

ART

'SEVENTH GENERATION'

According to American Indian legend, the sacred traditions destroyed with the advent of white people would be restored by the "seventh generation" — the Indians alive today. A new show celebrates the recent work of four from the "Seventh

Generation": potter **Carrie Ortiz**, photographer **Missy White-**

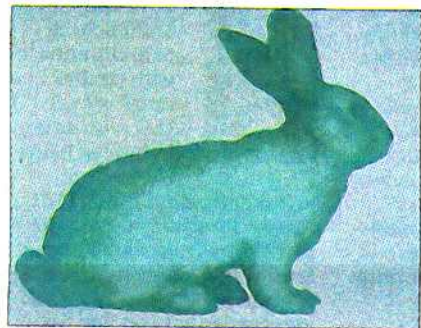
man, and painters **Patrick Rolo** and **Thomas Thein**, whose

"Cloud Forest" drawing is shown here. (5-9 p.m., today, free open-

ing reception. Exhibit through April 3, Ancient Traders Gallery,

1113 E. Franklin Av., Mpls. 612-870-7555.)

Mary Abbe



Designed by Chicago artist Eduardo Kac and genetically engineered by French scientists, this albino bunny has jelly-fish genes that make its fur glow green in certain lights.

Wading into the gene pool

In a potent show at the Weisman Museum, artists take on the science of genetics research, to provocative effect.

By Mary Abbe
Star Tribune Staff Writer

The pink-eyed bunny with the glowing, mint-green fur pretty much sums up the art-and-bioethics debate in a fluffy nutshell.

Created by Chicago artist Eduardo Kac and a team of French geneticists, "Alba" is a transgenic creature, an albino rabbit whose genes include just a soupçon of DNA from a phosphorescent jellyfish. That pinch of jellyfish matter gives Alba her greenish blush.

Alba herself is not in the Weisman Art Museum's engrossing new show, "Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics." But there are posters showing her in Kac's arms, and the debate they sparked in the guest book is a measure of the show's provocative potential.

Indignant viewers lamented science run amok and fretted about what might happen if Alba passed her genes to offspring.

"There are some times when technology can go too far," one wrote. "Why should we mess with something so naturally beautiful as life?"

Another condemned the project as "sick" and asked: "How is this OK? How is combining a jellyfish with a rabbit OK? Please don't try this again — or anything like it."

