H FOR HYBRID

By Gabriela Galati

The exhibition brings together six artists—**Camilla Alberti**, **Ivy Chilelli**, **C-LAB** (Laura Cinti & Howard Boland), **Clarissa Falco**, **Wataru Iwata**, and **Andrea Samory**—to whom the hybrid is a central concept.

The title of the show paraphrases Orson Welles' film *F for Fake* (1973), a hybrid itself, in which Welles blurs the boundaries between truth and fabrication, art and forgery, performance and identity. The film undermines traditional notions of truth, authorship, and artistic purity. Its subjects—most notably Elmyr de Hory and Clifford Irving—embody hybrid identities, existing in liminal spaces between artist and forger, truth-teller and liar. Welles himself takes on the role of narrator, magician, and trickster, adding another layer of complexity to this exploration of selfhood and storytelling.

This artistic approach mirrors the biological concept of hybridity. The Oxford Dictionary defines a hybrid as the offspring of two different species (plants, fungi, or animals), or as something that emerges from the combination of two distinct elements. The concept of the hybrid has a long history across cultures and has recently gained renewed interest, particularly within the context of posthumanist philosophy and science.

Closely related to the hybrid are reflections on the monster, as explored by Donna Haraway in *The Promises of Monsters* (1992). In this work, Haraway defines monsters as the "in/appropriate others" that inhabit what we understand as "nature," challenging conventional perceptions and encouraging a rethinking of what "nature" truly means. As early as 1985, in her seminal text *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway questions the notion of nature as a purely cultural construct. The cyborg—conceived as a cybernetic organism whose body integrates technological prostheses—was presented as both a fictional and philosophical framework for transcending dichotomies such as nature/culture and binary categorizations of gender.

In biology, the concept of *holobionts*—close associations between different organisms, typically a host and the species living within it—has garnered attention, largely due to the work of biologist Lynn Margulis (1981, revised eds, 1993 and 2000). Hybrids, like *holobionts*, challenge humanist and anthropocentric notions of the subject as an autonomous entity, separate from its environment and other beings. *Holobionts*, for example, reveal that the biome hosted within an individual profoundly influences not only physical health but also mood, perception, and even mental well-being. As Haraway remarked in 2004, "one literally thinks-with the bacteria one hosts."

Haraway is not the only one who questions ideas of purity and stable identities. Indeed, anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro critiques Western dualisms and remarks how indigenous ontologies embrace multiplicity and transformation: "The West has never really left the Great Divide behind... indigenous thought embraces transformation, perspective, and multiplicity" (2014: 63). Similarly, philosopher Jacques Derrida dismantles the myth of pure origins, arguing that meaning and identity are always contaminated by what comes after, and before. Meaning and identity are always deferred, and are always becoming (1967).

Byung-Chul Han draws on Derrida's deconstructionism and the concept of *différance* to explain the Chinese notion and practice of *shanzhai* (2011). Originally used to describe counterfeit technology, such as cell phones, *shanzhai* now applies to almost anything in China—clothing, digital devices, and even politicians. Han analyses the opposing conceptions of artwork and originality in the West and in China, demonstrating how the West's static and transcendent notions of identity and authenticity often lead to misunderstandings of the Chinese approach to copying and "forgery" (47). As Han explains, in China, a forgery—and the forger's mastery—can sometimes be valued more highly than the original. He cites Elmyr de Hory, who discusses his forgeries of Matisse in *F for Fake* (2011: 24), to illustrate this point.

Forging a painting in the style of a master involves not only imitating the style but also inserting oneself into another's "genetic" artistic lineage. It is akin to recombining artistic DNA: Elmyr's forgeries, for instance, blend elements of the original work with his own hand and intent. The resulting art is a hybrid organism—partly imitation, partly innovation, partly composed of the original's DNA and partly of the copyist's.
Han ultimately concludes the book by reflecting on how many high-tech devices are shanzhai versions of nature—a concept more familiar in the West as biomimicry. Through evolution and mutation, nature itself is a continuous process of hybridisation (60).

The artists featured in *H for Hybrid* explore, interrogate, and embody the idea of hybridity from diverse perspectives and through varied interests.

Contact:
Gabriela Galati
Co-Founder | Director

E: lab@wizardgallery.com
W: lab.wizardgallery.com
I: @wizard__lab

WIZARD LAB
Corso di Porta Ticinese, 87
20123, Milan

Inspired by the theories of different philosophers, but in particular of Donna Haraway's reflections on the monster, **Camilla Alberti** has made hybridisation not only the main subject of her works, but also her main medium. In her series *Blended Matter* (2023), she investigates sculptural organisms composed of mouldable compounds derived from urban and natural environments. Discarded objects, organic matter, and found materials are pulverised and reconstituted with handmade glues and pigments from sugar, flour, and plant extracts. Her work engages with witchcraft as a form of activism and a collaborative practice with non-human forces. Rather than imposing control, her process listens to and reacts to environmental rhythms—challenging human-centred paradigms of creation.

