



Life Time

Biological Clocks of the Universe

1 December 2017 – 18 February 2018

While the maximum age for humans is estimated to be 125, certain bacteria can subsist in a vegetative state for tens of thousands of years, only to awaken when conditions are more favourable. Researchers even claim to have found bacteria that survived this way for millions of years. Our own perspective on existence-in-time is determined by self-awareness, by memories and plans for the future—but to what extent does it constitute an objective measure? This is what MU is investigating with the exhibition *Life Time*, from 1 December 2017 to 18 February 2018, that presents the winners of the *Bio Art & Design Award 2017* alongside related works of nine more bio artists and designers.



PRESS RELEASE

Opening

Friday 1 December 2017

from 20.00

Entrance €5,- (incl. free drink)

Exhibition

1 Dec 2017 – 18 Feb 2018

Free entrance for press. Send your request to nadine@mu.nl

Partners



For more info and updates please visit the [MU website](#) and the [BAD Award website](#)

IMAGE:
Nick Liefhebber

Life on Earth is oriented towards the sun and the moon—day and night, the tides, the weather and the seasons. We relate our clocks to the rotation of the earth and base our calendars on the sun or the moon. How differently the days pass on Mars or Jupiter or Venus... Katie Petterson's *Time Pieces (Solar System)* keeps track of planetary times. Her work not just tells the revolutions or orbits around the sun, it also points to the randomness of our human perspective.

At the same time, this human measure is all we have. Jiwon Woo, one of the BAD Award winners, embraces it in *Mother's Hand Taste*, a culinary ode to the personal touch. *Son mat*—the taste of the hand—is an important principle of South Korean cuisine that represents cultural identity and the direct handling of ingredients. Here, Jiwon Woo translates it to traces of bacteria and fungi on the hand of the person who prepares the food. Working with Han Wösten at the Institute of Environmental Biology, Microbiology group, Utrecht University, she researches whether the taste of the hand might be identified across several generations, even when family members have emigrated to different continents.

Perhaps the largest deficiency in our thinking about life and time is the inability to communicate with other forms of life. No matter how hard activists try to give a voice to nature, in the end it's always humans battering each other with their opinions and passions. Gil Delindro acknowledges this gap in two sound installations: *(Un)measurements #2* uses sensitive microphones to probe a tree trunk hollowed out by fungi and *Manta Morta* listens in on a closed ecosystem of worms in decomposing matter. Both works refer to the cyclic nature of life and time and they both invite us to listen to other organisms.

Sound recordings also play a central role in *Seasynthesis* by Xandra van der Eijk, who realised her BAD Award-winning project with Han Lindeboom at the Marine Research institute at Wageningen University. She registered the erratic rhythms of ship propellers and underwater activities in the North Sea where the construction of offshore wind farms causes a constant industrious clamour. It will come as no surprise that all this noise is a serious disturbance of marine life—which inevitably brings us to the topic of human influence on the environment.

In the documentary *Deep Time*, Noah Hutton provides a disturbing image of how North Dakota is affected by oil extraction. The landscape has been ruined beyond recognition and the lives of the residents have been turned upside down by the

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sudden oil bonanza. Worries about the future are consistently ignored for the prospect of short-term profits.

Another form of fossil fuel, coal, is at the heart of *Cryo-sites* by Susana Cámara Leret & Sissel Tolaas. The installation zooms in on cryoconites, the combination of small rock particles, soot and microbes that gather and build up dark stains on glaciers and ice caps. The stains reduce the reflection of sun light, melting the ice and contributing to global warming and sea level rise.

The awareness that the next mass-extinction will most likely to be man-made—and that we as a species will be among the victims too—is clearly manifest throughout *Life Time*. In the performance *An Incomplete Life* by Proud Flesh, a person is being covered by salt trickling down from a reservoir that resembles the upper half of a giant hourglass. Question is: will anyone intervene?

A cinematic triptych by Timo Wright, *Ex Nihilo*, shows that hope and fear for the future are intricately interwoven. The first film is about the development of humanoids: robots that look and function like humans; the second is about the *Svalbard Global Seed Vault* in Spitsbergen where genetic material is being stored to preserve plants from extinction—and man with them—in the wake of a catastrophic event; and the third film is about *Oregon Cryonics*, where deceased people's brains are frozen for future times with the intention to revive the memories or even the personality they once contained.

Hope is absent from *Voltaic Realism* by Fujita Keisuke. Chipping away at a large column of carbon, the work represents the 800,000 suicides world-wide that are committed in the course of one year. The installation is connected to various social media and responds each time a suicide is announced; the corresponding messages are displayed on an illuminated news trailer.

No, *Life Time* is definitely not a light-hearted exhibition. The smell of the End of Days is in the air—literally: artist duo Thomson & Craighead collaborated with perfumer Euan McCall to create *Apocalypse*, a perfume based on ingredients that the artists found in the Book of Revelations.

Ironically, *Life Time* seems to downplay the temporariness of our existence-in-time. Bacteria were around for billions of years before man evolved, and they will survive us by billions of years. There have been so many waves of mass-extinction and now it's our turn—so what?

In *Chronobytes*, Thomas Thwaites works with Frank Maier and Sioban Imms to explore how remnants of our digital archives—the server farms, the hard disks and the tapes—might resurface millions of years later as metal ion colourations in the Earth's geology. A sense of fatalism becomes even stronger in *A Felicitous Neo-Past* by the third BAD Award winner, Guo Cheng. In his collaboration with Heather Leslie at the Institute for Environmental Studies, VU University Amsterdam, he removed all traces of human existence from a block of soil taken from the ADM dock yard in Amsterdam, to show it in a pristine state. He erases man from time, and perhaps only for the better? The collected traces are left behind for a next civilisation—human or alien—as a puzzle of what might have happened to us.

Editor's note

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