

Thomas
Feuerstein

PSYCHOPROSA

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FRANKFURTER
KUNSTVEREIN

Wall texts

Thomas Feuerstein: Psychoprosa

Thomas Feuerstein's exhibition PSYCHOPROSA hovers somewhere between art and science. It consists of a single, interconnected installation that serves as the incubator for the molecule PSILAMIN and for the production of slime.

Tubes transport green and colorless substances through the spaces of the Kunstverein. They incorporate laboratory vessels, apparatuses, and cooling systems into a narrative strand, while retaining their functional purpose in an experimental set-up throughout the duration of the exhibition. The exhibition space becomes a live laboratory, in which the artist himself has synthesized a new molecule, PSILAMIN, from algae and fungi and declared it to be a molecular sculpture. In his exhibition, Thomas Feuerstein weaves knowledge taken from art, philosophy and literature, as well as biotechnology, economics, and politics into an artistic narrative, which discloses questions about basic existential parameters and the origin of life.

Gate

In the sculpture GATE, specially cultivated algae are filtered in order to extract the amino acid tyrosine, which is necessary for the production of dopamine. The dopamine gained from the algae is used along with the psilocyn from the fungi to synthesize the molecular sculpture PSILAMIN. The substance exhibits psychoactive properties, which is why solid objects would seem to liquefy and appear viscous if PSILAMIN were to be ingested. Form and anti-form merge here both literally and allegorically in an artistic statement. The waste product of this chemical process is colorless slime. In order to create this substance known as P+, water is purified and desalinized when it passes through the GATE.

Materials, both with their specific properties and in terms of their cultural attributions, play a central role in Feuerstein's work.

MANNA-MACHINE III involves a bioreactor in which the single-cell green algae *chlorella vulgaris* is cultivated. Feuerstein brings the algae as a material with cultural and historical connotations into the context of art. It is widely considered to be an important model organism and played a key role in unlocking the process of photosynthesis among other things. Thus the algae's use in MANNA MACHINE III refers to different chapters in the history of science.

Cinema

In the room entitled cinema, Feuerstein's science fiction text FOR HE'S A JELLY GOO FELLOW has been set to music. In almost total darkness, the visitor can listen to the 90-minute audio drama. The only light source in the room is a glass sculpture, onto which a viscous, phosphorescent slime slowly drips. The audio play tells a story that binds together the existing substances and biochemical processes in the exhibition spaces into a literary fiction. In the audio piece, researchers discuss the question of what substance we are made of and identify slime as a primitive material that will ultimately cover all people and things in the "Slime Age".

Laboratory Kitchen

Feuerstein uses the single-cell chlorella harvested from the MANNA-MACHINE III as painting pigment. In the monochromatic images from the HARVEST series, art and natural history overlap accordingly.

An example of what Feuerstein calls 'processual sculpture', MRS D. and MR P. serve the dual purpose of treating the dopamine obtained from the algae and extracting psilocyn from the fungi. Both sculptures' designs reflect the spherical models of the respective molecules. The refrigerators both keep the cooling water at a constant temperature and function as pedestals for the sculptures. The molecule PSILAMIN results from the synthesis of dopamine and psilocin. In the work BABY PSY, laboratory flasks are used to create a model-like representation of the molecule's structure.

Again and again, one is struck by the links between nature and culture, animate and inanimate matter, living beings and objects, man and machine in Feuerstein's work. His art renegotiates these juxtapositions that have shaped modernity. Thus Feuerstein plays with the concept of animism, which attributes agency to non-human entities, and questions the classical concept of authorship.

The object PSILOPROSE and the charcoal drawing ARCHÉ take up the motif of the typewriter. While a crystalline form of PSILAMIN grows from the type wheel of PSILOPROSE, the keyboard of ARCHÉ displays the 118 known chemical elements in place of the Latin alphabet. Thus ARCHÉ refers to the (as yet) utopian possibility of 're-writing' any and every type of matter in a further development of 3D printing. KALTE RINDE makes references to the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer and the idea postulated in his book *The World as Will and Representation* (1844) of the world as a sphere covered with a "cold, hard crust on which a mouldy film has produced living and knowing beings".

UNCLE BIB presents the Michelin Man Bibendum as a silicone bust being shaken by a lab shaker. Feuerstein's use of silicone picks up on the gelatinous consistency of slime, which exhibits so-called rheopectic qualities and can retain its shape only when undergoing shearing force resulting from a steady flow of mechanical energy.

Together with the sound installation FOR HE'S A JELLY GOO FELLOW set to music in the cinema space, the lithographs from the series PSIPSY. DAIMON CULT form the exhibition's narrative thread. Images associate with the sprawling meshwork of shapes, symbolic machines and science fiction creatures, concepts, formulas, and textual excerpts synthesize Feuerstein's versatile thought processes. The confrontation between machines and biological organisms is the leitmotif that unites the drawings.

Greenhouse

Algae and fungi grow in the greenhouse forming the 'processual sculptures' referred to by Feuerstein. The basic elements needed to synthesize the new molecule PSILAMIN for the exhibition are extracted from these sculptures. The green algae *Chlorella vulgaris* circulates in glass pipes and tubes in order to gain even exposure to light needed for photosynthesis and to cause the cells to grow. Beyond their functional aspect of cultivation, the objects are aesthetic hybrids of laboratory equipment, sculpture, floor lamps and futuristic houseplants.

Cooling chamber

In the cooling chamber, the visitor enters a place that challenges the reliability of sensory perception and medial imagery. Here, phenomena occur that seem to elude logical explanation. The biomass of algae and fungi that mostly consists of cellulose and glycoproteins and is a by-product of the dopamine and psilocin extraction process is arranged in glass beakers. When mixed with distilled water this mass becomes slime. Having been filled into cans, this slime can also be found in the refrigerators whose doors and drawers open and close as if moved by invisible hands.

A glance at the surveillance camera reveals the presence of a demonic being, otherwise concealed to the human eye. Ranging from Greek mythology to modern physics and computer science, Demons form a recurring motif in Feuerstein's work. His demonology alludes to biochemical processes, but also to algorithms in the flow of digital communication that monitor and control systems, hence monitoring and controlling us as well.

Factory

On the wall, the graphic PSILOVE shows the structure of the molecule PSILAMIN, into the atoms of which the entire literary work of Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) is inscribed in spiral form. Slime, semi-fluids and other viscous substances are recurrent motifs in Lovecraft's horror stories.

In the installation ACCADEMIA DEI SECRETI, slime flows out of the experiment's closed system and into the real world of the viewer. Thick strands and streaks form a transparent, liquid sculpture that, unlike the sealed bioreactor, dissolves interior and exterior boundaries. In the accompanying sound piece written by Thomas Feuerstein, the *Accademia dei Secreti* is a secret slime society whose members research the question of what substance we are made of: "What is matter and how does it come to life?" The Accademia finds the answer in PSILAMIN – "P+ reveals being as slime" - and, in heralding the "Slime Age", sets for itself the goal of fusing humanity into a new protoplasmic community.

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