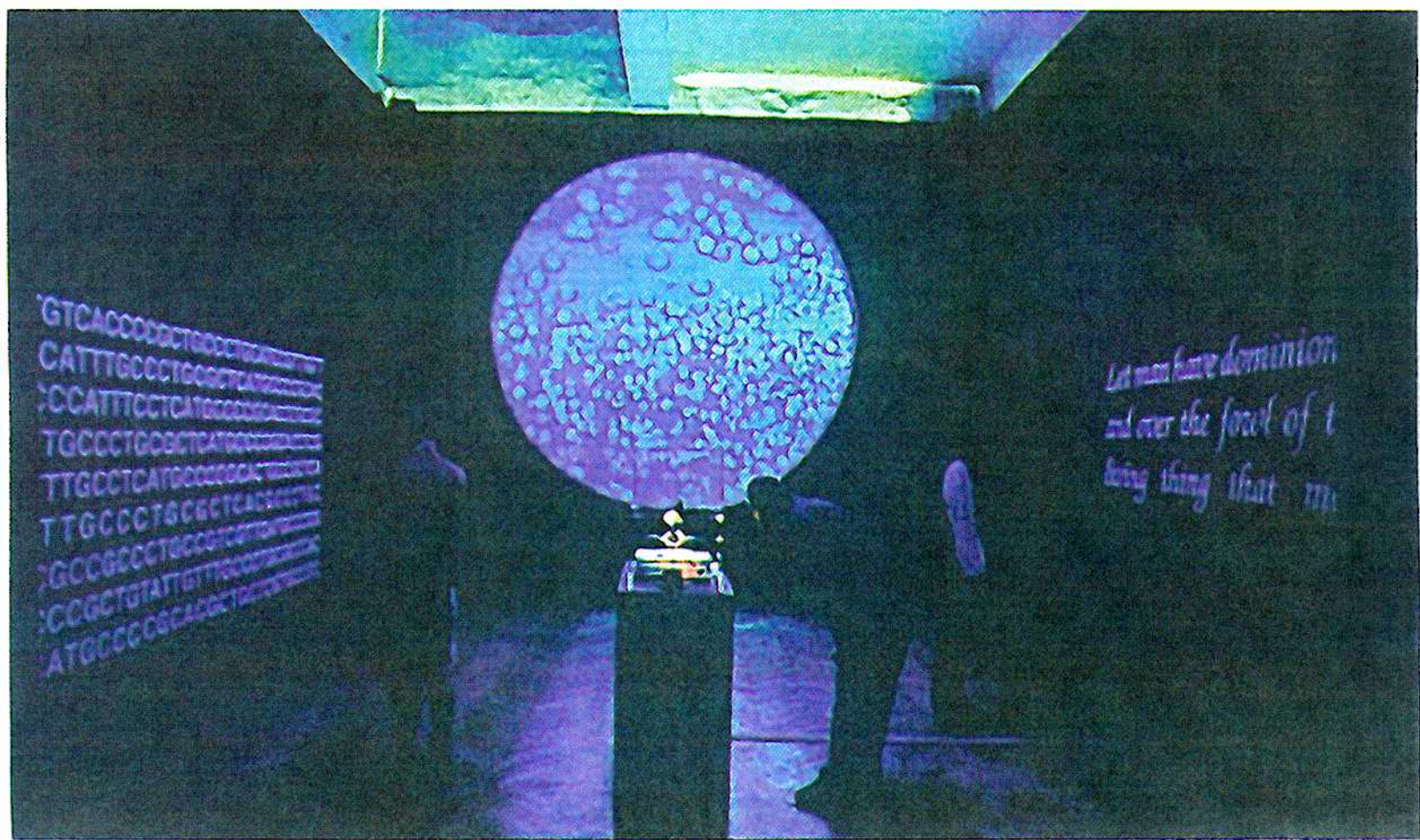
But others embraced the transgenic future without question: "I wish I could glow," one wrote wistfully.

Another leapt right to democratic capitalism: "Where did you buy the glowing bunny? 'Cause I want one."

Organized by the Henry Art Museum at the University of Washington in Seattle, the exhibit includes more than 50 photos, sculptures and installations that artists around the world have made in response to the Human Genome Project, scientists' effort to crack the human genetic code.

GENE(SIS) continues on E20

REVIEW



Viewers can alter the mutation rate of a new strain of *E. coli* bacteria by changing the light levels in this installation by Eduardo Kac.

Wading into the gene pool

GENE(SIS) from E1

They range from abstractions inspired by the computerized DNA code to riffs on race, photos of strange, genetically altered creatures and even a hilarious, pseudo-scientific effort to distill the "soul" of Motown music by crushing and melting old records.

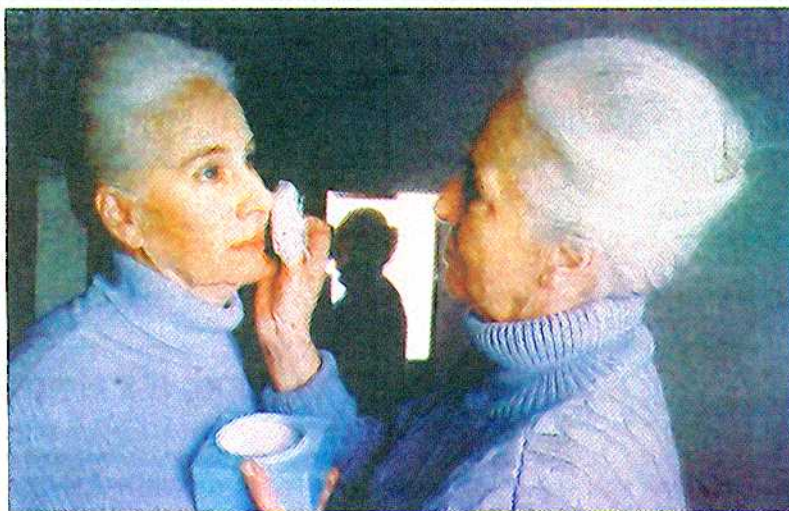
Larger social and cultural issues also simmer here. In a world being rapidly and irreversibly transformed by science, who controls and directs the scientists? Should artists — or any ordinary citizens — have the opportunity to muck about in the gene pool and create furry little slime-balls to unleash upon the world? Why — or why not?

