

# Institutional Presentation: Experimenta Life Forms

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Experimenta

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## Abstract

Experimenta is Australia's leading contemporary arts organisation dedicated to commissioning, exhibiting and promoting art driven by technology. Since its inception in 1986, Experimenta has developed a worldwide reputation for fostering creativity that extends the aesthetic, conceptual and experiential potential of new art forms. Experimenta showcases dynamic contemporary artworks at the nexus of art with digital media, science and technology, and design. Melbourne based, with national and global reach, Experimenta supports Australian artists through regular touring exhibitions and major multi-artform projects. These exhibitions and projects present artists working with technology in unexpected and unconventional ways, creating artworks that are daring, ambitious, interactive and often remarkable. These artworks raise questions about the present and the past and new ways of viewing the world around us. They also provide a glimpse into possible futures. In 2020, Experimenta explores it's most ambitious exhibition theme to date: Life Forms. *Experimenta Life Forms* will present more than 20 leading contemporary Australian and International artists whose work is about life as we know it, or indeed, as we don't know it.

## Keywords

Curating; touring exhibitions; experimental art; media art; art & technology; interactive art; artificial intelligence; bio-art;

## Introduction

Our world is driven by technology and our human experience is shaped by it. Cultural audiences and broader society grapple with new ways to understand contemporary life, particularly in the face of recent developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning; the shift from human centric thinking to an increasingly porous lens that recognises a multitude of life - microbes, fungi, plants and animal - as having agency; and the impacts of these shifts on our society.

As digital and bio technologies become ubiquitous, many artists are exploring these increasingly difficult definitions of 'life' through burgeoning artforms including bio art, creative coding, robotics, data driven works and virtual/augmented reality. Their thoughtful use of these tools

strip away boundaries between technology and humans, and open up new insights into perennial questions on the changing landscape of life as we know it.

*Experimenta Life Forms* presents artworks that speak to the technological change and new research findings redefining our ideas of life. At what point do our technological advancements transform us into something other than human? What new life formations are emerging through technological and biological adaptation, invention or discovery? What are the ethical questions, particularly now that scientific research is identifying sentience in animals, plant-life, and may soon be found in our machines? *Experimenta Life Forms* will present more than 20 leading contemporary artists whose work explores these questions.

*Experimenta Life Forms* is an exhibition of the moment, exploring a concept that questions our definitions of contemporary life and ask us to rethink what it means to be human. Through the presentation of a diverse range of artforms including robotics, bioart, screen-based works, installations, and generative art, *Experimenta Life Forms* addresses the changing conditions of forms of life on earth due to the emergence of artificial intelligence (A.I), bioengineering, and the social and cultural impacts of these changing definitions.

As with all of its exhibitions, Experimenta offers a rare opportunity for audiences to experience technology at the creative edge, and explore complex conceptual positions through experiential learning opportunities. *Experimenta Life Forms* will focus on reactive works that enable contribution and participation. Alongside an expanded public programs offering, audiences will also have opportunities to engage through workshops, performance and events, and artists' talks; we support arts education through the development of a study guide in partnership with ATOM; and we encourage accessibility by working with Description Victoria to create audio guides for people who are blind or have vision impairment.

Experimenta will reflect some of these burgeoning artforms in the very development of the exhibition itself, with its curators experimenting with algorithms and data mining techniques during their research and development period, both exploiting freely available data to develop cultural content as well as taking a critical position on the over-reliance on data to shape our experiences and world views.

This exhibition ultimately asks: can art contribute to the discovery of these new life forms? As Australian artist Patricia Piccinini says in the catalogue of her recent survey exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia: “I think that’s the strength of art, it’s part of the dialogue around how we shape our society.”<sup>1</sup> Through the artists it presents, *Experimenta Life Forms*, seeks to make a significant contribution to the dialogue around the changing landscape of life as we know it, or indeed, as we don’t know it.

### Author Biographies

Jonathan Parsons has over twenty-five years of experience working as an Artistic Director, curator and creative producer in Australia and internationally. He is currently Artistic Director of media arts organisation Experimenta, and the Creative Director of Robotronica, a biennial festival of robotics and interactive design at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). He has artistically led and collaborated on a broad range of cultural programs and events across all art forms including for ISEA2016, Byron Bay Writers Festival, Powerhouse Museum, State Library of Queensland, Riverfestival, London International Festival of Theatre, Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Adelaide Festival of the Arts, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras and Pacific Wave Festival.

Lubi Thomas is an experienced curator working in the field of digital/new media arts and associate practice areas. Currently, Lubi is an independent curator and artist; co-director of Ars Electronica Australia; Experimenta’s Curator @ Large; and curatorial advisor to the Digital Place-making Institute. In the past decade, she has developed and delivered an extensive range of exhibitions, projects, festivals, events, residencies and mentoring programs, as well as, public and education focused programming. Site-responsiveness is a key element in her practice, working closely with artists, creative technologist, and their collaborators to produce works and cultural experiences for a variety of audiences. Lubi’s master’s *Curating in Uncharted Territories* proposes a methodology for cultural programming development and sustainability for sites engaged in the display of, and engagement with, experimental creative practice.

Susan Kukucka is an arts manager with a background in producing public programs, and in research and policy development. Before becoming Experimenta’s General Manager, she produced State Library of Queensland’s public engagement programs for many years, developing hundreds of events, performances, festivals, exhibitions and numerous collections-based exhibitions and programs. Throughout Susan’s career there has been a strong thread of digital media and technology-driven arts practice, from producing video games exhibitions to increasing audience

access through online and digital technologies. Susan has served on committees and boards with Youth Arts Queensland, Arc Biennial: Visual Art, Craft & Design, and 2High Festival, and has held arts research and sessional teaching positions at Griffith University & Queensland University of Technology; worked in cultural and creative industries policy at Brisbane City Council; and was the recipient of an Asialink residency in China.

Nicky Pastore is a creative producer, and has worked with numerous Melbourne-based organisations including Experimenta, Footscray Community Arts Centre, 100 Story Building, Arts Access Victoria, and film studio Oh Yeah Wow as well as event-based projects at local councils such as Brimbank Council, City of Port Phillip Council and Yarra City Council. Across all aspects of her work, Nicky fosters a strong connection for artist-engaged practice and strives to create inclusive pathways for artistic development. Through her role as Festival Director of the Gertrude Street Projection Festival (2014-2018), she has been responsible for managing the delivery and programming of a highly successful public art event and implementing key strategies to ensure the growth of the video-arts industry.

### References

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<sup>1</sup> McKay, Peter (2018). *Patricia Piccinini: Curious Affection*. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery.