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## Synthetic bio–film festival announces winners

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*One of the five winning submissions to the Bio:Fiction film festival held in Vienna asks if synthetic biology could bring Bruce Willis back to his Die Hard glory days.*



Scientists and artists alike gathered this month at the Museum of Natural History in Vienna for [Bio:Fiction](#), a two-day synthetic biology science, art, and film festival. The event featured talks by synthetic biologists and artists and concluded with an award ceremony for the top submitted films in five categories: fiction, documentary, animation, jury's choice, and online audience choice.

"It was my first time in Vienna," says Tom Judd, the former graduate student at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in the UK who produced the animated film winner, [Bruce](#). "I got to meet the other guys who won. We all went for a drink afterward with Markus [Schmidt], the organizer."

*Bruce* paints an eerie but amusing scene in which a programmer connects a piece of grocery meat into a computer via a USB plug. After uploading digital information, a head and four limbs begin to emerge from the raw meat, which eventually morphs into a miniature man with a high forehead and bare feet. The little man wears a white tank top and resembles Bruce Willis from the 1988 film *Die Hard*. The programmer then uses a video game controller to navigate the mini Bruce Willis as he battles toilet-paper-roll terrorists.



Cynical but imaginative, the animation raises ethical questions about synthetic biology arising from the juxtaposition of creation and destruction depicted in the film.

Inspiration for the film came to Judd while building electronic puppets at RCA in 2008. The idea to merge puppetry with biology arose during a discussion with fellow RCA student, James Chambers, who had been working on a class project in synthetic biology. Within three months—using a Wacom brush and tablet to draw his scenes in Photoshop—Judd had created the short, punchy animation. To achieve the illusion of depth in the film, Judd used the 3-D modeling program Maya.

Other Bio:Fiction film festival winners were:

- *(In)visible* by Sonja Bäumel for best fiction
- *E-Chromi* by Daisy Ginsberg for best documentary
- *Die Schneider Krankheit* by Javier Chillon for special award of the jury, and
- *Who are the engineers of the future* by Christina Agapakis and Patrick Boyle for online audience award.

Although the festival concluded on 14 May, the Synth-ethic Art exhibition, featuring works from 10 science-inspired artists, will be on display at the museum until 26 June 2011.

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