Closer Than Your Family

Heather Dewey-Hagborg
18 March – 15 April 2023
Wei-Ling Gallery, Brickfields

Wei-Ling Gallery will host a much anticipated exhibition by the prominent and critically-acclaimed artist Heather Dewey Hagborg with her exhibition entitled, '*Closer Than Your Family*' features at our galleries from 18 March – 15 April 2023.

Her First solo exhibition in Malaysia.

This solo show by artist Heather Dewey-Hagborg features recent works that examine how cutting-edge developments in biotechnology are raising fundamental questions about what it means to be human.

Watson's Ghost interrogates the interpretation of genetic data, presenting hundreds of interpretations of a single individual's face based on their DNA. *Lovesick* presents a custom retrovirus designed to infect humans, irrevocably altering their genomes to make them more loving. *Hybrid: an Interspecies Opera* transforms research around xenotransplantation – the genetic engineering of pigs to supply human organs–into a musical tribute to the creatures giving their lives for these scientific advances. Finally, *Future pigs*, plural, builds on the research from *Hybrid* to present a set of speculative portraits of pigs in the future, if human modification continues along the trajectory of today.

Together these works probe the ways human beings are multitudes, via the subjectivity of interpretation, their genetic mutability, and their increasingly chimeric proximity to non-human animals.

Esther Klein Gallery
Philadelphia, PA
6 October – 6 December 2022

Wei-Ling Gallery
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
18 March – 15 April 2023

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Watson’s Ghost

Watson’s Ghost
2021
Two 3D printed portraits, with holographic video presented on a Looking Glass Portrait
8 x 8 x 6 inches

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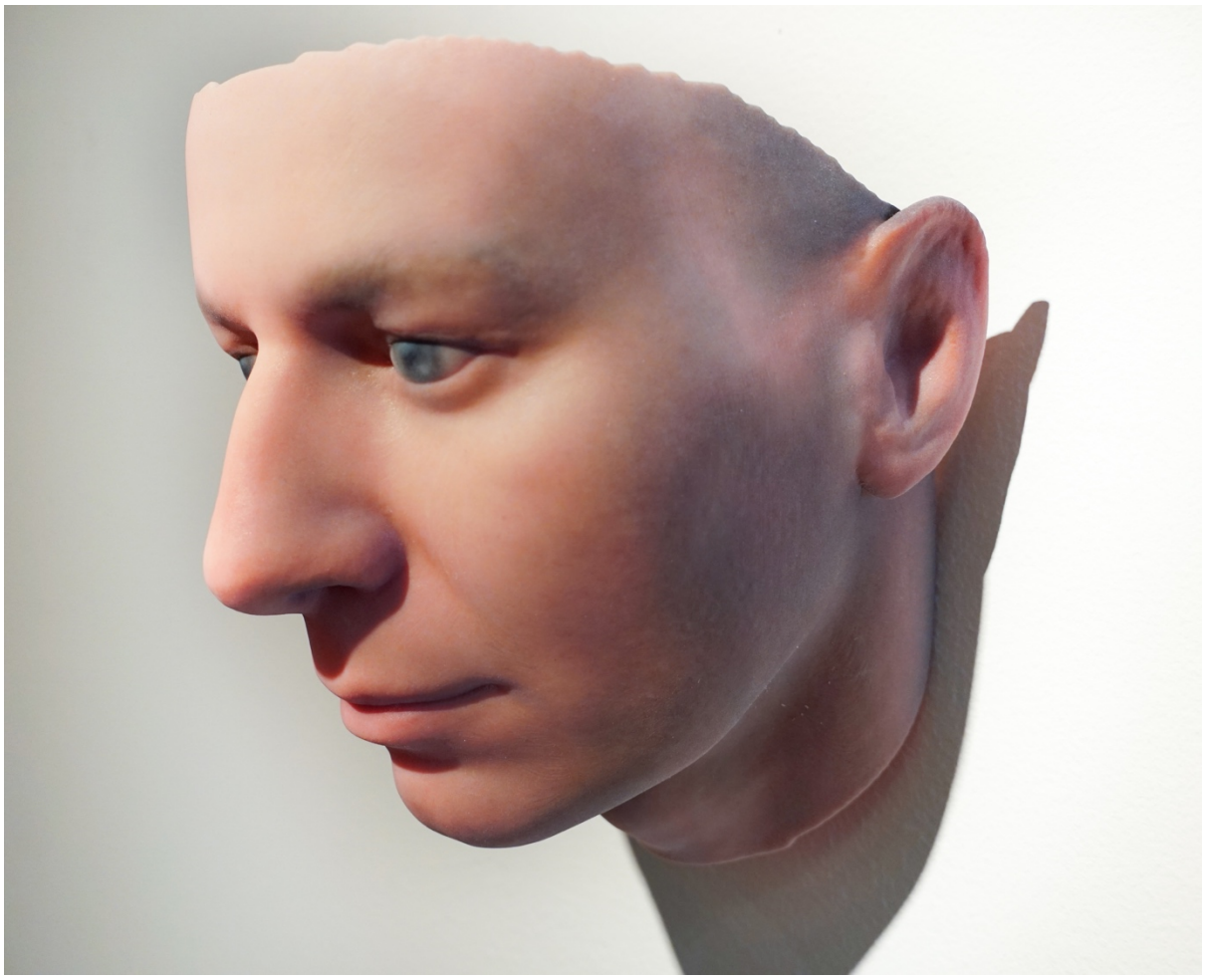

