

# *Neonate (6e656f6e617465) (2019-2021)*

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## **Abstract**

This artistic abstract presents my art practice through one of my long-term works: *Neonate (6e656f6e617465)*. The installation-based work's title refers to an organism in its adolescent stage and seeks to express feelings on how technological advancements have altered our perceptions of social dynamics. Examining the conceptual formation of the work through my own concept of the "Uncanny Cyborg," which I develop out of two main texts, Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" (1919) and Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1984). Highlighting the importance of the relationship between the material, connotations, and method of production, I seek to construct a hybrid visual language that is indicative of a contemporary anxiety and discomfort.

The work first engages with the idea of a juvenile organism by repeatedly using imagery that might suggest birth-conception. Through the process and the consideration of symbol-making, objects, materials and their represented subjects are manipulated in an attempt to subvert its signs and signifiers to become a new proposition for an in-between, rather than an either-or idea of the word "conception."

*Neonate* serves as a proposition for alternative forms and cultivations and energy transfers, the subsystems that fuel an entire operation. The artist considered the imagery of cultivating (conception), contemplating the resources, roles, functions and energy transference in the processes of crafting the setting of the installation. She learned from the Uncanny, how the acts of revealing what is meant to be concealed can be exhibited through manipulating objects. Treated as though it were

incubating an organism, bodies of silicone are put into positions that create semblances of acts of nestling and cradling. The connections of tubes, symbolic of an umbilical cord, draw a symbiotic relationship, where a subject subsists through the nutrients and resources from a mother-like figure, rich with assets, mimicking germination as seen in agricultural greenhouses, a manufactured way of growing produce.



Fig. 1. *Neonate*. Chok Si Yuan. 2020.

The approach of revealing and concealing to generate feelings of the "domestic" and "undomestic," is re-enacted through biological and mechanical tensions in quieted and lesser pronounced ways. Within the installation, the simultaneous presence and absence of the acrylic board (fig. 1) as a connector between objects also serves as a fragmentation of the internal and the external. Loosely replicating solar panels and satellites, which harnesses energy from the sun, the pieces become symbols of transference, activating information and converting energy, much like the resources that

are required to produce a child. In doing so, these materials, seen as cold and manufactured, yet placed in acts of nurturing, generate feelings of the uncanny, disguising the objects and hindering recognizability. Therefore, the visual tension is created through methods of metaphor and various forms of the word conception.

In the “major rearrangements” of social relationships as Haraway has postulated in her column of comparisons, certain rows compare reproduction from “sex” with the question of “genetic engineering.” In current state of rapid technological development, procedures like I.V.F. (in-vitro fertilization) and A.R.T. (assisted reproductive technologies) call into question the organic family's status and connotations, replacing heteronormativity and binary genders with a web of relationships that redefine and question gender, sexuality and heteronormativity. Taking responsibility in the technologies that reorient our thinking, the inherent binaries that objects have, in particular the tensions between biological and mechanical, the soft and rigid must be rethought (fig. 2)



Fig. 2. *Neonate*, Chok Si Xuan 2020.

In addition to the double being used in the process of creation, *mise-en-abyme* is also seen in the usage of electronics, both symbolically and literally demonstrating energy transference and a network joining objects together. In relation to the idea of birth, it supplies the silicone organisms with air, and functions in a similar way to oxygen supply tanks, as though it were subsisting them, as the power from the supply outlets goes through a series of conversions from power to activating the air pump.

Therefore, in bringing a biological, bodily process outside of the body and into a laboratory, the installation reimagines the procedures by employing mechanical objects into biological acts. The result is a cybernetic system of organisms dilating and contracting, inhaling and exhaling, in a sterile environment of uncanny objects.

### References

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### Biography

**Si Xuan** is a sculptor whose practice concerns tackling all things 3D—digitally, tangibly, and metaphysically. She is interested in cybernetics—the feedback between humans, living organisms and machine—and the exploration of physical relationships. By exploring media such as silicone and found objects, and incorporating electronics like Arduino microcontrollers and methods such as 3D modelling and printing, she creates objects that erode the boundaries between the biological and mechanical

Si Xuan has attained awards such as The Lasalle Scholarship (2019) and the Winston Oh Travelogue Award (Practice) (2018). Additionally, she has also participated in exhibitions such as Meshminds Art X Tech for Good (2019), The Winston Oh Travelogue: What the stars are telling us (2018) and

programs such as Chanel X Harper's Bazaar Singapore Paris Immersion Programme (2019) and Young Artist Talent #11 by the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture Thailand (2020). She currently resides and practices in Singapore.