SYNTHETIC ECOLOGIES LAB: COMPENDIUM

Serpentine Arts Technologies and Synthetic Ecologies Lab launch an innovative new tool to explore new artistic engagements with the sciences and lifeforms

Leading researchers, artists, scientists and writers focus on the theme of fermentation

This July, Serpentine’s Arts Technologies present the first season of Compendium from the Synthetic Ecologies Lab, a collaborative web tool aiming to further define the emerging field of synthetic ecologies. Synthetic ecologies explores relationships between natural and artificial biological systems. Compendium’s season run between 6-9 months, and its first season will focus on fermentation; supporting multiple frameworks of investigation to move beyond more established meanings found within biochemical or metabolic processes and the culinary arts.
As a web-based tool, Compendium is powered by the platform Are.na, where users save content, create collections over time and connect ideas. To qualify and reinforce its exploration, the Lab has invited a collaborative cast of researchers, artists, scientists and literarries within the field of fermentation to steer its development. These Contributors include Joshua Evans (Danish Technical University), Namita Patel (Francis Crick Institute), Seetal Solanki (Ma.tt.er), Lucy Chinen (Non-Food), Nadia Berenstein (James Beard Award-winning journalist and historian), Guest Curator Angela Dimayuga, and a Lead Researcher Chiara De Leone to support the curatorial process (with more names to be announced later in the season).

Through this exploratory foundation built with its Contributors and Guest Curator, Compendium remolds Are.na’s data-sets to republish, translate and archive their new findings for users to interact with and reinterpret for their own fermentation-led exploration.

To support this personalised exploration for users, Compendium’s design and development team boasts an equally skilled group of design-led experts including Mindy Seu, Somnath Bhatt, Brian Huddleston and James Wreford.

**Yasaman Sheri, Project Director and Serpentine Synthetic Ecologies Lab Principal Investigator, said:** “The Synthetic Ecologies Compendium is not only a resource but a space and community for experimentation and collective investigation. Every person in the project practises deep listening, code switching, and playful collaboration - in turn we have created a guild for building new definition models within the emerging field of Synthetic Ecologies. A stellar, thoughtful, and creative team of transdisciplinary practitioners expanding vessels of knowledge with open arms that we now extend to our users.”

**Kay Watson, Head of Technologies, said:** “The Synthetic Ecologies Lab is a key part of the holistic vision of the Serpentine Arts Technologies programme to interrogate emerging fields of science and advanced technologies. The Lab functions in dialogue with our broader work in AI, blockchain, video games, the metaverse and web 3 technologies and demonstrates the important role that art and creativity can and should play in their development. It has been a privilege to collaborate with Yasaman Sheri and all our brilliant Contributors on the Compendium. As a working research and development tool, it will become a long-term archive for discussion and reflection on the past, present, and future of the life sciences that will grow with our audiences and participants.”

**Bettina Korek and Hans Ulrich Obrist said:** “We are delighted to be working with such an exciting, cross-disciplinary collection of people to explore the emerging field of Synthetic Ecologies that is being strengthened through Compendium. Pushing the boundaries of creative collaboration by embracing new technology platforms and ways of thinking is a core part of the work at Serpentine, and we are so excited to see how the Compendium develops across this season and those to come.”
Preliminary areas already in coalescence through their work since April 2022 include fermentation’s broader cross-disciplinary relationship to knowledge sharing, historical timelines, non-human intimacies, our senses, non-colonial definitions and materiality. This aggregation of content will continue through the Summer and until October 2022, with a series of live events via Serpentine’s Twitch (@serpentineUK) starting with a virtual launch and introduction to Angela Dimayuga on 07 July 20:00 BST / 12:00 PDT / 15:00 EDT, with more to follow in August and September with different contributors.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Arts Technologies
Serpentine Arts Technologies collaborate with artists to generate new understandings and knowledge specific to advanced technologies that artists are interested in researching and interrogating. The team has two operational areas of focus: commissioning and research and development. These manifest in artist-led projects and the R&D Platform.

About Synthetic Ecologies
Led by designer and researcher Yasaman Sheri, Synthetic Ecologies Lab aims to support artists in the context of emerging biological technologies and ecology by strengthening the foundations for art’s critical inquiry and intervention into these spaces. This is done by integrating insights derived from existing art-science collaborations as well as exploring the tools and models for collaboration in new artistic engagements with the sciences and lifeforms.

