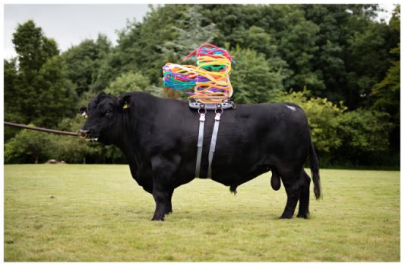
Basic Detail Report



Health/Toxin, Cahirmee Gino (GZA)

Health/Toxin

Date

2016

Primary Maker

McKinney, Maria

Medium

Photograph: archival pigment print, 125 x 225 cm, framed, unglazed Sculpture: semen straws, glue, cable ties, powder coated steel frame, 83 x 65 x 65 cm

Description

In pre-Christian Europe, people annually performed customs in relation to the reaping and sewing of the harvest. These rituals have since been popularly interpreted as an attempt to influence the future behaviour of nature. Part of this practice involved making a corn dolly, an object made through the intricate handcraft of binding straw with the final sheaf of that year's crop. This figurine is regarded as the vessel to where the spirit of the harvest resorted and resided through the winter months after the crop was reaped. In spring it would be returned to the earth by being buried under the first sown seed. This doll has since become a symbol of fertility, both of the land and the living creatures that feed off it. In contemporary society however, the branch of knowledge known as genomics has given humans the ability to truly influence how nature behaves in future generations of animal and plant species. Having gained an understanding of the complex structure of genes and their functionality, the emergence of bioinformatics has allowed scientists to direct breeding strategies with the objective of achieving more physically healthy and commercially productive animals. This body of work is proposed as a rephrasing of what was once intangible. Now we not only understand these formerly mysterious processes of propagation, but also manipulate them to our own ends. This ability is in itself a cause of wonderment; the magic has become in a sense, real. The colourful objects on the back of the bulls are made from semen straws, the storage receptacles used in the artificial insemination process. Produced in highly hygienic environments, these receptacles come in a variety of bright pop colours to help distinguish between different bull's semen while being stored in liquid nitrogen. As the semen straw is party to these animals propagation, it is imbued with a different significance from its natural predecessor. It is a symbolic carrier, a vessel of contemporary values and meaning. The animals are the bearers of these ceremonial-inspired sculptures. Together, the carrier and object coalesce into something strange and entrancing. For the past eighteen months McKinney has been working with Dovea Genetics, a bull stud farm with 90 bulls standing at stud producing semen in a controlled environment. Her scientific collaborators are quantitative geneticist Dr. Donagh Berry (Teagasc), genome biologist Prof. David MacHugh and Head of Veterinary Clinical Studies Prof. Michael Doherty (both UCD). This work was made possible by a Wellcome Trust Arts Award, Arts Council

Project Award, and created while on residency in Parity Studios, UCD. The project has been realised in consultation with a veterinarian and the artist has worked closely with the animal's handlers to ensure they are not made uncomfortable or distressed while making the work. Genetics is responsible for approximately half the observed changes in animal performance in well-structured breeding programs. The nine photographs/objects consider the newly proposed breeding objectives to achieve the cow of the future: 1) produce a large quantity of high value output (i.e., milk and meat), 2) good reproductive performance, 3) good health status, 4) good longevity, 5) does not eat a large quantity of food, 6) easy to manage (i.e., easy calving, docile), 7) good conformation (over and above reflective of health, reproductive performance and longevity), 8) low environmental footprint, and 9) resilient to external perturbations. The video installation depicts a Belgian Blue bull wearing a semen-straw object based on the myostatin gene. This gene is responsible for muscle growth regulation. Through 150 years of line-breeding, Belgian farmers managed to manipulate this gene to achieve the “double muscle” Belgian Blue breed. This type of breeding is a precursor to modern-day practices - we are now in the era of genomics. Maria McKinney is from Donegal and based in Dublin, Ireland. Craft is an important element of McKinney's practice with her selection of materials is based on their specific purpose and examines the wider cultural implications through their habitual use. Outcomes include sculpture, installation, photography and film. Her recent work considers the use of genomics in modern cattle breeding. McKinney questions the human impulse to try and influence nature - from ancient rituals performed in relation to the harvest, to making breeding decisions for livestock based on economically beneficial genomes. Understanding the intricate atomic crafts performed by genetics is presently becoming a reality. How we navigate this future will have a drastic effect on what and who we are as a species. In March 2018 her body of work Sire will be exhibited at the 'Wellcome Collection', London. In 2017 she began a three-year membership in Temple Bar Studios, Dublin. In the same year she was selected to participate in Skowhegan, an International residency in the countryside of Maine USA. Previous solo exhibitions include the RHA, Ireland (2016), Lokaal 01, Belgium (2016), La Permanence, France (2015), the MAC, UK (2012). In 2015 she was University College Dublin, 'Parity studios' artist in residence, and was a Fire Station Artists Studios member 2012-2015. She was shortlisted for the MAC International 2014 selected by Hugh Mulholland, Judith Nesbitt and Francesco Bonami. She has received funding awards from the Wellcome Trust and Arts Councils of both Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 2019, Sire will travel to the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading UK.

Dimensions

Photograph: 125 x 225 cm (Crate: 168 x 240 cm) Sculpture: 83 x 65 x 65 cm Steel stand 139 x 61 x 77cm