

Identity Issues. Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?

by Marta de Menezes

This talk explores the multiple possibilities of artistic approaches that can be developed in relation to Art and Biology in contemporary art practice and research. A special emphasis will be placed on the development of collaborative art and biology projects where the artist has to learn some biological research skills in order to create the artwork. I will discuss methodology and meaning generation to making artworks, a critical making through critical thinking. To situate the inquiry, I will draw upon my own work *Nature?*, *Tetrahymina*, *Un/biased* and hint at the current research projects like *The origin of Species* and *Truly Natural* to question how our biological and cultural commons (for instance how our genetic composition is similar to various other animals, what is and can be considered enhancement and treatment) to challenge our conception of identity individually, as a species and as organisms. I will ask how the artistic manipulation of life shifts our sense of identity to give rise to new forms of (un)identities.

Brief biographical notes

Marta de Menezes is a Portuguese artist (b. Lisbon, 1975) with a degree in Fine Arts by the University in Lisbon, a MSt in History of Art and Visual Culture by the University of Oxford, and a PhD candidate at the University of Leiden.

She has been exploring the intersection between Art and Biology, working in research laboratories demonstrating that new biological technologies can be used as new art medium.

In 1999 de Menezes created her first biological artwork (*Nature?*) by modifying the wing patterns of live butterflies. Since then, she has used diverse biological techniques including functional MRI of the brain to create portraits where the mind can be visualised (*Functional Portraits, 2002*); fluorescent DNA probes to create micro-sculptures in human cell nuclei (*nucleArt, 2002*); sculptures made of proteins (*Proteic Portrait, 2002-2007*), DNA (*Innercloud, 2003; The Family, 2004*) or incorporating live neurons (*Tree of Knowledge, 2005*) or bacteria (*Decon, 2007*). Her work has been presented internationally in exhibitions, articles and lectures.

She is currently the artistic director of Ectopia, an experimental art laboratory in Lisbon, and Director of Cultivamos Cultura in the South of Portugal.