About Yasaman Sheri
Yasaman Sheri is the Principal Investigator and leads the Synthetic Ecologies Lab at Serpentine. She is an Artist and Designer investigating the creative and critical inquiry in life sciences. Her work explores the plurality of senses and the invisible scales at which humans frame and reframe ecology through culture, society and technology. She is an educator and design leader with more than a decade of experience building novel interfaces for immersive computing and curricula on sensory & experimental design. She writes frequently, mentors artists exploring emerging technologies and creative science and is an advocate for women identifying communities of colour and folks less represented.

About Angela Dimayuga
Angela Dimayuga is a New York City based chef, cultural producer and multidisciplinary artist. She is the co-author of Filipinx: Heritage Recipes from the Diaspora, an anthropologic, memoire-manifesto and design driven cookbook. As a humanities degree graduate Angela often works in the ephemeral and impermanent, engaging and producing experiences sometimes with food, other
artists, advocating community care, and or celebrating BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Colour) queer and trans folks in nightlife organization.

About Chiara De Leone and the Contributors

Chiara Di Leone is a writer and researcher currently focussing on anticipatory governance and the epistemologies of climate change. Her essays are published in several outlets, including NOEMA, Real Review, and TANK magazines as well as edited collections by Sternberg Press. She holds a Master of Arts from Goldsmiths University in London and a Bachelor of Science in Econometrics from LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome.

Nadia Berenstein is a James Beard award-winning journalist, flavour historian, and part-time faculty at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Nadia holds a PhD in the History and Sociology of Science from the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation told the story of the growth of the flavour industry and the science and technology of flavour design; her ongoing research investigates how society, culture, and technology inform the experience of sensory pleasures and the shape of consumer desires, from food to fashion. Nadia’s writing has appeared in Epicurious, The Counter, MUNCHIES, Food & Wine, and Serious Eats, among other places.

Lucy Chinen is an artist, writer, and Co-Founder of Nonfood, an algae-based food company. She has previously written about food systems and food tech in relation to climate change. Most recently she has worked on Half-Earth Socialism, a game based on the book by Troy Vettese, developed by Francis Tseng and TRUST Support.

Joshua Evans is senior researcher at the Danish Technical University’s Centre for Biosustainability, where he leads the Sustainable Food Innovation Group. Josh’s work links flavour, ecology & evolution, biocultural diversity, and their politics in the Anthropocene—particularly through fermentation and microbes. He holds degrees in Geography and the Environment, History and Philosophy of Science, and Humanities, and has worked in culinary research and development.

Namita Patel is the Fermentation Manager at The Francis Crick Institute, a biomedical research organisation making discoveries on how life works based in London, UK. Namita has over 15 years experience in pilot scale microbial fermentation for the production of material for early stage research projects, and holds a Bachelor of Engineering in Chemical Engineering, with Biochemical Engineering from the University of Birmingham and Masters in Science in Biochemical Engineering from University College London.

Seetal Solanki is a translator of materials. The Founder and Director of Ma-tt-er, a relational practice focused on providing access to materials through education, consultancy and design. Her work at Ma-tt-er reorients mindsets, behaviours and mechanisms towards futures that are caring and respectful by providing ecological and nuanced strategies that are biodiverse, inclusive and response-able. Previous practice-based collaborations include the likes of Potato Head Bali,

**About the Serpentine Arts Technologies Team**

**Alexander Boyes** is cross-functional and integrated Producer within Serpentine Arts Technologies. Alex augments with creators and researchers across art, gaming, science and performance to best achieve their outputs and processes that have included Art Gallery of NSW, Design Museum, The Francis Crick Institute, and Royal Opera House outside of Serpentine Arts Technologies.

**Victoria Ivanova** is R&D Strategic Lead within the Arts Technologies team. Her core focus is on systemic and infrastructural conditions that shape socio-economic, political and institutional realities. Victoria is completing a practice-based PhD between Serpentine and London South Bank University which has led to the creation of the Serpentine R&D Platform.

**Kay Watson** is producer and curator working with art and advanced technologies, photography and video games. She is Head of Arts Technologies and a Trustee of Brighton Photo Fringe, York Mediale and The Photographers' Gallery.

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