

ON·VERGE

alternative art criticism

#SMARTART

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What is #smartart? I ask this question with candor and without preconception. Yet I would like to start off with a hypothesis: A work of art does not come into existence by accident—the intention of a singular artist—but is a machine and product of a larger society. Art does work, and because it does work, we do not need to obsess over an individual artist's intention. This idea is clearly inherited from Wimsatt and Beardsley's ideas about poetry, where they argue that an author's intention is neither available or a desire object of critical inquire. We will start with this hypothesis in beginning to define #smartart.



Hans-Christian Lotz, *Die Hanfreibe der Oberen Mühle in Steinach im Freilichtmuseum Vogtsbauernhof Gutach 2014 (The Hemp Press of the Upper Mill in Steinach at the Open Air Museum Vogtsbauernhof in Gutach 2014)*, 2015, Aluminium, record 16 STA module, Glass, Steel, Silicone caulk, mixed media, 119 x 142 x 9 inches, Courtesy of David Lewis Gallery

On view at David Lewis Gallery, Hans-Christian Lotz's *Rain Over Water* (2015) is a good example. The work consists of eight rectangular solar panels with pig-brain vacuum packed to cells. The occasional flare of insect appendages sets off the archipelago of grey matter. Clearly, this is #smartart. It is not because the work uses chunks of nervous tissue from one of most intelligent domesticated animals that had cohabitated with humans for more than five thousand years; nor because it calls upon the photovoltaic modules evoking question about the energy politics and impending environmental disaster. Rather, the synthesis of these elements begins the debate about #smartart.

At The Kitchen, Anicka Yi's solo-exhibition *You Can Call Me F* (2015) raises a similar set of questions. Collecting biological samples from one hundred women, Yi worked with synthetic biologist Tal Danino to create a petri dish billboard exclaiming the name of the show. Like the Lotz, the piece is a breeding ground for collaboration. It foregrounds the more than 102 contributors to the site. More so, it engages with societal fears about contagions and disease, so extensively emphasized by both entertainment and news media, in particular in their association with the female biology, and its purported mystery. The intelligence of Yi's piece is that it continues to grow after her, literally, new plumes and nodes of the bacterial structure will emerge throughout the life of the work.



Hans-Christian Lotz, *Rain Over Water* (Installation view), 2015, Pig brains, RFID-tag, each panel 5'4" x 3'2" x 0'1" inches, Courtesy of David Lewis Gallery

What is to be said about #smartart that employs innovative materials, exceed and betray generic expectations, even outgrows its creator? These are works that expand and blur the lines between art and science, biology, climatology. These works go outside themselves and the artists, to engage with society's mechanics. Their meaning is not limited to their own materiality. They infect minds and galvanize artistic clichés. They are situational, not insofar as they are products of a maker or their environment, but that they effect, shift, alter their conditions. They are abstract, intentional, bio-electro-chemical. #smartart will continue to invade, electrify and gain potency, extinguishing effete and antiquated artistic forms.