MAKE DO AND MEND, ANNA DUMITRIU

***MAKE DO AND MEND*, STORYTELLING IN ART AND SCIENCE, BY ANNICK BUREAUD**

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Central to *Make Do and Mend*, when one encounters it for the first time, is the patched suit on the mannequin followed by the toy sewing machine on its pedestal. The four framed pieces, on the wall, appear as some kind of background information, as secondary items, before revealing their content and role at a closer look.

Make Do and Mend is not a self explanatory artwork and is almost as complex to explain as the science it is using and reflecting upon. Non self explanatory artworks are common in art-science projects as well as in average (non art-science) contemporary art, but there are different ways of being so.

Make Do and Mend can be described as what I call 'intermediary-objects', carrying stories to be told and unfolded. It does not «stand for». It is actual objects embodying the story lines. In other words, *Make Do and Mend* is a narrative spread between different artefacts.

It would be easy and a mistake to focus only on the 1941 suit, patched with the silk fabrics onto which the *E. Coli* bacteria, repaired using the so called «mollecular scissors» CRISPR/Cas9, were grown.

All the elements, echoing and mirroring each other, are equally important. In this respect, the four frames are like ''tablets' antique tablets' that are providing clues to decipher the work, which not only includes cutting-edge biomedical research but is also rooted in local history both from the Second World War in the UK and, more generally, in the history of Western science and is based on strong cultural references. The audience becomes like archaeologists 'reading' the history through remaining fragments that would have been over written.

Anna Dumitriu is using craft techniques, often connoted as feminine, in her artworks while working with the latest biotechnologies to address crucial contemporary issues. In *Make Do and Mend*, the «low-craft» aesthetics of the antique vintage elements not only refers to WWII and

year 1941 but also confronts and opposes our vision of the clean-sterile-high-end lab aesthetics and the very notion of progress.

Each technique acts as a metaphor to the other to deploy the embodied ennmmessched stories. In this respect, the homologous recombination technique can be compared to patching and the whole process of gene editing to craft with its meticulous steps and endless pipetting and 'cooking' procedures. Moreover, the clichés of 'male-science' and 'female-craft' are put upside down: science is craft.
The mending metaphor is even more powerful and the sewing machine the real key element of the piece for bringing to the forefront the ethical issues that the work carries: it is a toy which is the exact replica of the real machine. Are we like kids playing with matches when thinking of 'repairing' faulty genomes or our own past medical and scientific mistakes?

In the late '90's, when bioart emerged, one of its key elements was that the Living itself had become a medium for art, a living that had to remain alive, at least throughout the exhibition time. Formerly, many of those artworks had a 'lab-aesthetics' as they needed to maintain the living element alive, for instance in bio-reactors, and one of the struggles was precisely to bypass this drawback. One good example to have been successfull in this respect is Eduardo Kac's Genesis where the modified bacteria were alive but part of a larger (media) art installation.
Increasingly, due to health and safety regulationsregulations, to other kind of constraints (nobody would like the pathogenic pathogenic bacteria that are in many of Anna Dumitriu's projects to continue growing), to the expansion of speculative bioart, or to aesthetical choices, an important segment of bioart is finding its way into traditionnal art mediums and sometimes even out of the living matter itself. *Make Do and Mend*, as many of the artist's other works, belongs to a bioart trend that I would term «non-living bioart» in that it includes 'for real' bio elements such as modified bacteria, but killed. The fact that it is genuine, both in its biotechnology techniques and vintage items, and for real, makes all the difference. It is neither «about», nor hypotheses. It is.

Annick Bureaud, Paris, September 2017

CREDITS

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