

Exhibition

BORDERLESS BACTERIA / COLONIALIST CASH**Ken Rinaldo**

Opening: Saturday, 25 January 2020, 7 pm

Exhibition running time: 26 January – 1 March, 2020

Fri – Sun, 2 – 6 pm

Borderless Bacteria / Colonialist Cash discusses important current aspects of biopolitics. By visualising microbiome landscapes of banknotes, the project invites us to reflect about the interconnectedness of ecological and economic exchanges. Wishing to lessen his carbon footprint, artist Ken Rinaldo expressed the wish that the work be made without his travelling. This work was first done during a residency at Cultivamos Cultura, Portugal. Some of the works in the exhibition were created with students from the Gustav-Freytag-Schule in Berlin-Reinickendorf as part of a collaboration between the school, ALB and the DIY Hack the Panke collective.

Much recent attention has been given to the human microbiome, the microbes which live on and within our bodies. These communities also exist on most surfaces around us. When we touch objects, we exchange bacteria, fungi and viruses, leaving some microbiota behind. It is no surprise that one of the objects we touch most – money – is not only a medium of economic but also microbial exchange. According to a study conducted by the NYU Center for Genomics & Systems Biology, 3000 types of bacteria were identified on dollar bills from just one Manhattan bank.

Ken Rinaldo, an established artist in the field of Bio and Postmedia art, develops hybrid human-nonhuman ecologies. *Borderless Bacteria / Colonialist Cash* explores the hidden microbiome of money within a critical framework that also sheds light on exchange and power. Do Chinese Yuan and American Dollars share bacterial and fungal communities?

This micro-performative project is intriguingly simple in its set-up: Various bills of international currency are displayed in square Petri dishes on enriched agar. Time plays a crucial role, as a microbial landscape grows and realises itself over the course of several weeks.

On an aesthetic level, the iconography of the currency literally loses face as microbial growth undermines the representational aspect of the banknotes. The official character of money is subverted. As its microbial nature comes to light, it appears far less representative: a fine network of mycelia covers the head of George Washington on a \$1 note; on a 10 CHF note, Le Corbusier is no longer recognisable due to bacterial growth.

Aesthetic and biopolitical aspects are closely linked: We are reminded of the colonial roots of capitalism, when exchanged goods spread smallpox, measles and influenza to aboriginal peoples in the Americas and Australia, devastating local populations. The nonhuman has always played a vital, if untold, role in our histories and the development of our economic and cultural systems. As the artist remarks: "Paper money microbes don't respect money or borders and travel freely both enhancing and simultaneously challenging the collective human body, microbiome, constitution, and post-colonial ecologies."

Regine Rapp & Christian de Lutz (2020)

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Thanks to Cultivamos Cultura in São Luís, Portugal in the Summer 2017 for the residency allowing the production of these works, invited by Marta De Menezes and Dr Luís Graça; Dr. Mario Ramirez, Group Leader at Molecular Microbiology & Infection at Instituto de Medicina Molecular in Lisbon, Portugal; a Microbiologist for information about the best ways to culture microbes on money; Professor Amy Youngs for her Photoshop mock-ups of how these would look when finished growing; Dr. Adam Zaretsky for editing Ken Rinaldo's original BB/CC text.