

**Transcript: Media Art Other – Professor Sarah Cook**

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**Producer: Troy David Ouellette**

*Special Note: At the behest of Professor Cook, and because this is ongoing research, I am only posting the intro and outro text. The transcript will be available when the final text is published. Thank you.*

**Speaker 1: Troy David Ouellette**

Hello, and welcome to episode five of Media Art Other. In this podcast, we discover the various practices of media arts professionals who work in everything from web-based art, sound art and video to artists and curators who explore the curation of media art. Media Art Other was generously funded by the Humanities Research Institute at Brock University. I'm your host, Troy David Ouellette. The Media Art Other podcasts are intended to enhance our understanding of otherness using media art examples as a platform for expressing differences that include things like: Identity, Disability Arts, Media Art Design and Interfaces, Environmental Otherness, Indigeneity and Post Colonialism. Each Artist and Curator brings unique perspectives and scholarship to the fields of curation and media art practice. Included in the webpage will be linked to the researchers and organizations associated with the guests.

In this fifth episode, I am pleased to present Professor Sarah Cook, a curator, writer, researcher, and Professor of Museum Studies in Information Studies at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. She is editor of *24/7: A Wake-up Call For Our Non-stop World* and *INFORMATION (Documents of Contemporary Art, Whitechapel and MIT Press)*. I can say without hesitation that Professor Cook is one of the few scholars in Media Art that has devoted her entire life to its study.

Having grown up in Canada, Sarah has held a longstanding association with The Banff Center where she has worked as a guest curator and researcher in residence for the Walter Phillips Gallery. While at Banff, she also worked for the International Curatorial Institute developing exhibitions, summits, residencies, and publications and was a founding member of the Journal of Curatorial Studies advisory board. As a founder/curator of LifeSpace Science Art Research Gallery in the School of Life Sciences, University of Dundee, she curated 16 exhibitions including, newly commissioned works, from artists Mat Fleming, Heather Dewey, Andy Lomas, Daksha Patel, Helen and Kate Storey, Mary Tsang, Thomson & Craighead amongst others. Together with Beryl Graham, Sarah co-founded CRUMB, the longstanding online resource and network for curators of new media art, hosting workshops and courses worldwide. She has also worked, as an adjunct curator of new media, at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and was the inaugural curatorial fellow at Eyebeam Art and Technology Center in New York City.

In this episode, Professor Cook will speak about some of her curatorial projects and focus on the work of Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg. For those who do not know Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg's work, it's important to note that this particular artist is on the forefront of creating artistic projects that work in conjunction with artificial intelligence --- she examines subjects as wide-ranging as machine learning, synthetic and evolutionary biology and ecology. She challenges notions of progress and extends the envelope of media art beyond what we would generally associate it with ---- These include the sub-genres of: VR and Augmented Reality, Sensory Art, Robotics, Sound Art and Bio Art – just to name a few. I will provide links in the show notes so that you can do further research if needed. And now I present Professor Sarah Cook with her talk on new media curatorial practise and, more specifically, on the work of artist Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg.

In summary...

It's interesting how inventions, innovations and new technologies take on another life - in the arts than what they were intended for in the industry. I was struck by the admission by Ginsberg that "It felt important within the work to add composition and tell a story rather than exhibit just a pure AI output". As Professor Cook suggests, "This is a demonstration that the artist is playing a role, using AI as a tool, and still making a set of aesthetic choices, confirming Ginsberg's authorship of the experience of the work."...end quote. As software technology, especially over the pandemic, has come to rule our lives more and more, I am cognoscente of how AI will be able to fake almost anything regarding human vocalization. Think of Siri, Alexa *Sonos*, *AirPlay*, or *Google Assistant* smart speakers or even Otter.ai voice recognition --- as it has evolved from dictation software. As Professor Cook remarks... 'Machine Auguries' offers us a chance to understand what art can teach us about a future of AI. If at the moment we are concerned about deepfake videos, how much more complex will the world be when we also have to worry about fake sound? Ginsberg writes," deepfake sound, instead of images, added another layer of complexity; the human ear is much more sensitive to variation than the eye, so it's much easier to make a convincing fake image than a convincing fake sound."...end quote. As we develop new databases that mix and match archived content, I wonder what kind of world we will live in that captures our everyday encounters as they become more and more linked with advertising, consumerism and other sectors of political, social and cultural engagement. In the end, it seems to offer up more questions than it is able to answer.

#### Outro

Thanks for listening to this 5th episode of Media Art Other.

If you want to connect with some of the projects Professor Cook has been working on, please follow some of the show notes and links provided on the Media Art Other website. Join me next time as we investigate the work of Curator Candice Hopkins and Sound Artist Raven Chacon. I look forward to hearing them speak about some of the curatorial projects and sound-works they have been working on over the years. If you enjoyed this podcast and would like to help support the podcast, please share it with others. Until next time, stay safe.