

# artnet

## *Why Is This Artist Growing Metal in a Box?*

*Agnieszka Kurant makes left-brain art for right-brain people (and vice versa).*

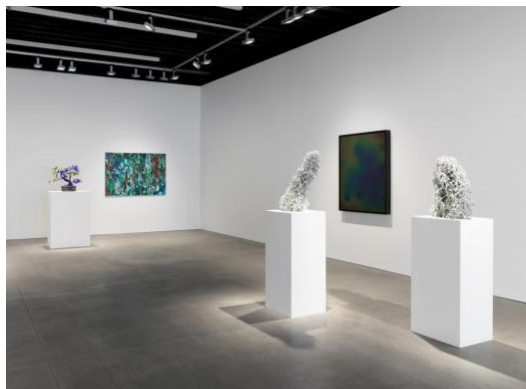
by Ben Davis (August 16, 2025)



Agnieszka Kurant, *Chemical Garden* (2021/2025). Photo by Ben Davis.

Is there a name for art where the vibe is “poetic science project?” I don’t think there is, exactly, even though it seems like one of the major modes of making art recently. Agnieszka Kurant is a leading light of this nameless genre of contemporary art, and “Collective Intelligence” at Marian Goodman is her first solo show in New York in more than a decade.

Here, you get a peek into what she has been up to. That includes zinc sculptures cast from termite mounds; a bonsai tree Kurant is growing to entwine with a 3D model representing the best scientific guess about how a more-evolved bonsai tree will look in the future; and a liquid-crystal painting that blooms with abstract spots of color in response to social media trends—essentially a mood ring for society.



Installation view of “Agnieszka Kurant: Collective Intelligence” 2025. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery.

It's an eclectic group of stuff. What holds it together is a way of thinking, not a visual style—or rather, in her best works, two ways of thinking are held in balance. The fascination of the “science-y” experimental processes behind the works is part of their interest (they benefit from explanation). But they aren't really attempts to explain or illustrate anything. Their focus is on the poetic ideas or formal energies that emerge from exploring these processes as art, almost as a byproduct.

For my tastes, the most successful work in “Collective Intelligence” is *Chemical Garden* (2021/2025). It's a sealed Plexiglas cube on a plinth, full of murky liquid and strange metallic growths. It makes your skin crawl, with its toothpaste-and-rust colors. What is going on here is that Kurant has put metal salts into a solution. Over time, these are crystalizing on the sides of the box, forming a living underwater “garden” of different metal blooms. This replicates a natural phenomena: the formation of metal deposits on the ocean floor (“polymetallic nodules”), which takes millions of years.



Detail of Agnieszka Kurant, *Chemical Garden* (2021/2025). Photo by Ben Davis.

*Chemical Garden* is intriguing but a little gross-looking. It's pretty-ugly post-conceptualism. It is also both a window into a chemical process and a (literally) elemental symbol that accretes associations, much the way those metal forms build up. You think of e-waste, deep sea mining, and post-industrial ruin, but then also the apocalyptic Surreal abstract landscapes of Yves Tanguy, or the conceptual Minimalism of Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963–67), or some caged alien virus out of a movie... and so on. It may be one of my new favorite cube-based artworks.

*More photos from “Collective Intelligence,” below:*



Agnieszka Kurant, *Semiotic Life* (2022/2025). Photo by Ben Davis.



Works from Agnieszka Kurant's "A.A.I. (Systems Negative)" series (2016–present). Photo by Ben Davis.



Agnieszka Kurant, *Post-Fordite 7* (2022). Photo by Ben Davis.



Agnieszka Kurant, *Air Rights 7* (2021). Photo by Ben Davis.