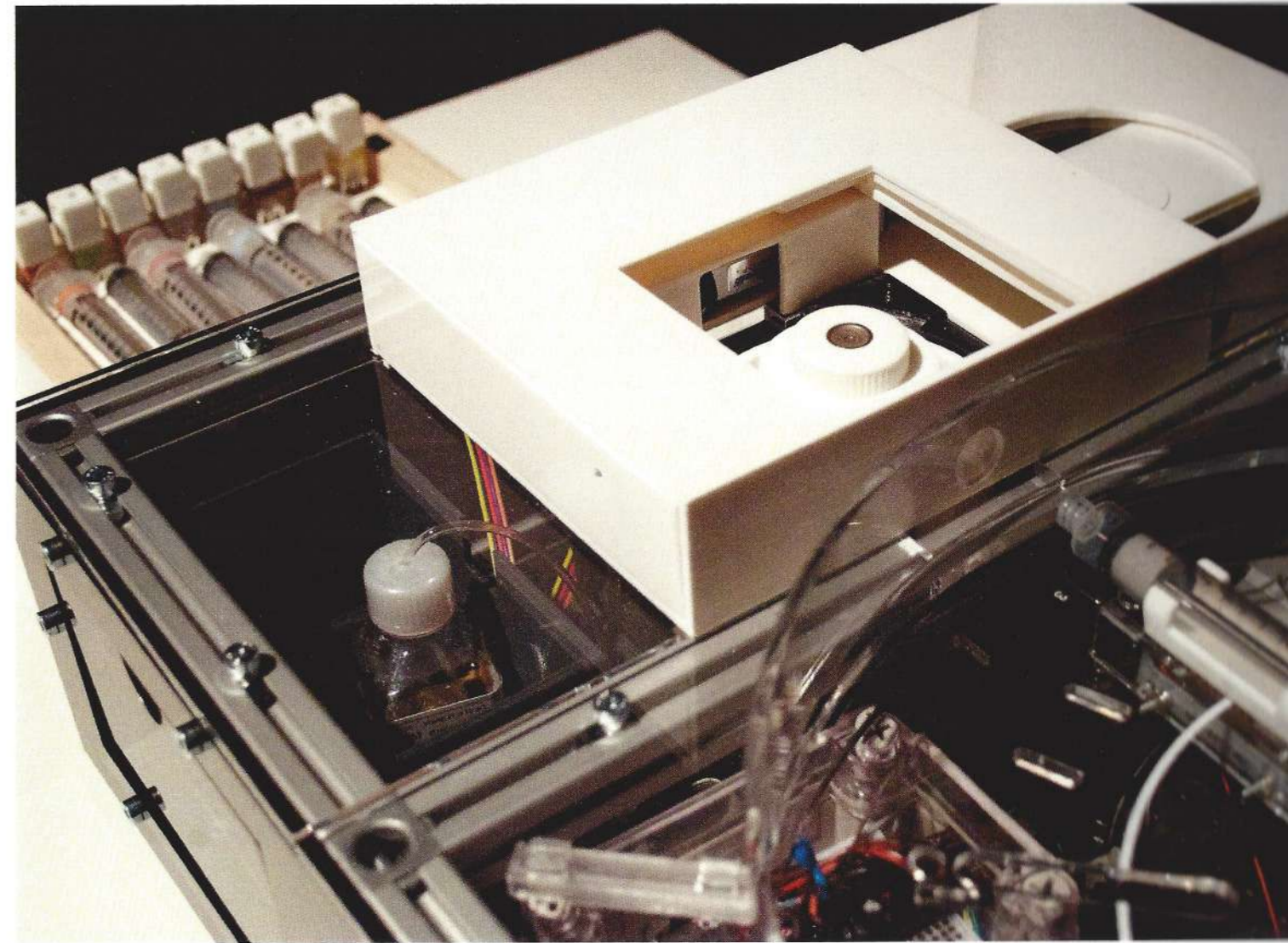
