

ADAM BRANDEJS

Toronto, ON

Genpet™, a ‘mass produced, pre-packaged, bioengineered living pet available in seven different personality types,’ is the product of Bio-Genica: Genetic Engineering and Manufacturing, a fictitious biotech firm founded by President and CEO Adam Brandejs, a Canadian artist. Each life-like Genpet™ comes carefully wrapped as a self-contained unit. Marketed as ‘better, modified to be reliable, dependable and as efficient as any other technology we use in our busy lives,’ they can be seen as a 21st century version of the old-fashioned pet rock or the Tamagotchi (the original virtual pet released in 1996). While awaiting sales in stores, the pets are in ‘stasis mode,’ a hibernating state, supported through a fully functional built-in heart monitor, a nutrient feeding tube and a freshness gauge that displays the remaining shelf life of the pet. The electronically animated latex sculptures are supported with several elaborate marketing tools such as a website and information catalogue, although, as limited edition works of art, they are not actually for sale as mass-produced commercial products. The website and catalogue are cleverly designed to appear realistic, but they are really a parody of the potential outcome of using biotechnological advances for commercial purposes.

Says Brandejs, “I see this generation slowly and systematically being desensitized towards owning and manipulating life.”⁵⁴ Consumer demand for the Genpets™ is certainly high; with over a million hits a day on the web-

site and sales requests continuously streaming in from across the globe, the idea of presenting and marketing life as a commodity doesn’t appear to be problematic for the masses. According to Brandejs, the project is designed to get the public thinking about bioengineering and how they feel about where that science might lead us. “I am not against bioengineering, I’m simply hesitant towards where and how and by whom the technology will be used. The question surrounding bioengineering is not in its positive or negative ramifications, or where it can take us; but whether we [as a society] are responsible enough to go there.”⁵⁵ The piece is as much a statement about consumerism, corporate ethics, and the commoditization of life as it is about biotechnology.

GENPETS, 2005–6, mixed media,
dimensions variable

