

GINA CZARNECKI INTERVIEW
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Gina Czarnecki's film and installation work explores the human body's interface with biology/genetics, disease, evolution, technologies of image production and other fields such as religion, migration and war. In her writing, Czarnecki describes a childhood trip to Poland with her father, a survivor of WW2 concentration camps, and the impact this had on her art. She has ultimately found a parallel between the reduction of human life to genetic units through DNA analysis and the technology of digital imaging with its modifiable pixel units, finding both can work as arbiters of, and smokescreens between, us and the 'truth'. Czarnecki has applied these ideas to her most recent work *Contagion* which is being funded by the prestigious Wellcome Trust Sciart Awards in the UK Melbourne City Council Arts Projects and Arts Victoria Art and Innovation award.

The Wellcome Trusts Sciart programme 'supports imaginative and experimental arts projects that investigate biomedical science' and has its equivalent here in the Synapse project at the Australia Council for the Arts. Possibly point to the programmes listed and also state possibilities like the arts innovation but these are not like the wellcome in that they are not primarily science organizations but there to support art

Recently relocated to Australia from the UK, Czarnacki has since collaborated with choreographers and dancers, musicians, programmers, engineers biomedical scientists and epidemiologists. Her work represents the cutting-edge interface between science and art and here she talks about Sciart, *Contagion*, and the broad sweep of her interests.

Science and Art

Legitimation of a profession – dev of medical and biomedical and the world that supports the deconstruction and materiality of human existence – the rise of the profession of the doctor....the demise of the profession of the artist..... Hence any scientist can command a specific fee, any artist under a threshold of international recognition can not,....equal pay on funded works
Scientists don't get much opportunity to play as tight guidelines on what can / not be funded supported financially morally politically ethically.
There is a total imbalance in the legitimacy of profession .

Long term collaborator Keith Skeene shared Guinness and conversation, the behaviour of slime moulds, forensic investigation into pollen to identify time and place of death, (the pollen cocktail in relation to wind direction pollen can not be destroyed even if emerged in acid....

To give you a sense of the the scientists I'm working on contagion.

Describe them/meeting expertise

And then there is Keith Skene whose been an important collaborator of mine for many years. He is a micro-biologist and is interested in the evolution of eco-systems. We never work in a very structured way but sit down over Guinness and have really good conversations about the migration of birds or the way systems evolve when newcomers join them. Which is the basis for this project. Adaptation, evolution and change – mutation. What's essentially human? It's biological and it has physical forms and psychological forms. And that's the territory I share with scientists. But I work one more step removed, although the scientists say that scientific images can be no less symbolic than the artistic images I am using.

The whole body of my time based work from 2000 has directly been in response to having a week on my own in an isolation unit in Hospital in Scotland after recently coming back from Dundee. The doctors suspected I had Ebola, I lonely became aware of this when a colleague showed me the newspaper article pressed up against the anti-chamber window, “” where your organs explode and you bleed uncontrollably to death”.... Fatalitiy rate something like 99 percent. I was conuncilled for the aids thest though – I assumed because there was the funding to do this associated with the testing/awareness and that there was a greater chance of living slightly long enough to sue for mental damage that there was with ebola... However in that room the notion of what is pure and what is not,

, but it's not as successful as AIDS because it tends to wipe out entire communities, so it's contained in that way. So then I started to look at successful diseases and their change over time, how they are transmitted and their effect on the way the world has evolved. For example, invading armies disturb local rules that are transmitted verbally through generations, so someone might pull wood out of a dam which will lead to cholera further down stream. Europeans invading America, Australia and the islands caused so much biological havoc that a lot of those communities were totally destroyed. So it was easy for europeans to invade and dominate most of the planet.

Contagion uses the SARS outbreak in Amoy Gardens in Hong Kong as an epidemiological example. that there are 3 schools of thought on how it was transmitted - rat droppings, sewerage and airborne. In the case for airborne, 3D computational graphics were used and because of the compelling visualisations, this became the dominant theory. And of course when this was made public, there was massive panic because it's a microbiological, invisible enemy that you can't escape.

Mechanical reproduction and imaging the truth

But *Contagion* is also about an interest I have always had in the image and authenticity. In 1998 I made a work where I reproduced images which looked authentic, but viewers knew they weren't. It was at a time when photoshop had just arrived. I was interested in the fact that you can see a picture of Tony Blair with his arm around someone, and even though it may say next to the photo that it has been digitally manipulated, the resonance of the image stays with you, its been etched into your mind. So even though you know it's not the truth, it throws up certain questions.

And there is the fact that we've come to accept certain symbols or images as 'truth'. With my most recent work *Spine*, there were a whole lot of questions coming from Melbourne City Council about falling bodies and Sally-Jane Norman brought this up as well - references to 9/11. So how quickly can an image be attributed and owned by a certain event, including my falling naked bodies that had nothing to do with suicidal gestures.

What I think has happened is that we began to depend on context to recognise an image of truth. Science, law, medicine and the military present images and we take them as authentic, but so many of them are artificially constructed. And art can present fact but it's always perceived as fiction. Medicine has been developing imaging technologies to prove the existence of something – scanning, the ultra-sound, the infra-red. I was on a train journey in the UK and I sat opposite a gulf war engineer and he said that 'of course we kill people but we see them as little green dots on the screen and we just zap them'. So, on the one hand they have the technology to be able to see inside a womb and find any deformities, but they also use the same technology as a smokescreen between us and the reality of human destruction.

God, pigs and disease

And this question of truth and authenticity is linked to the demise of organised religions and the rise of science. Human genetics is linked to evolution is linked to religion. For example, the word quarantine comes from 40. It was allegedly a Christian system to stop contamination; a boat had to be docked for 40 days before they could bring anything onshore. It was so successful that it is believed to be the reason Christianity succeeded so well in certain places where other religions didn't observe quarantine rules.

the pig which genetically is most similar to us, and the only animal that can catch flu. They think the reason the bird flu outbreak occurred in Asia is the proximity humans keep to pigs and pigs to birds. So the pig becomes the carrier between the humans and birds. And certain religions don't eat pork, but our

genetic proximity to pigs has become detached from that. So I'm interested in mapping different religions, why they started at particular points in time, what was happening then and why a belief in an afterlife becomes essential.

The Installation

So I'm using different images and different imaging technologies. One of the images I'm working on now is a 70 year old man who has had a picture taken of himself every year. As the contamination spreads through the space and appears as an erosion of colour off the middle screen, it peels a layer off the younger face of the man making him older.

Contagion will have a trial at the Sydney Powerhouse Beta_Space to gather information on interaction **DATES**, public forum Saturday October 14. The installation will premiere in Victoria and The UK in 2007.