

**VASTAL: The Vivoarts School for Transgenic Aesthetics, Ltd.**

by

Adam Zaretsky

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major Subject: ELECTRONIC ARTS

Approved by the  
Examining Committee:

---

Mary Anne Staniszewski, Thesis Adviser

---

Kathy High, Member

---

Nao Bustamante, Member

---

Igor Vamos, Member

---

Nancy D. Campbell, Member

---

Steven J. Kurtz, Member

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute  
Troy, New York

April 2012  
(For Graduation May 2012)

## ABSTRACT

The VivoArts School for Transgenic Aesthetics Ltd., (VASTAL), was formed in 2009 by Adam Zaretsky. The school was opened as both an artistic gesture and in order to make hand-on biotechnology labs more accessible to the public. During the following year, VASTAL publically held living-art performance labs with Unstill Life Studies (ULS) accompanying lectures, five of which are reviewed in this dissertation:

1. Ecology and EcoArt: Seed Bombing Lab
2. Ethology and and Art for Non-Humans: Enrichment Arts Lab
3. Gastronomy and Edible Art: Hybrid DNA Isolation Lab
4. Bioinformatics and DNA Literary Studies: (De)Mystified Genetic Code Lab
5. Cell Biology and Tissue Culture Arts: Body Alterity Lab

VASTAL public labs emulate the use of life as an artistic medium to analyze the aesthetics of transgenic technologies in both non-humans and humans alike. The VivoArts School for Transgenic Aesthetics Ltd. arts production labs are also designed increase the range of public perception about issues pertaining to transgenic technology. This includes the analysis of the ethical, legal, social and aesthetic differences and similarities between human Intentional Genetic Modification of the Human Genome (IGM) debates and non-human Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) debates.

Edited video documents accompany each of the laboratories are included in this dissertation. The video documentation of these science and art laboratories provides the data and extended theory, which the written dissertation supplements. Herein termed Unstill Life Studies (ULS), the dissertation explores the theoretical tenets of the biotechnological teach-ins through the lens of contemporary and historical bio-philosophy. This combination of investigation and practice shows how a variety of art and technology interfaces can explicate trans-species collage and bring the public closer to the resultant, actual beings of biotechnology, be they GMO or IGM.