This triptych of computationally-generated genetic portraits complicate the legacy of scientist James Watson, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA and one of the first people to publicly publish their genome. His fascination with the function of genes, and belief in genetic causality of human nature, led him to troubling reductionist views encompassing race, sex, ethnicity, and intelligence.

The study of genetics has its origin in the study of eugenics, the theory that human traits are purely genetic and that humanity can be improved through selective breeding. This ghost of eugenic belief continues to haunt the study of genetics to this day.

By showing a multitude of different interpretations of how James Watson might look based on DNA alone, we confront the true complexity of life and the entanglement of genetics with expression, environment and serendipity.

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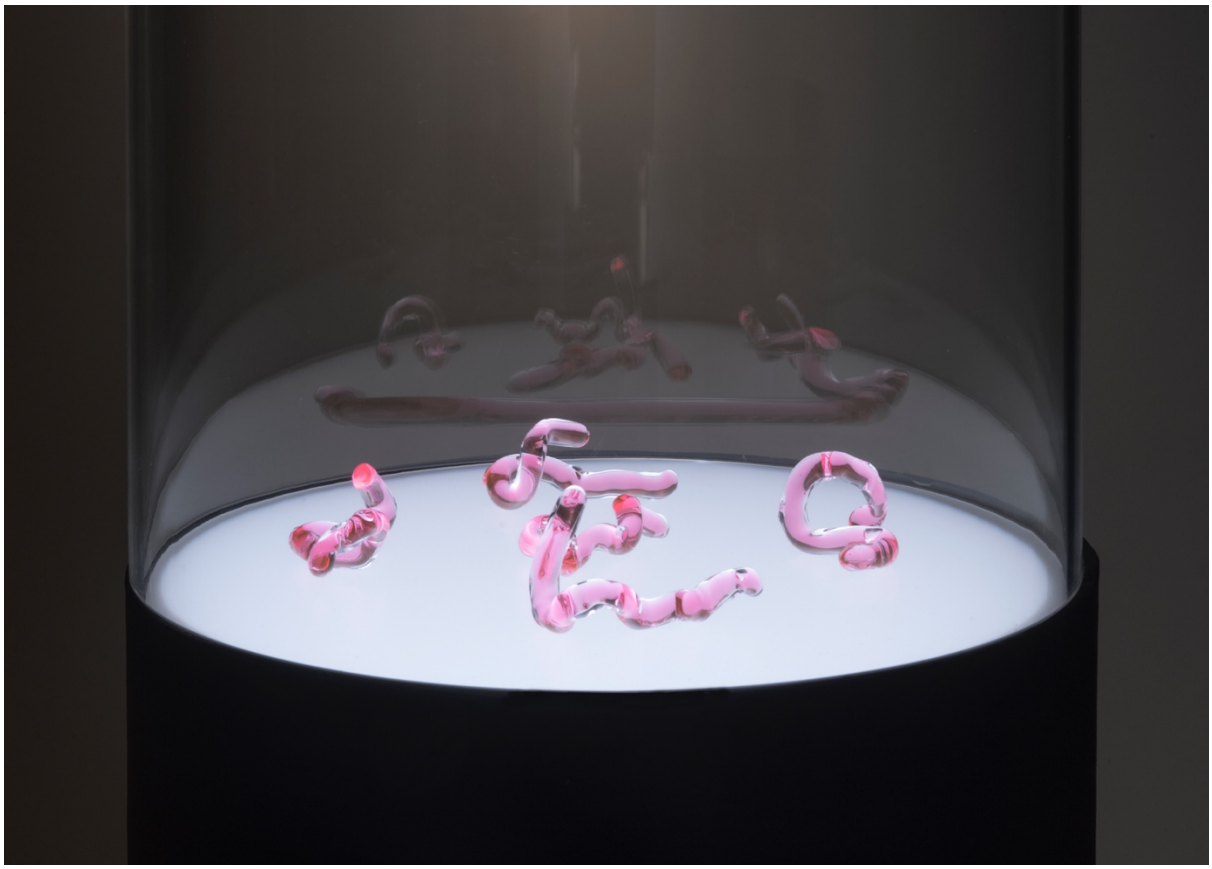
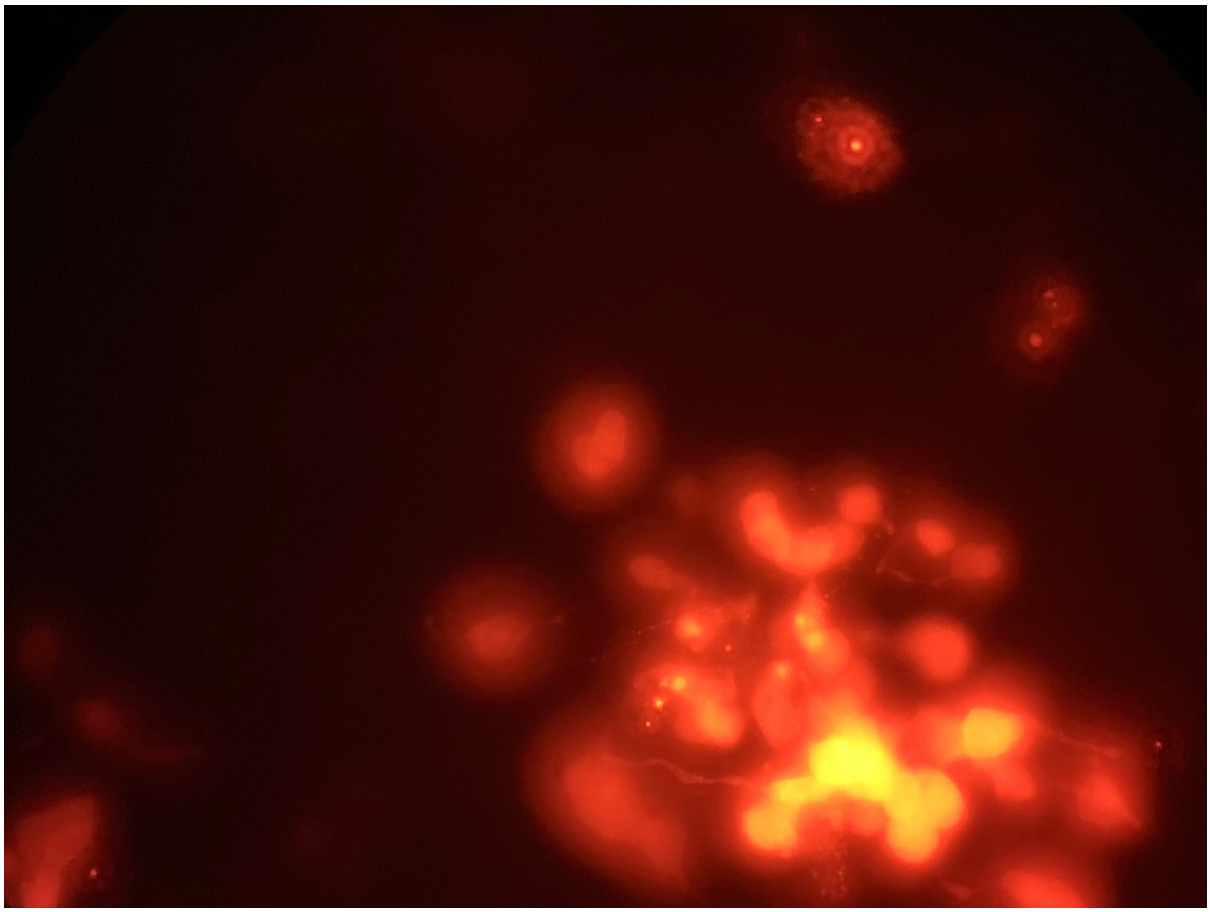
Lovesick: the Transfection