Appropriately "Gene(sis)" offers endless fodder for debate but takes no sides in the discussion. The New York artist collective Creative Time designed funny paper cups printed with provocative DNA jokes and ads for futuristic products such as "No Die," an elixir of eternal life. (Art), another collective, has fabricated breathtakingly beautiful quasi-holographic representations of DNA and a magical new, leukemia-fighting protein called Gleevec or STI-571.

Questions about the genetic significance of race and age underlie some works. Kori Newkirk created a symbolic self-portrait consisting of a DNA chain whose atoms are basketballs to illustrate the widespread presumption that tall, slender African-American guys such as he are genetically programmed with basketball skills. Claiming to "hate basketball," he has long been annoyed by the stereotype.

Several artists dive into the thorny question of who owns and controls your DNA. Since 1992, Larry Miller has been copyrighting his genetic code in cities around the world, generating a wall of elaborately stamped, fingerprinted and be-ribboned certificates.

More startling is the story of Henrietta Lacks, a 31-year-old African-American who



In this computer-altered photo, Dutch artist Margje Geerlinks suggests that in the future humans might be able to reverse the aging process, as these identical women seem to be doing.

died of cervical cancer in 1951 but whose tumor cells are living and reproducing in HeLa, a "cell line" that researchers used in developing the first polio vaccine and still employ in cancer and AIDS research. Scottish artist Christine Borland tells Lack's story, displays a HeLa cell under a microscope and projects it onto a wall.

Kac's "Genesis" installation is the show's most provocative piece, because it allows the public — online and in the gallery — to manipulate a new strain of bacteria and to be responsible for their actions. With the touch of a computer button, viewers can raise or lower the ultraviolet light shining on a petri dish con-

taining a new strain of *E. coli* bacteria, prompting it to mutate. The bacteria were created from a genetic code derived from a Bible verse about humans having dominion over other creatures. (The verse was translated into Morse code and then into a DNA sequence that scientists followed when splicing the new *E. coli* hybrid.) Other collaborators translated the code into the spacey computer music that animates the dramatic installation.

Humor might well be the one human trait most elusive to scientific analysis, and it is, fortunately, in ample evidence. My favorite bit is the elegant recording studio/science lab that Dario Robleto built so he could "scientifically"

REVIEW

Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics

What: An engrossing show of photos, sculpture and installations by 50 artists who respond to esoteric science in provocative and engaging ways.

When: Thru May 2.

Where: Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, 333 E. River Rd., Mpls.

Tickets: Free. 612-625-9494.

extract the essence of soul music from its manifestation in old Motown records. The studio is filled with blue crystals he claims to have concocted by melting down and pulverizing his mother's Motown record collection. Microphones link the crystals to a mad scientist's lab cabinet stashed with skulls, petri dishes of shrunken records, jars of blue and black "brains" and bottles filled with Motown distillates: Doo Wop Vocals and Various Lost Love Melodies. Robleto's sophisticated send-up of science and the music industry is a deft reminder that we might well crack the genetic code, but humor and soul are still elusive.

Snatching esoteric subjects out of the ether of academe, "Gene(sis)" makes them intellectually and emotionally accessible enough for informed debate in the fresh air of chat rooms and coffee shops. Most importantly, the art is fabulous, wrapping a lot of weighty content into smart, suave and even funny packages that engage the eye and ear as much as the brain. Bravo!

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