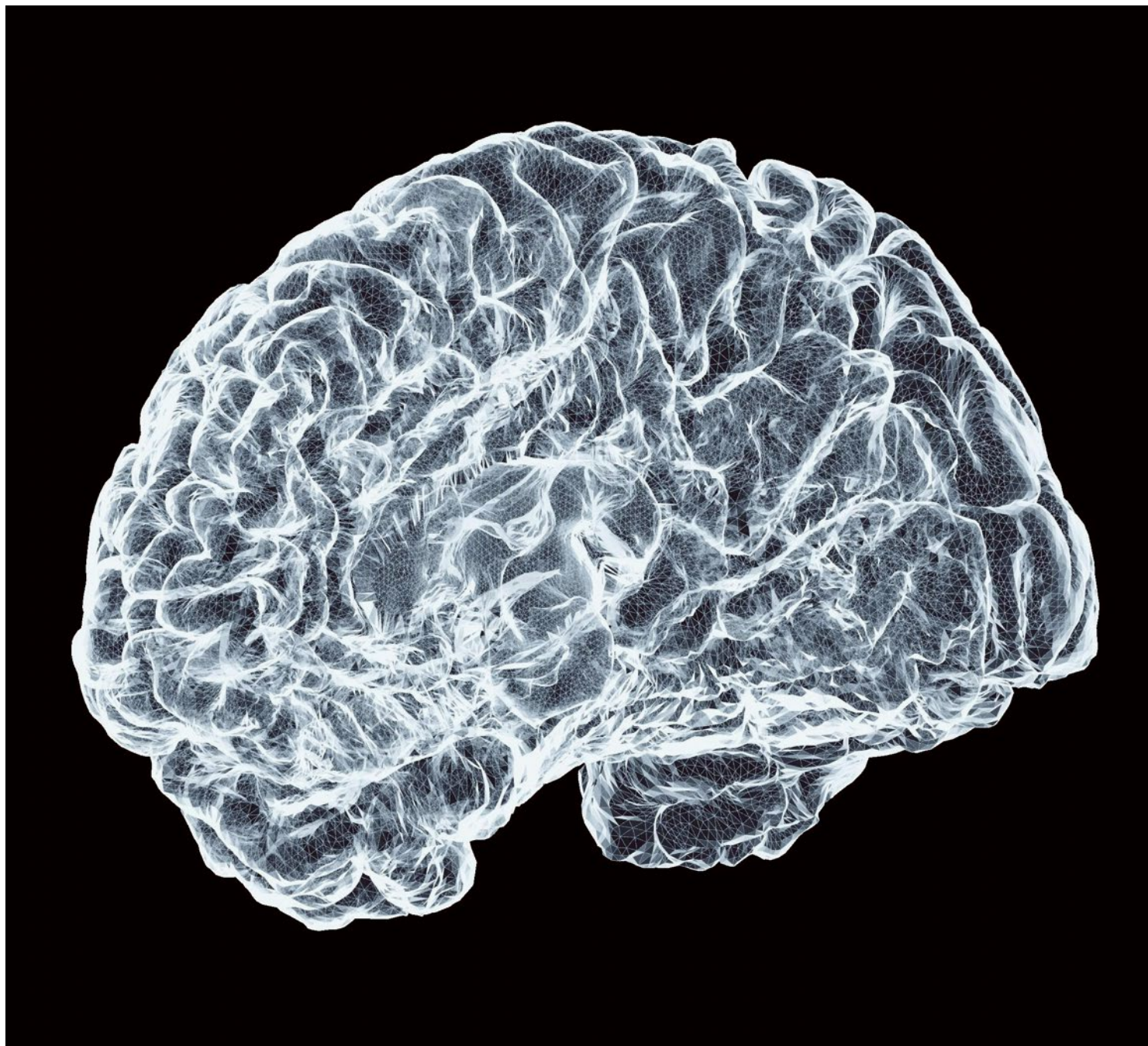


BILLIONAIRE



THE LONGEVITY ISSUE THE ART OF LIVING BETTER

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The End of Aging?

Is a life without age perhaps no longer a life at all?

by Michael Schindhelm

Everyone wants to grow old, but nobody wants to be old. The Roman philosopher Cicero observed this over 2,000 years ago. Imagine, thanks to advances in biomedicine, we could grow older almost indefinitely without being old. If we really wanted to, we could always be 25, 52 or even 14. But do we truly desire that?

Until recently, the question never arose. People inevitably met their fate, some sooner, others later. People suspected that aging and death had to do with personal genetics, with a healthy or unhealthy lifestyle, but the only certainty was that one day the end would come.

In the past few decades, biology has made enormous progress in understanding the processes of life. The National Institutes of Health now recognise 12 so-called hallmarks of aging, including genomic instability, telomere attrition and epigenetic alterations. Some scientists believe they are on the brink of discovering the secret of aging and, consequently, biological death. Some even claim to have initiated a rejuvenation process using proteins that can turn an adult cell into a stem cell in the so-called 'mouse model' — clinical studies on mice.

In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in the topic of aging. It is anticipated that the value of longevity therapies will reach over US\$40 billion in the coming years. No wonder, since it affects us all! There's a claim that the first person to live to be 150 has already been born.

This has prompted opposition within the longevity community. While some promise groundbreaking advances, figures such as Venki Ramakrishnan, Nobel Prize winner, warn against drastically underestimating the complexity of the aging process. Geneticist Linda Partridge, on the other hand, says: "Foretelling anything is difficult, in particular,

the future. But in research as rapidly developing as longevity, there is a sensation every week."

While science is required to adhere strictly to proven facts, art is allowed — and indeed must — speculate. Art can manipulate reality, addressing our emotional selves, our fears, and our hopes, while science addresses our rational selves.

Longevity provides a rich source of inspiration for artists. So, with the exhibition *The End of Aging* we have undertaken a thought experiment. What if... a 14-year-old told us in a TED Talk that she was over 100 years old and had reversed her biological clock? Could dramatic overpopulation only be stopped by banning childbearing? If fasting, abstaining from stimulants and, ideally, abstaining from all pleasure stops aging, what is left of life? Is a life without age perhaps no longer a life at all? And wouldn't we then have to introduce the right to voluntarily depart from this endless life?

Our exhibition at the Kulturstiftung Basel H Geiger guides us through the abandoned rooms of a hospital, symbolising a world where hospitals are no longer needed. In the final room of the exhibition however, we enter a recovery room and encounter researchers in video installations who provide a reality check. One of them, Matt Kaeberlein from Seattle, says: "Eat, move, sleep, connect. Once you've got that dialled in, then you can start to think about the sort of more experimental stuff."

If that's not inspiring...◇

*Author, filmmaker, and curator Michael Schindhelm is showing his film *The End of Aging* in a year-long collaboration with *The Kulturstiftung Basel H Geiger* | KBH.G from 3 May - 21 July 2024.*



Exhibition view of The End of Aging by Michael Schindhelm,
'Recovery Room', Kulturstiftung Basel H Geiger, 2024 (c)
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