Installation view, Fridman Gallery, NY

Lovesick: the Transfection
2019
Custom retrovirus, glass (10 vials), two single channel HD videos, music arranged by the artist
Dimensions variable



HEK293 producer cells expressing RFP 400x magnification

What if love could spread like a virus?

In *Lovesick* I worked in a collaboration with research scientists at Integral Molecular, a biotechnology company specialized in antibody discovery, to create a custom retrovirus which infects its human host with a gene that increases the production of oxytocin. The hormone oxytocin is implicated in feelings of love and bonding, and the promotion of empathy and connection. The work is envisioned as an activist intervention, to spread affection and attachment and to combat the alienation and hate of the present.

I designed small glass vials to contain the virus, shaped like different energy states of the oxytocin molecule, that can be broken open and consumed orally. The form expresses the uniqueness of what the person is about to do, and in referencing the style of a cyanide capsule, also conveys the gravity and irreversibility of the act. The installation consists of the vials of glowing virus, video of the microscopic cells expressing their infection, and an audio narrative imagining what this "lovesick future" might look like. It includes a piece of music based on a 14th century ballad by Francesco Landini that tells the story of a woman struggling with a love that is in vain. I have re-written the song to list instead the letters representing the proteins contained in the oxytocin molecule.

I imagine a lovesick future in which individuals, couples, and groups consume this virus by smashing open the glass vials, pouring the fluid into their mouths, incubating it there for several seconds, then swallowing, while chanting together, or humming to themselves, "CYIQNCPLG."

The installation is accompanied by a series of photographic prints that evidence the work I have done in the lab. Human embryonic kidney cells (HEK293) and human T lymphocyte cells (Jurkat) are presented under both bright field and fluorescent microscopy, at varying magnifications. Under blue or green fluorescent light, you can see the infected cells glow bright red, demonstrating they have been effectively genetically modified by the virus.

