***Silent Barrage* wins first prize in prestigious international art competition *VIDA 12.0***

Can the movement of an audience through a mechanical forest help to calm-down cultured nerve cells in a lab thousands of kilometres away? *Silent Barrage* has been awarded first place and 18,000 Euros in the prestigious international competition, VIDA 12.0, rewarding excellence in artistic creativity utilising new technologies and artificial life.

*Silent Barrage* isan art and science collaboration between art researchers, Phil Gamblen, Guy Ben-Ary & engineer Peter Gee from SymbioticA at The University of Western Australia, and scientists from Steve Potter’s Laboratory for Neuroengineering at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta*.*

One of the very few real art and science works – in that it is both artistically meaningful and scientifically valid, Silent Barrage investigates the nature of thoughts, free will, and neural dysfunction. The installation consists of thirty-two sculptural robotic objects (the ‘robotic body’). Each of the objects amplifies and represents the electric activity that occurs in a real biological neural network (the ‘brain’) being grown and nurtured in a Petri dish in Dr. Steve Potter’s lab. The behaviour of each robotic object is directly dependent on the signals generated by the neural network. The internet serves as the interface between the robotic body and its remote brain. The audience is invited to interact with the neural network by moving through the space where their actions are picked up and transmitted to the neural network, completing a closed feedback loop between the robotic objects (and viewers) in the gallery and the neurons in the lab

A pioneer in the field of artificial life, Fundación Telefónica’s VIDA Competition not only rewards excellence within artificial life art, but has over the past decade become a fundamental archive of the evolution of electronic art in one of its most significant aspects. VIDA awards have in the past been interested in art work that bridges the gap between "invisible" biological activity and the exhibition space. The VIDA 12.0 jury awarded *Silent Barrage* first place due to its remarkable and surprising sculptural manifestation of neural activity. As part of the prize, Silent Barrage will be exhibited in a scaled down version of nine poles) at ARCOmadrid, the 29th International Contemporary Art Fair, Spain, in February 2010. The Jury was struck by *Silent Barrage*’s remarkable and surprising sculptural manifestation of neural activity as a fascinating model of neural interconnectivity itself. VIDA awards have in the past been interested in art work that bridges the gap between "invisible" biological activity and the exhibition space: Silent Barrage. The work will be exhibited in July at Art.ficial – the Sao Paolo Art and Technology International Biennale, Brazil.

*Silent Barrage* was developed by Guy Ben-Ary and Philip Gamblen, with Peter Gee, Dr. Nathan Scott and Brett Murray, hosted by SymbioticA in collaboration with Dr. Steve Potter Lab (Dr. Steve Potter, Douglas Swehla & Stephen Bobic) at Georgia Institute of Technology. Silent Barrage evolved from the *Fish and Chips* & *MEART - the semi living artist* projects established in 2000 at SymbioticA. The award coincides with SymbioticA’s tenth anniversary.

SymbioticA, located within the School of Anatomy and Human Biology at The University of Western Australia, is an artistic laboratory dedicated to the research, learning, critique and hands-on engagement with the life sciences. Steve Potter’s Laboratory, one of nine groups in Georgia Tech’s Laboratory for Neuroengineering, develops new neuroscience technologies, such as embodied cultured networks, for studying learning and memoryin vitro. Their research is funded by the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Coulter Foundation. Ben-Ary and Gamblen’s research at the Potter Lab in 2006 was supported by the Australia Council New Media Arts Board. *Silent Barrage* has been assisted by the State of Western Australia through the Department of Culture and the Arts.

For more information, visit: <http://www.symbiotica.uwa.edu.au/silentbarrage>

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