

London Fieldworks: *re-inventing Disney*

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Hibernator is a new site-specific work by London Fieldworks commissioned by Beaconsfield London. London Fieldworks is an art partnership that was co-founded by Bruce Gilchrist and Jo Joelson in 2000, as an artist-led organisation to develop multidisciplinary collaboration. Since 1995 their collaboration at the art-science-technology interface has reflected their ongoing enquiry into how the data of natural phenomena and human experience are interpreted and manifested in both science and art, leading to poetic investigations around data and narrative.

Their projects and installations have been exhibited internationally, most recently at the Fort William Mountain Film Festival, Roundhouse, London, Science Museum, London and the Cheltenham Festival of Science.

Syzygy (1997-1999), a project described as “a laboratory-in-action” was a telematic artwork that took place simultaneously on an uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland and at the ICA, London; a collaboration between artists, engineers, scientists and a world champion stunt kite flying team. The project involved transmitting 2 live data streams (weather data collected from sensors on kites and brain data from the kite fliers) via mobile phone to a smart material sculpture-cum-receiver at the ICA. Gilchrist and Joelson were awarded Millennium Fellowships by the Royal Society and British Association for the Advancement of Science for *Syzygy*.

Their project *Polaria* (2000-2002), involved a month in North-East Greenland where the artists conducted fieldwork on Arctic light and human physiology. The data collected by the artists was used to construct a “virtual daylight chamber”, an immersive interactive installation. Members of the public could interface the database via an electrified chair to produce simulations of Arctic light according to their body/mind state, eliciting notions of light ecology and the body’s relationship to environment.



The *Hibernator* project is the second in a trilogy of works around the theme of suspended animation. *Hibernator* takes as its starting point the myth of Walt Disney – cryogenically frozen at the point of death and incarcerated until technology can bring him back to life. Bruce and Jo proposed his re-animation to star in their film; *Hibernator: Prince of the Petrified Forest* inspired by the first eco novel *Bambi* by Felix Salten. Bruce says, “the premise for *Hibernator* was to bring Disney back to life through a fused image with *Bambi* and *Thumper*.”

The film began with the re-birth of Disney in the form of a chimera emerging from hibernation; a hybrid of himself and the iconic characters, *Bambi* and *Thumper*. Bruce says, “We’re referencing animation techniques, which brings Disney back into play and creates a hybrid that is a symbolic link to environmental cues. The performance is determined by light outside. It’s a dynamic piece.”

The animatronic chimera was constructed in collaboration with robotics and prosthetic specialists and set against a pre-scripted narrative and soundtrack, which was the central element and subject of the

installation and the film. *Hibernator* was activated by an environmental cue – solar energy and the re-awakening of the chimera was conceptually linked to natural animal hibernation patterns.

The live artwork allowed the viewer to witness the solar-powered actions of the animatronic, as well as the artists engaged in the live film making process. The film was screened weekly, which showed the development of the project. Bruce comments: “The visitor will have access to the creative process, which is a metaphor for perceived notions of reality. Reality constructions relate to the animation business. Disney can orchestrate dreams and fantasy.”

Currently there are no plans to re-enact the project. It is a site specific, one-off experience. However, the outcome is a new work — the animation — *Hibernator: Prince of the Petrified Forest*. The film is available for screening and distribution and will be toured in time.

For more information on *Hibernator: Prince of the Petrified Forest* or the artists please see www.londonfieldworks.com or www.artemergent.org.uk Cherie Federico