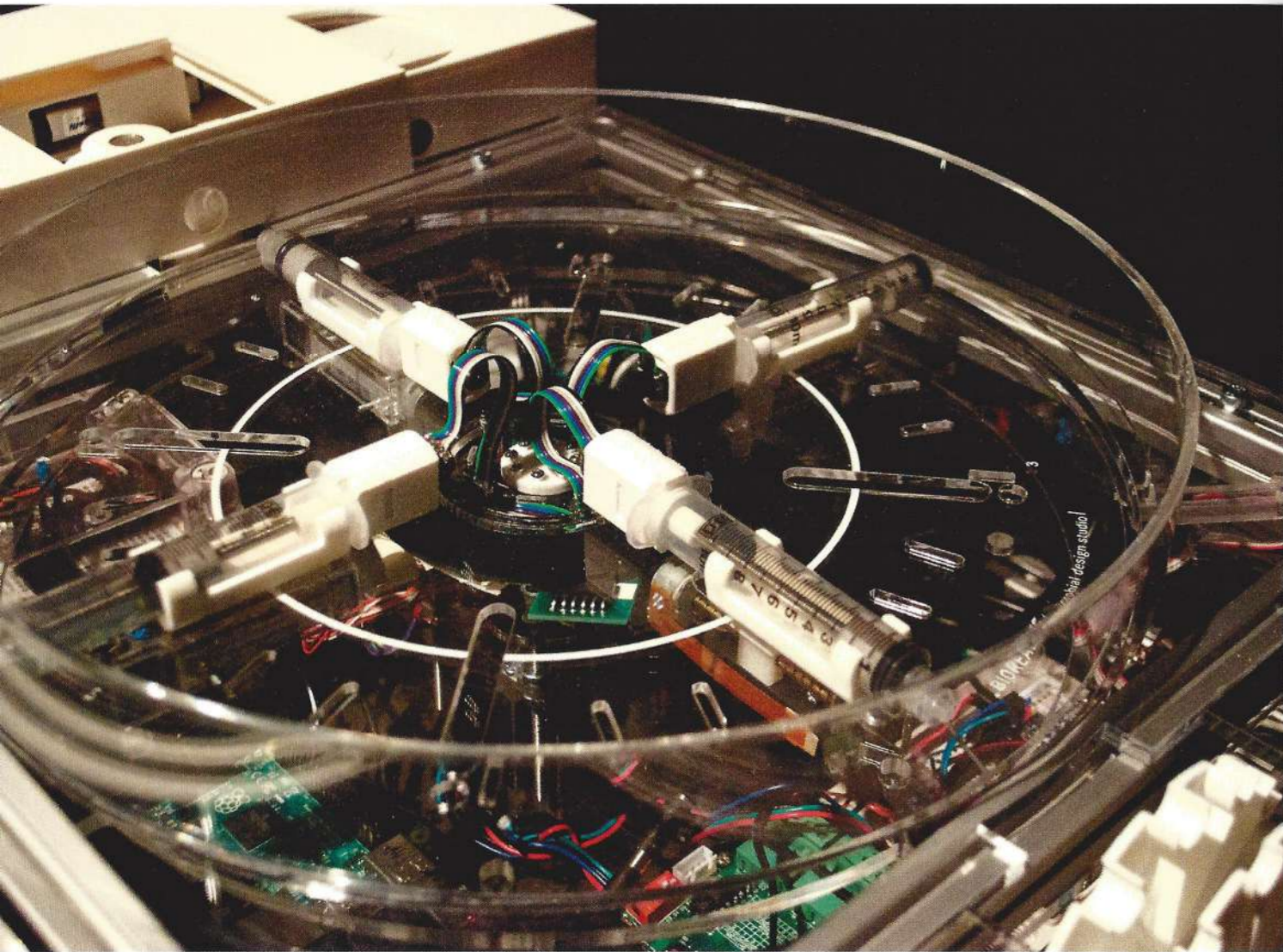


