

A row of seven test tubes in a metal rack, each containing a different glowing orange specimen. The specimens include a long, thin, vertical form, a small plant-like structure, a curled human-like figure, a more complex human-like form, a small green plant, and a human-like figure with arms raised. The background is dark with blue light reflections on the top of the test tubes.

IN VITRO

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Video installation

Andrea Santini & Francesca Sarah Toich ©2015

A video projection is mapped onto laboratory glassware, where images gain an holographic quality thanks to the combination of liquid, glass curvature and rear-projection film material. The size and position of the rack prompts viewers to draw in near and observe the different processes that seem to take place 'in vitro'.

Humans and plants are seamlessly generated and dissolved 'in vitro' from particles of projected light. Forms of life 'escaping' the art laboratory to remind us of ancient myths perhaps still deeply embedded in current research, be it for ambition, desire for gain or fear of loss and time.

Inspired by themes and issues surrounding the extraordinary achievements in the fields of genetic engineering and genomics, the work raises a number of questions on the reasons and outcomes that drive such research. It also alludes to centuries of alchemy and experimentation, all the way to Paracelsus' notion of the Homunculus and it's subsequent developments in Nineteenth century fiction.

A miniaturised female body condenses in one of the tubes and searches the tiny space around her, attempting to escape and establish communication with the viewer. As new clones are generated in adjacent vials, each shows varying degrees of awareness and agency and each seems to adopt a slightly different behaviour. Following dissolution in-vitro some eventually re-consolidate as plants, and viceversa. An ikebana style composition appears as a symbol of mankind's need to imitate and manipulate nature. An anthropomorphic dead trunk fluctuates in a sort of Danse Macabre with a human miniature in fetal position ...

Modern genetics seem to somehow embrace the idea of the body as an artificial 'home' for what we are, a place that can be planned and fixed at will, as opposed to a 'natural' shell or shelter, subject to the cycles of time and chance. Such a degree of manipulative control over our bodies and organs is extremely fascinating and tempting, yet the long term prospect of being surrounded exclusively by 'instances' of perfectly and similarly

designed young and healthy humans has some rather disquieting implications. Possibly very appealing to economic forces as a way to secure a highly predictable consumer base, the idea might not be as universally attractive as it seems if one truly paused to assess its potential impact.

Video preview link: <https://vimeo.com/114225789>

Requirements and technical specifications:

Venue requirements:

In Vitro is best presented in a low light environment. A clean neutral (aluminium, black, white) desk/stand with a surface of at least 80x80cm and a height of approximately 70 to 90cm can be sourced on location, a dedicated support may alternatively be provided by the artists. The installation is otherwise self-contained and incorporates a video-projector running a 7' approx video loop.

Technical specifications (all components provided by the artist)

- Power supply requirement: 220V AC, 16A
- Video Projection: rear projection, 1024x768 min res (built in)
- Built in media player with loop feature.

Figure 1: Examples of recent installation set ups





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