PATRICIA PICCININI

Art Basel Hong Kong
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Tolarno Galleries

Patricia Piccinini
***The Rookie* 2015**
Fiberglass, silicone, hair
48 x 65 x 46 cm
Edition 2/3
AUD $65,000.00

Patricia Piccinini
***The Rookie* 2015**
Back view

The Rookie

The Rookie - the first timer, the raw recruit, the novice.

This new sculpture by Patricia Piccinini continues her long term investigation into the way that biotechnology today erodes the traditional boundaries between the artificial and the natural.

Responding to progress being made in Genetic Engineering*, The Rookie*, is both literal and surreal. It reflects on the emergence into the world of new creatures such as the Chinese 'micropigs'. For $2000, consumers can purchase the world's first 'genetically customised' pet.

"Of course,' says Patricia Piccinini, "we can argue that all domesticated animals are in fact 'genetically customized' through breeding, but these are the first to be directly engineered at a genetic level through a technique called CRISPR.'

CRISPR seems set to do for Genetic Engineering what the PC did for computing - making it cheap and ubiquitous. For me, the interesting thing about the micropig is the nature of its particular adaptation: cuteness. What makes this particular organism uniquely adapted to its environment is its attractiveness to humans. Artificial evolution has selected for relative weakness and helplessness; the pigs they descend from are actually pretty fearsome up close. It is the micropig's harmlessness relative to its human owners that will allow it to prosper. For me, this is a poignant and fascinating idea: Artificial evolution selects for 'unfitness' for the natural world.

The Rookie is encased in a protective carapace that is derived from a football boot.

Perhaps, like the micropig, it is The Rookie's very vulnerability that is its greatest defence.

Patricia Piccinini
***Embryo* 2016**
Fiberglass, automotive paint
74 x 124 x 114 cm
Edition of 3, AP
AUD $95,000.00

Patricia Piccinini
***Embryo* 2016**
Back view

Embryo

I am interested in growth because it expresses diversity within the context of a single being. Snapshots that document the growth of an organism seem to show us a succession of apparently different beings. If you didn't know how things worked, you might have difficulty believing that the baby and the woman were one and the same species, let alone the same person. In fact, the term embryo is used to define the early stages of an organism's development, when it is actually quite difficult to determine its species. At eight weeks, when it becomes clearly human, the embryo becomes a foetus.

This essential mutability of life is something that I find very interesting, and I see it as very much a hallmark of how we see the world. Human beings change things. It is what we are most proud of. Sometime we do it for the good, but not always. The medium of this change, more often then not these days, is technology. That technology is becoming increasingly amorphous itself; straddling the biological, the physical and the mechanical.

It is strange then that it is the mechanical that still seems to represent technology to us, but perhaps that is because our sense of the mechanical is becoming more nebulous itself. We are entering the age of the self-driving car, and while we all understand what this is supposed to mean, 'self-driving' sounds to me like the car has a 'self' to drive. How far is it from self-driving to self-determining I wonder? Or self-assured? I am being silly of course, but I do love the fantasy of a world where such increasingly naturalised technologies are given the sort of natural habitats and processes that they seem to deserve.

The other thing that is interesting about an embryo is that is represents pure potential. It isn't anything yet. It's hard to even figure out what it will become, but it will become something. Something amazing. It is the absolute representation of fecundity; the possibility of new life and the guarantee of changes to come. That's a very positive idea for me.

Patricia Piccinini 2016

TOLARNO GALLERIES
LEVEL 4
104 EXHIBITION STREET
MELBOURNE 3000
VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA

POSTAL
PO BOX 67
FLINDERS LANE
VIC 8009
AUSTRALIA

T +61 3 9654 6000
F +61 3 9654 7000
E mail@tolarnogalleries.com