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SPLIT CRYSTAL: FROM THE HUMAN MOUTH TO CRYSTALLISED RESEARCH

Spit Crystal was the result of a two month journey, commissioned by Science Gallery London, to study the potential of saliva alongside salivary researchers and crystallography experts based at King's College London. The research produced was displayed alongside a large-scale replica of the crystal grown from the artist's spit following the saline composition found in saliva. A crystal consisting of spit gathered from guests to the gallery's 'ground-breaking' event was also created using the same processes.



Visitors viewing Inés Cámara Leret 'Spit Crystal' during a pop event

WHO?

- ▶ Artist, Inés Cámara Leret
- ▶ Mucosal Salivary Research Group
- ▶ Brian Sutton, Professor of Molecular Biophysics and Head of Structural Biology
- ▶ King's College London
- ▶ Science Gallery London

WHAT?

A healthy individual produces between 0.75 and 1.5 litres of saliva a day, and, while 99.5% of this clear and odourless fluid is water, the remaining 0.5% provides an incredible insight into who we are, by providing a complex, biological fingerprint of ourselves.

Taking place over the pop-up season MOUTHY at Science Gallery London, Inés Cámara Leret grew the first ever crystal from human saliva. She worked with salivary researchers and expert crystallographers based at King's College London, in order to construct this perfectly ordered saliva crystal. It was the first time crystallographers at King's had collaborated with mucosal researchers, and the collaboration has since led to the development of a new research proposal.

In addition to this research collaboration, there was an added public engagement strand to the Spit Crystal piece too. Despite it nowadays being regarded as vulgar, spitting has traditionally been regarded as a symbolic act to wish a new venture good luck or success. Stemming from this, Science Gallery London and Inés Cámara Leret invited guest to donate spit samples during their 'ground-breaking' event, which officially marked the start of building the gallery at Boland House. The spit samples were collated and made into a collective crystal, which was then later displayed in the MOUTHY pop up season.

WHAT THEY SAID?

"I like to adopt the role of an alchemist and take viewers on a journey to question the relationship between cause and effect."

- Inés Cámara Leret

WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS AND IMPACTS?

- ▶ Interdisciplinary collaboration
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Inspiring creativity
- ▶ Public Engagement



The process of how a human Spit Crystal is made laid out



Part of a Spit Crystal on a loop

LINKS

Learn more about Inés Cámara Leret work at:

<http://www.inescamaraleret.com/spitcrystals.html>

Learn more about the Mucosal Salivary Research Group at:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research-groups/mucosal-and-salivary-biology.aspx>

Learn more about Molecular Biophysics Department at King's here:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lsm/research/divisions/randall/index.aspx>

Sources: Science Gallery London website and documentation

Complied by: Ciara O'Flynn, Science Gallery International in 2019

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