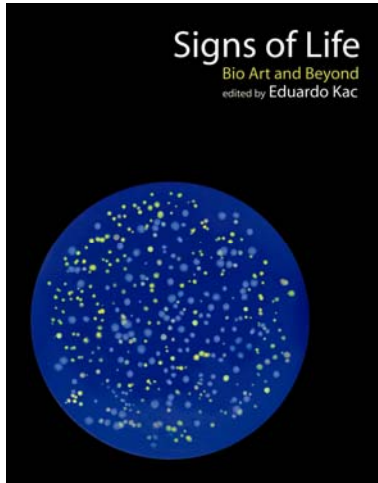


**Signs of Life: Bio Art and Beyond** /Edited by Eduardo Kac.--(Leonardo). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, September 2007.--430 p.: ill.--ISBN-13: 978-0-262-11293-2 (cl., alk. paper): \$34.95.



In this latest addition to the challenging Leonardo series, Kac, famed transgenic artist, activist and author, voices his views with other scholars and artists in essays which address theoretical, historical, cultural, and ethical tenets surrounding art that employs biotechnology to manipulate and create life forms. In applications which include photosynthetic photographs, performed human vaginal contractions in space, 'disembodied cuisine,' tissue sculpture, skin grafts, plant breeding, genetic portraits and genetically modified beings, bio art is rife with paradoxes: relationship and victimization, domination and self-determination, the artificial and natural, the real and ideal, consumption and exploitation, and appropriation of the living and creative freedom (to name a few).

Collectively, these essays represent bio art as a promise and a threat to the common good. From an optimistic viewpoint, bio art inspires pathways to a renewed language for life and art, while exposing shortcomings in dominant ideologies and processes; creates bridges of understanding through multi-disciplinary collaborations; and

desires to connect with "other" life forms. Bio art also makes explicit a basic human need to manipulate life for survival, aesthetic, emotional, or symbolic reasons with potential for moral transgression and harmful acts. This final point is made in the last essay by philosopher Yves Michaud, who also advises on the importance of "wondering" more aggressively about the aims of bio art, observing that "words move about freely, but the ideas often remain imprecise." Further, in this anthology, the depth of consciousness or caring as practiced by bio artists is often ambiguous, and the psychological, spiritual and emotional impacts elicited through experiencing bio art are rarely or adequately expressed.

A working knowledge of critical theoretical discourse as it intersects with art, science, and technology is assumed in many of the essays, though most contain extensive annotated footnotes to help guide the reader to additional important sources and ideas. Kac's introduction to the text is essential in understanding the context and substance of this collection. *Signs of Life* is advanced academic reading, but could be used in guided classroom discussion or debate at the undergraduate level.

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