

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/ Conference Title:	2018 Biodesign Challenge
Travel Dates:	18/06/2018 - 24/06/2018
Location:	NYC
Group member(s):	Laura Turpeinen, Fernanda Bolaños, Ivan Shpurov, Luis Martinez Guzman
Aims:	Participate and present as a contestant

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

On June 2018, Mycterials participated in one of the top Biodesign summits in the world – the Biodesign Challenge at MoMa, NYC. The Biodesign Challenge takes place every year, and here biologists and designers from universities all over the world come together and showcase innovative biotechnology projects. In the scorching summer heat of New York City (warm for even those unaccustomed to living in Scotland’s rainy weather), Fernanda, Ivan, Luis and I witnessed some of the upcoming trends in biodesign. We invite you to check the [Biodesign Challenge](#) web page if you’re interested to know more about this event.

Designing ecological solutions

It’s easy to feel isolated when talking to people who don’t seem as conscious about environmental issues. More than ever before, we are facing planet-wide environmental problems issues such as global warming, animal welfare and pollution. The Biodesign Challenge demonstrated that our generation is filled with driven problem solvers, who are just as concerned about these issues as much as we are! And not just that, the competing teams are creating and developing new ways to tackle a lot of these problems in ways other people haven’t even thought of before. The event lifts up the morale for environment-concerned people and inspired us to think that no idea is crazy enough to disregard as a potential sustainable project.

After all – aren’t many great ideas based on science-fiction scenarios in the first place?

Popularity of mycelium

The creativity involved in the featured biodesign projects seemed endless. It ranged from tackling plastic consumption with kombucha diapers ([Sorbit](#)) from microbes to uncover landmines ([Microbial Frontline Recovery](#)). However, one material shined distinctively over the rest, as many of the competing projects involved mycelium. Due to the material’s amendability and biodegradability, mycelium was applied in a range of creative ways, such as harvesting kinetic energy in footwear ([MyStep](#)) or a domestic farming system, which consumes plastic while producing nutrient-rich fungi ([Plastomach](#)). In fact, a mycelium based biodegradable toilet ([MYCommunity Toilet](#)) won first prize in the summit. This project is a demonstration mycelium’s versatility as real-life biomaterial. We’ll be following our fellow mycelium bio-innovators closely, with anticipation on their developments and open to possible future collaborations.

Curiosity and collaboration

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After the presentation of our project at MoMa NYC, we got a chance to present our work in a more one-to-one scenario at the Parsons School of Design. We answered a lot of questions by curious viewers and were surprised by the amount of people interested in our project and the way Mycterials could work.

We had some time at the end of the expo to talk to our colleagues about their projects and know more about their plans on taking their inventions to the hands of consumers. This open interest and collaborative mindset created a warm and unifying atmosphere, where we were not competitors at all, but like-minded students burning to solve issues larger than ourselves.

We'd like to thank organizers Alison Irvine and Veena Vijayakumar for allowing us to participate in this exciting summit. The encouraging energy of the Biodesign Challenge is sure to fuel our progress in the future.