Installation view, McEvoy Foundation San Francisco

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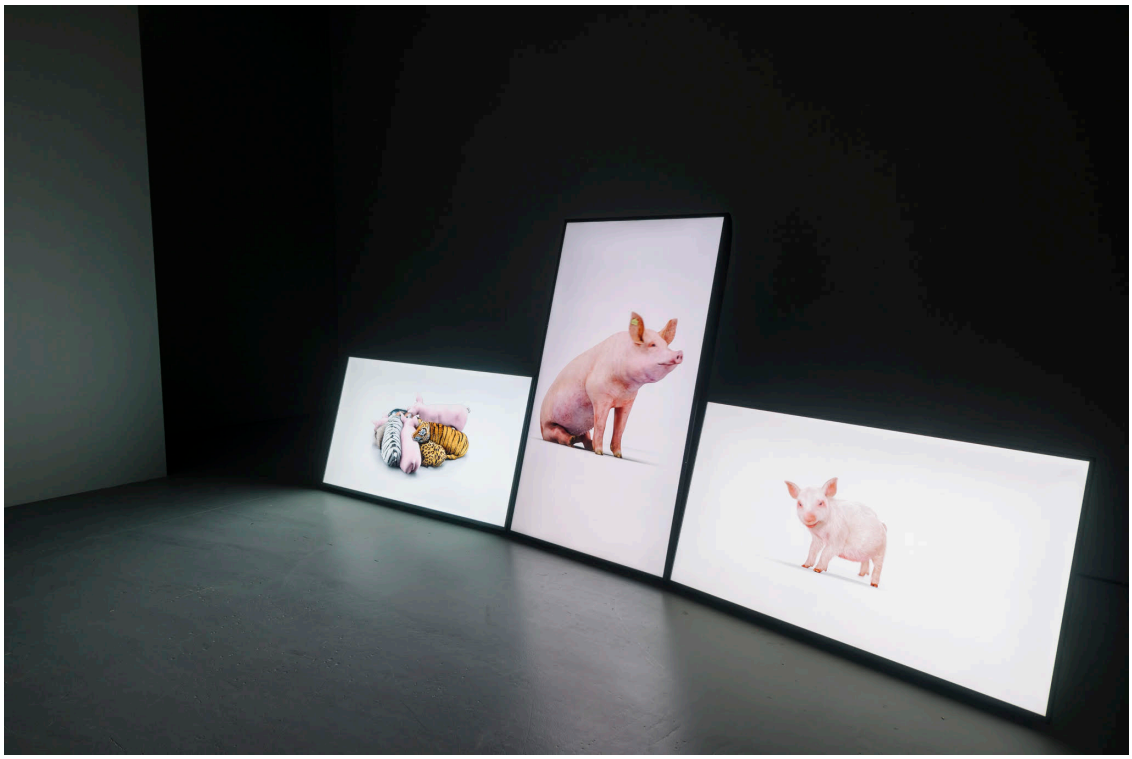
Hybrid: an Interspecies opera



Future pigs, plural
3 single channel animations

Hybrid: an Interspecies opera
Single channel film and 3d-printed ceramic sculptures with cast glass pedestal surface

Hybrid: an Interspecies Opera unfolds in 5 movements as we journey from cutting edge genetic engineering to the very origins of pig domestication 10 millennia ago, and back to the wild boars still inhabiting our forests.

This documentary and personal narrative is set to an original score by composer Bethany Barrett and presents an intimate account of the interspecies relationship at the heart of the science of xenotransplantation–specifically the genetic engineering of pigs to supply human hearts.

The film begins from the question of whether CRISPR gene editing represents a radical rupture or rather a continuation of the millennia old practices of selective breeding. It presents documentary footage from rarely seen porcine research facilities and archaeological archives of early animal domestication at Ludwig Maxilimilians Universität (LMU) Munich and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

The libretto is constructed from the words of key scientists engaged in this new field of research and archaeologists studying the origins of domestication, taken from original interviews conducted by the artist.

The film concludes with the construction of an effigy of one of the *xeno*-pigs we see in the film. This object is a kind of memorial for the creature whose life was taken to advance science and potentially save human lives. Drawing on cutting edge digital

imaging and printing techniques we see the robotic construction of a clay sculpture which ends in flames–fired in a pit in the ground using the earliest of ceramic methods.
The ancient and the high tech meet in an artwork that goes beyond simply educating audiences to making them feel the dramatic weight of these new technologies, their complexities and long histories. The result is an impressionistic glimpse of a biomedical field with massive implications for ethics, aesthetics, and the fluctuating state of human/non-human relations.

Future Pigs, Plural. A set of images portray "the future pig" as imagined by the artist based on interviews with biologists and archaeologists. The images depict amplifications of what forms pigs may take, through ongoing domestication and selective breeding processes. One is the size of a cow, with reproductive capacity to carry a litter of more than thirty piglets. Another image represents the opposite, micro pigs, bred for biomedical purposes with the added bonus of making adorable pets. These tiny pigs show an exotic range of coat colors–one of the first visible traits humans began to modify in pigs at the onset of domestication thousands of years ago. The third shows one further possibility, that by bringing the pig genome closer to the human we may also bring the pig face closer to our own. While it may seem speculative, each scenario is based on genetic changes that have already occurred; coat color was the first thing that changed during pig domestication, and snout size has reduced in this process as well.