Ivy Chilelli's sculptures explores the intersections of posthuman, ecofeminist, and transfeminist thought, drawing from the theories of Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Anna Tsing. Her work unfolds through a sympoietic, plural, and horizontal perspective, where organic and synthetic elements merge to form hybrid, posthuman entities. By combining resin, clay, iron, and plants, Chilelli's sculptures exist in a liminal space—oscillating between human and non-human, machine and nature, artificial and animal. These emerging and otherworldly beings reflect on material symbolism in both physical and political contexts. Constantly shifting between organic and inorganic, individual and collective, they embody transformation in search of stillness.

C-LAB (**Laura Cinti** & **Howard Boland**)'s *Becoming Female* (2025) is an artistic intervention combining scientific methods and plant conservation to ask whether inducing sex change in plants could offer a future to a cycad on the edge of extinction. Focusing on the *Encephalartos woodii*, a rare cycad with no known female, surviving today as clones from a single male plant discovered in South Africa over a century ago, the work combines tissue culture, chemical augmentation with genetic tools to explore the possibility of producing a female. Alongside scientific experimentation, the artist also searches the forest for a surviving wild specimen using drones and AI, questioning what it means to 'save' a species. In this sense, C-LAB's work addresses both extinction and de-extinction.

Clarissa Falco investigates the idea of variation as essential for survival. In her *Digimon* series, she merges porcelain sculpture with the aesthetics of the cyborg that resonates with a vision of "techno-nature" in which machine and body co-evolve. These porcelain monsters are at the same time threatening, delicate, and even a bit tender. Her work echoes the autopoietic systems of nature, where the distinction between the organic and the technological blurs, generating new possibilities for being.

Wataru Iwata, (in collaboration with Nobumichi Asai, Hironobu Nakamura, and TAN JC)'s *Life Is Beautiful* is a simulation of 2D cellular automata where both visuals and music emerge from an analysis of cell activity. A cellular automaton is a discrete computational model used in mathematics, theoretical biology, and computer science to simulate complex systems or behaviours, including those found in living organisms. In *Life Is Beautiful*, the artists have programmed a system in which certain cells generously transfer energy to their neighbours, while others—dubbed "greedy"—only absorb. What kind of ecosystem arises when cells repeat patterns of giving, taking, life, and death? How does such a system form a society? A new version of *Life Is Beautiful* will be presented at *H for Hybrid*. This iteration introduces a "curiosity" algorithm, which influences the activity of the cellular automata. In simple terms, the life-energy-rich cells now impact their neighbours more actively, spreading their "give-and-take" dynamics like a contagion. Despite its simplicity, the model offers a subtle reflection on similar patterns found in human behaviour and social interaction.

Andrea Samory's 3D-printed works lure viewers into a world of strangeness. Glossy, colourful, and uncanny, his works evoke the viral: not only in the biological sense, but in the way cultural, digital, and emotional content circulates. These hybrid forms resist categorisation, embodying a sense of instability and fluid identity. Samory's work explores virality as both a force of disruption and a metaphor for interconnectedness.

In *H for Hybrid*, hybridity emerges not as a marginal or exceptional condition, but as a fundamental mode of existence—biological, cultural, technological, and philosophical. All the works in the exhibition, as well as all the artists' practices, reconsider the boundaries between self and other, original and copy, nature and artifice, proposing hybridity as a dynamic, generative principle rather than a deviation. In a moment in which entanglement and interdependence have been subjects of reflection both of science and the humanities, the hybrid becomes a vital trope for rethinking how the ideas of identity, authorship, and agency are unstable and constantly changing. Through their varied approaches, the artists in this exhibition, show that to be hybrid is not to be divided, but to be complex, interconnected, and open to transformation.

Milan, April 2025.

References:

Derrida, Jacques, 1967, Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1976, Johns Hopkins University Press, New York.
Han, Byung-Chul, 2011, Shanzhai: Deconstruction in Chinese, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA).
Haraway, Donna, 1985, A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century, in: Haraway, D.J., 2004. The Haraway reader. Routledge, New York, p.7.
Haraway, Donna, 1992, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others', pp.63-124, in: Haraway, D.J., 2004. The Haraway reader. Routledge, New York, p.64.
Haraway, Donna, 2004, The Haraway Reader. Routledge, New York.
Margulis, Lynn. Symbiosis in Cell Evolution: Microbial Evolution in the Archaean and Proterozoic Eons. 2nd ed., MIT Press, 1993, p. 18.
Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, 2014, Cannibal Metaphysics, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Contact:
Gabriela Galati
Co-Founder | Director

E: lab@wizardgallery.com
W: lab.wizardgallery.com
I: @wizard__lab

WIZARD **LAB**
Corso di Porta Ticinese, 87
20123, Milan