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Body lapse

Fancy seeing a hybrid of Walt Disney, Thumper and Bambi being filmed as it goes through a series of visions in surreal landscapes? Then don't miss art group London Fieldworks' *Hibernator* at London's Beaconsfield gallery. **Yolanda Zappaterra** explores the background to this animatronics event

WHO'S the most famous person to have been cryonically frozen? Walt Disney, right? Uh, wrong. Turns out the world's most famous animator was never actually frozen, but he was hugely interested in the process of and possibilities inherent in cryonics, or suspended animation.

Art group London Fieldworks has taken this as its starting point for *Hibernator*: *Prince of the Petrified Forest*, an intriguing new exhibition that over the course of seven weeks will see the creation of a film, composed of eight animated films or 'visions', using an animatronic hybrid of Disney and two of his most famous creations, Thumper and Bambi.

The provenance for the exhibition lies in a rich mix of reference material that includes not just Disney's interest in Robert Ettinger's cryonics programme, but also his enthusiasm for the social engineering concept Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow he devised but never saw materialise; Marc Eliot's dark unauthorised biography of the man, Walt Disney, Hollywood's Dark Prince; Felix Salten's 1923 novel *Bambi, A Life in the Woods* (the original source for Disney's film); the *Bardo Thodol* (Tibetan Book of the Dead) and Timothy Leary's *The Psychedelic Experience*, a manual based on it; the time-lapse photography of John Ott and, in particular, his work for Disney; and more contemporary esoteric concerns, such as how ecological shifts are impacting on hibernation patterns in nature and the growing possibility of induced hibernetic states, including long-term human stasis, as developed and explored by space agencies in Europe.

Given such origins, *Hibernator* promises to be a fascinating event, a site-specific piece that will be set firmly at the intersection of art and science, as London Fieldworks co-directors Bruce Gilchrist and Jo Joelson envision it. The duo will be shooting the eight self-contained episodes in the Beaconsfield upstairs gallery space before compositing each one on- and off-site and screening them in the

downstairs arch space, through which the viewer will have to navigate a journey to the screen.

But, behind the scenes is an impressive team of collaborators, including scriptwriter Steve Beard; animatronics designer Matthew Walker, who will have created the robot animatronic that will form the hybrid chimera Gilchrist and Joelson will film; prosthetics designers and sculptors Paul and Laura Carey, who will have given the animatronic its weirdly disconcerting form; and composer Dugal McKinnon, who deconstructs Frank Churchill's original score for *Bambi* and reconstructs it as darker melodies composed using specifically developed software routines.

To some degree, the movements of the animatronic will be determined by light, this 'being one of the two key determinants of hibernation (along with temperature)', explains Gilchrist. He and Joelson are wary of giving too much away, but explain that using green-screen technology, they will create 'what if' scenarios in surreal landscapes, 'a series of visions that will each end with the animatronic going into a state of torpor before regaining consciousness in a different landscape'.

Key to creating the films in public will be the idea of exposing processes of artificiality and pretence. 'They offer a reminder that our idea of reality is just a construction, so their composition is a metaphor, something that's very true for the art process; it's a metaphor for a construction of reality,' explains Gilchrist. Thus, *Hibernator* is ultimately about manipulation – of the world and perceptions – which comes back neatly to Disney, Ott and Ettinger. 'Their work was all about creating artificial lifespans for organisms and manipulating life processes, dealing with that moment when life becomes death,' says Gilchrist. ●

Hibernator: Prince of the Petrified Forest is on from 15 March to 29 April at Beaconsfield, 2 Newport Street, London SE11

1 *Hibernator* image, part of *Hibernator: Prince of the Petrified Forest*, by London Fieldworks, 2007, a Beaconsfield commission

2 Animation still from *Prince of the Petrified Forest*, part of *Hibernator*

3 Hex silhouette, part of *Hibernator: Prince of the Petrified Forest*