

What would a world designed with synthetic biology look like?

In a corner of Istanbul's Design Biennial late last year, photographs of bizarre creatures sat alongside more conventional displays of product design and typefaces. Diaphanous globes, like transparent balloons, clung to the mossy trunk of an oak tree. Rust-coloured patterns ran across green leaves, as if the foliage had been decorated with henna. On the forest floor, a slug-like creature slithered, its back dotted with gold markings; in another photograph, what looked like a porcupine without a head crawled over the dirt, its quills tipped blood-red.

Not quite living things, not quite machines, these imagined prototypes inhabit a dystopic, future world – a world in which they had been created to solve the problems of the living. The porcupine, for example, is an Autonomous Seed Disperser, described as a device that would collect and disperse seeds to increase biodiversity. The slug would be programmed to seek out acidic soils and neutralize them by dispersing an alkali hygroscopic fluid.

They are the designs – and thought experiments – of London-based Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, designer, artist and lead author of the book *Synthetic Aesthetics: Investigating Synthetic Biology's Designs on Nature*. In her project *Designing for the Sixth Extinction*, Ginsberg imagines what a synthetic biology-designed world would look like – and whether it's desirable.

"A lot of the discussion in synthetic biology is, 'Oh, we can use it to save nature, we can engineer bacteria to clean up pollution,'" she says. "I wanted to design much bigger, much more visible organisms. If they're bigger, then do we feel differently about them?"

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Meet the latest phase of genetic engineering: synthetic biology](#)