

God the Mechanical Mother

God the Mechanical Mother is a new installation by Kat Lang, who works together with Tobias Allen while taking inspiration from an array of artists and theorists. Lang's exhibition is an immersive experience that melds the human and non-human. Data retrieved from the body goes through a series of processes, resulting in a recontextualisation of personhood. Through investigating how the body, in its most extreme states, develops and devolves via these processes, Lang creates an experience in which we must rethink our own.

Those entering the space are not viewers, but participants. Each body that enters the custom made corridor is captured on a thermal camera and live streamed onto a screen placed just outside the entrance. In thermographic imaging, bodily forms move within the space. It is designed to catch the body heat of participants, but not so that they may see themselves in real time. If desired, it is possible to look at the remnants left behind by your own body—though that too will fade in time. This work features exchanges between human and non-human, as the data retrieved by the camera calls into question how removed from nature these electronic elements really are.

Plunged into darkness, we bring our own feelings into the work. It can be read as threatening, comforting, consuming, enveloping. *God the Mechanical Mother* is a microcosm of possibilities where we are suspended in time. The emotionality of the work has been created via the weaving of auditory, visual and olfactory elements into a sensorial realm.

An audio loop plays Lang's distorted version of 'You Are My Sunshine.' As one of the most recognisable songs on Earth, it has been recorded and sampled hundreds of times. Lang takes from Nicholas Bourriaud's theories of Relational Aesthetics and Postproduction in their application of the audio component. Bourriaud posits that musicians "consider it normal that the sonorous treatment applied to the borrowed loop could in turn generate other interpretations, and so on and so forth."¹ He goes on to assert that each sample is a link in a chain existing in relation to the others surrounding it. Lang's offering adds to this chain. Recorded using contact microphones, also known as piezo discs, coated in decomposing material and inserted in the artist's throat, their body's sonorous output flows in the darkness. The irony at play in the lyrics runs through the rest of the installation, for there are unavoidable linguistic associations we are predisposed to think of when we encounter cloth.

'Man of the cloth'

'clothes make the man'

'the fabric of society'

¹ Nicholas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002.

Muslin cloth has long been utilised as a filter in the production of food. Separating fatter liquid from thin, it functions as a barrier as well as an aid. Here, Lang acknowledges this history by soaking muslin in beef tallow and draping it both on both of the sides and ceiling of their corridor. Lang collaborated with Tobias Allen in the production of this work, performatively placing the fat onto the cloth in a variety of ways—most notably standing on either side of the cloth and placing their fat filled hands together. This is the first in a series of interactions that plays out. Others include the fat with the muslin, the weight of both overlaid atop the wooden support, and the inevitable human hands that curiously reach out to touch the work. All the while, the marks that the fat makes on the cloth are slowly changing.

Thinking back to this structure as a realm of potential and its various linguistic associations, I am drawn to the Māori word for potential: 'pito mata', literally the 'uncooked portion.'² It was common to preserve manu such as muttonbird in their own fat by placing them in a hue. They were then stored away, ready to be consumed as need be. My feelings as a participant in this work are much the same; submersed in fat, full of potential, waiting for someone to pull me out.

² Te Aka Māori Dictionary, <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/> 1. (noun) potential - literally the 'uncooked portion'. The uncooked piece of kūmara that can be replanted having the potential to produce many more kūmara.