**ORKAN TELHAN:**  
**BIOREALIZE: MICROBIAL DESIGN STUDIO**  
**AND BANANAWORKS**

Orkan Telhan's artistic practice illustrates the current trend to transfer the open source spirit from hardware and software culture to wetware, moving from the production of forms to the very conception of systems, media and devices. *Biorealize: Microbial Design Studio* is an automated biolab to design, culture and test genetically modified organisms. The machine incorporates the facilities of a wetlab into a single inexpensive hardware, which transforms, incubates and purifies microorganisms so that they can create novel proteins encoded by custom DNA designs. The platform runs as a closed-loop system that automates the design of living organisms through combinatorial design, process control and analytics algorithms. Aside from its function as a novel fabrication tool, *Microbial Design Studio* also provides a critical framework to explore self-evolving and self-designing living systems.

In this exhibition, *Microbial Design Studio* is used to speculate about the future of food and the evolution of taste. Today, what we consume is not only shaped by biological evolution but also by complex social and economic decisions imposed by humans. Since the earliest days, we grow what we like; what evolves through nature is highly implicated by our anthropocentric "taste." Today, Cavendish, the most popular banana on the international market, for instance, is mostly a human artifact; it is an outcome of a long history of selective breeding practices that standardized its form, texture and taste. As a living artifact, on the other hand, Cavendish is a monoculture—it cannot grow by itself and rather needs to get cloned across different plantations around the world. As it cannot sexually reproduce, it also cannot diversify its own biology and "taste." A series of *Bananaworks* is featured as biochemically novel concoctions made of probiotics, microbe-sourced proteins and wild banana water. They function as hybrid semi-living encapsulations capable of diversifying



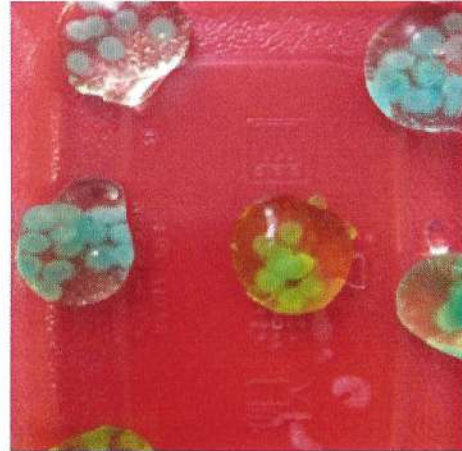
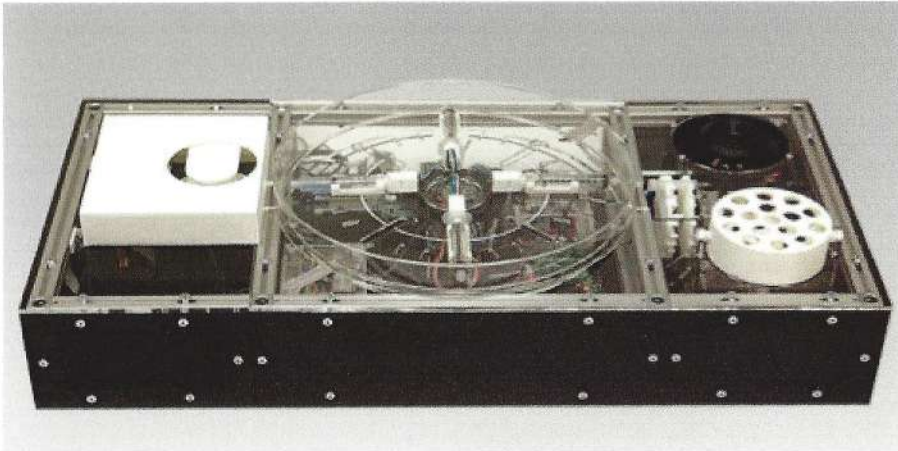


their taste independently and of creating infinitely new possibilities that cannot be created by nature-born (wild) bananas or microorganisms alone.

*Bananaworks'* research grew out of Orkan Telhan's residency at the Center for Fundamental Living Technology (FLinT) at the University of Southern Denmark.

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*Orkan Telhan is an interdisciplinary artist, designer and researcher whose investigations focus on the design of interrogative objects, interfaces and media, engaging with critical issues in social, cultural and environmental responsibility. Telhan is an Assistant Professor of Fine Arts - Emerging Design Practices at the University of Pennsylvania, School of Design. He holds a PhD in Design and Computation from MIT's Department of Architecture. He was part of the Sociable Media Group at the MIT Media Laboratory and the Mobile Experience Lab at the MIT Design Laboratory. Telhan's individual and collaborative work has been exhibited internationally in venues including the 13th Istanbul Biennial, 1st Istanbul Design Biennial, the Armory Show 2015 Special Projects, Ars Electronica, ISEA, LABoral, Archilab, Architectural Association, the Architectural League of New York, MIT Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.*



*Left: Microbial Design Studio, countertop wetlab.  
Right: Bananaworks, bacterial media encapsulated into macro-fluidic gels (assisted by Carolina English).*