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List of artworks	
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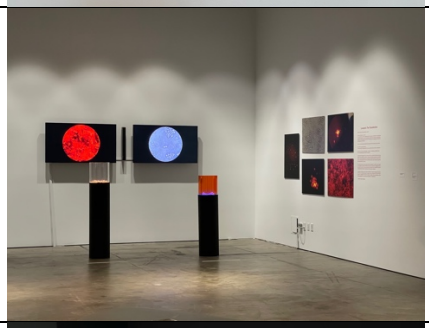
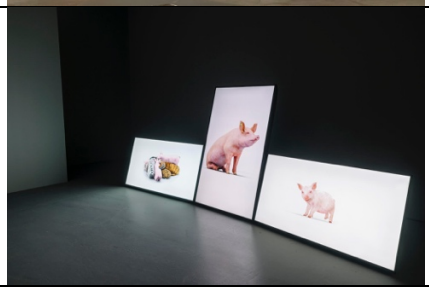
Lovesick: the Transfection 2019 Custom retrovirus, glass (10 vials), two single channel HD videos, music arranged by the artist Dimensions variable	
Hybrid: an Interspecies opera Single channel film and 3d-printed ceramic sculptures with cast glass pedestal surface	

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Dr. Heather Dewey-Hagborg (B.1982) is an artist and biohacker who is interested in art as research and technological critique. Her controversial biopolitical art practice includes the project Stranger Visions in which she created portrait sculptures from analyses of genetic material (hair, cigarette butts, chewed up gum) collected in public places.

Heather has shown work internationally at events and venues including the World Economic Forum, the Daejeon Biennale, the Guangzhou Triennial, and the Shenzhen Urbanism and Architecture Biennale, Transmediale, the Walker Center for Contemporary Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and PS1 MoMA. Her work is held in public collections of the Centre Pompidou, the Victoria and Albert Museum, SFMoMA, among others, and has been widely discussed in the media, from the New York Times and the BBC to Art Forum and Wired.

Heather has a PhD in Electronic Arts from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She is an Artist-in-Residence at the Exploratorium, and is an affiliate of Data & Society. She is a founding board member of Digital DNA, a European Research Council funded project investigating the changing relationships between digital technologies, DNA and evidence.

She is also a co-founder and co-curator of REFRESH, an inclusive and politically engaged collaborative platform at the intersection of Art, Science, and Technology.

Wei-Ling Gallery

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Wei-Ling Gallery was founded in 2002 by Lim Wei-Ling with the ambition to nurture the development of Malaysia's contemporary art scene. The flagship Gallery is housed within a heritage shophouse that was ravaged by a fire in 2004. The unique interior is an installation unto itself, having been designed by renowned Malaysian architect, Professor Jimmy CS Lim.

The Gallery's position has been achieved through ambitious, diversified and contextual curatorial projects and programming. Wei-Ling Gallery has repeatedly presented Malaysian Contemporary art to international audiences, simultaneously representing a selection of widely-acclaimed local and international artists. Our exhibitions are free and open to all as a space for public imagination and inquiry.

In its continuous efforts of cultivating the local contemporary art scene, Wei-Ling Gallery is also one of the most prolific publishers of art publications in the country, valuing the importance of archiving. The Gallery's publishing activity encourages an appreciation for contemporary art with a backlist of monographs, artists' books, and exhibition catalogues which highlights the often-overlooked characteristics of an artist's practice.

The Gallery is also active on all relevant social media platforms, especially our podcasts which took root during the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown. Launched in 2022, WLG Incubator identifies the next generation of Malaysian artists, by bringing together the opportunity for them to be advised and guided by an established artist. WLG Incubator also aims to highlight and encourage project collaborations with emerging Malaysian artists, helping them develop a practice that is authentic, experimental and progressive.

Our WLG Discussion Lab covers topics which are pertinent to current issues and the Gallery will soon usher in WLG Salon, a gathering of individuals from the art fraternity and academics for serious discourses.