ADA Artist Interview with Claudia Robles Angel
Archive of Digital Art, August 2021
Full text and interview by Rachel Müller on ADA:
https://www.digitalartarchive.at/features/featured-artists/featured-artist-claudia-robles.html

What are your current projects?
I'm currently working on two new projects, the first is a continuation/evolution of my last installation REFLEXION. This new work is inspired by the spontaneous order or synchronisation system in nature, e.g. fireflies or humans clapping together. The goal is to bring the entire group to a spontaneous synchronization that creates a connection between the performer and the audience within the immersive sound space, namely, that both the heartbeats of the performer and of the audience are influenced by each other.

The second project explores the integration of affective computing, emotional intelligence and machine learning techniques combined with biomedical signals, to create a new installation, an intelligent space that recognises visitors' emotions using AI and which reacts with visuals, sounds and text according to such emotions.

What path led you to digital art and what fascinated you about it initially?
Since the start of my career, I have been fascinated with technologies (first analogue and later digital). From the very beginning (in the 80s) I wanted to combine them with art but unfortunately at that time in the faculty of arts where I was studying, there was no department dedicated to this, for which I decided to experiment on my own, combining this experimentation with my studies in art, mostly because I was attracted by moving images, I started experimenting with 16mm film. At that time, I additionally started considering how to use personal computers to produce art works. Due to the fact, that such combination was not available in the programmes at my university I decided to come to Europe to study art in the way I desired (media art). During my studies in videoart in Switzerland, my interest in sound started, the reason why years later I came to Germany to study digital sound art and electroacoustic music.

What sparked your interest in viewing the human body as an instrument; to display and integrate into performance the usually invisible and inaudible internal movements within the human body?
My awareness about it started when I began my studies in Germany. Before that, I used to work with diverse software packages for video and sound, but only when I started code programming, I came to the realization, that I wasn't using my body for many hours... just my hands... which sparked the following question in my mind: "why not using my entire body"?
The real push then began during an interdisciplinary workshop at the Bauhaus Foundation, in which artists from many disciplines attended, and where we worked together to create performances including the opportunity to work with a German dance group who had developed an interface for dancers to measure muscle tension for interactive dance works. During that workshop I had the opportunity to test software which created interactive works. After that workshop, the next project I wanted to develop occurred to me and I immediately started seeking funding and institutions which had the technology I wanted to use. This search became an artist in residence (and funding) at ZKM (Center for Art and Media) in Karlsruhe, during which I created in 2004 the interactive performance/installation "Seed/Tree" using biomedical signals; this was the first project with which I began researching the human body as an instrument, with particular attention to those usually invisible and inaudible internal movements within the human body. This is also related to my usage

of macro lenses in video and photography in order to make visible the imperceptible, so that extending this to my usage of biomedical interfaces was a natural evolution in my creative process.

What was there first – a scientific or an artistic interest?
My main aim is and has always been artistic, even though science has always been simultaneously and constantly on my mind. For example, my final dissertation in fine arts (my first degree) was inspired by quantum physics. But my impulse to question the world and as an answer create art definitely derives from an artistic point of view.

What do you think can be gained from bridging the gap between the arts and science?
The most important from my point of view is the possibility to go beyond our own fields, in a way in which we both can gain a better and wider understanding of the world, enriching both fields.
From an artistic point of view, science offers artists through a diversity of factors (including technologies) a wide range of possibilities that cannot be achieved otherwise. Furthermore, I am convinced that digital art could not exist without science.

How does the rapid development of the interfaces employed in your artworks influence your artistic process?
Such rapid development has many consequences, and the most important ones are those, that the interfaces I currently use are not only much more affordable (pricewise), but also, can be much more easily combined with diverse software packages, allowing for much more possibilities of experimentation and development. As an example, when I introduced brainwaves in my work (2008), I had not other option but to use a medical device, which needed plenty of effort and research to interface with the programming software I used for my performance INsideOUT. About seven years later, I started using another system to read brainwaves, which was easier to obtain, easier to insert in my work, much cheaper than the first one and which allowed for the usage in installations, which the former one did not permit.
The main issue here, is that in the past, this kind of interfaces were only affordable in scientific institutions but nowadays we can obtain them commercially at affordable prices and small sizes, and we can even have them connected to our smartphones.

Most digital artworks are created collaboratively. How many people are involved in your artworks (on average), and how would you describe the artistic development of your works as a collective/individual process?

In general terms, I work alone for the entire conception of my digital artworks, whereby I also programme by myself the main algorithms of them.
Having said that, in some cases I nevertheless require the support of colleagues (technicians and/or scientists) to develop hardware for my concepts. In such cases, normally one or two people are involved. Very occasionally, I also work with other artists to make digital artworks, but the tendency is, that I work alone.

How do you archive your own works? How do you think your works should be preserved?

I'm used to have several copies in different external disks of the fixed media audiovisual compositions but in regard to interactive performances and installations, I normally make video documentations of each work and the archives contain sounds, pictures and programming for each work.
Depending on which works, for example installations, the best way in which they could be preserved is to have them permanently exhibited in museums internationally.

In the case of performances (video documentation), as well as for the fixed media works (audiovisual or acousmatic compositions), the best way to preserve them are specialised institutions. For example some of my works (audiovisual & acousmatic compositions) are archived at ICEM (Folkwang University of the Arts, Essen), at https://www.emdoku.de/en and additionally, I have a profile with pictures of my interactive works at this platform (ADA).