



'Transformism' - two new commissions by Melanie Jackson and Revital Cohen

22 January - 9 March 2013

The John Hansard Gallery begins 2013 with **Transformism**, two new commissions by Melanie Jackson and Revital Cohen. Commissioned by The Arts Catalyst, both artists, through their distinctive practices, have made new works exploring their interests in how cultural archetypes and ideas interweave with science and technology to create new shapes, visual forms and structures.

As we develop the tools to manipulate and engineer new forms and systems of life, the exhibition considers our historical and contemporary entanglements with nature, technology and the economy, and how these relationships influence emergent forms in biological and synthetic matter, through new sculpture, installation and moving image works.

The Urpflanze (Part 2) is the second part of **Melanie Jackson's** ongoing investigation into mutability and transformation that takes its lead from Goethe's concept of an imaginary primal plant, the *Urpflanze*, that contained coiled up within it the potential to unfurl all possible future forms. Contemporary science likewise imagines the potential to grow or print any form we can imagine, by recasting physical, chemical and biological function as a substrate that can be programmed into being. Jackson's work begins in the botanical garden and looks to the laboratory, from clay pits to the factory floor, from analogue to digital clay, from its own animated pixels to the interior of the screen in a series of moving image works and ceramic sculptures. She has collaborated with Esther Leslie on a text that has informed the work and a new publication, *THE UR-PHENOMENON*, that will be distributed as part of the exhibition.

In *Kingyo Kingdom*, **Revital Cohen**, whose projects often test the ethical parameters of biological design, explores the genus of fish that have been designed for aesthetic purposes, questioning the definitions used to indicate living creatures. Does one denominate a manipulated organism as an object, product, animal or pet? What consequences does this entail for

our feelings and behaviours? Cohen's interest in the cultural perceptions and aesthetics of animal-as-product took her to Japan where exotic goldfish have been developed over centuries of meticulous cultivation; breeding out dorsal fins and sculpting kimono-like Ranchu fish tails. *Kingyo Kingdom* explores the unique culture of breeders, collectors and connoisseurs with footage from the Japanese national goldfish competition, questioning the design and commodification of this species.

An illustrated exhibition guide with an essay by Isobel Harbison will be available in print and as an eBook.

Events

Private view and Crafting Life: Materiality, Science and Technology symposium, Saturday 26 January, details at www.artscatalyst.org

Biographical information

Melanie Jackson

Melanie Jackson inhabits different tropes of art making to interrogate possibilities of representation against the engaged practices of the world. She is interested in ways in which thought and affect is conducted through the material, and much of her work has explored this against the context of work, production and the flow of international capital. She is currently investigating the relationships between nature and technology through a series of experiments with fauna and flora, and the technologies available to her. Melanie is a lecturer at Slade School of Fine Art, her solo exhibitions include *The Urpflanze (Part 1)*, The Drawing Room, London (2010), *Road Angel*, Arnolfini, Bristol (2007), *Made In China*, Matt's Gallery, London (2005). She won the Jerwood Drawing Prize in 2007.

Revital Cohen

Revital Cohen is an artist and designer who develops critical objects and provocative scenarios exploring the juxtaposition of the natural with the artificial. Her work spans across various mediums and includes collaborations with scientists, bioethicists, animal breeders and physicians. Since establishing her studio in 2008, she has been exhibiting and lecturing internationally within varied contexts and locations - from scientific and academic conferences to art galleries and design fairs. She is the current winner of the Science Museum's Emerging Artist Commission.

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