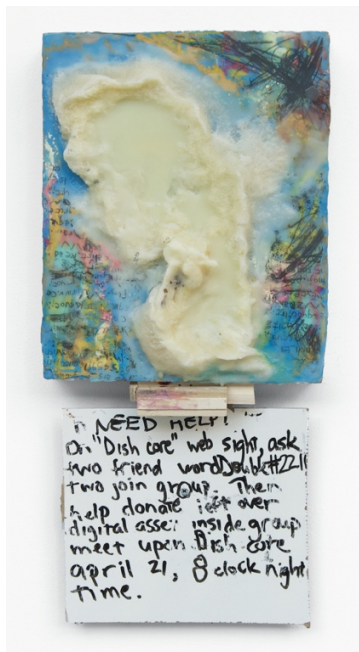


Lakin, Max. "Review : Greg Smith," *ARTFORUM*, Summer 2022.

ARTFORUM



Greg Smith, *dish core invite*, 2022, wool fiber, encaustic, wood, hardware, latex paint, dry-erase board, 19 1/2 x 9 x 3".

Greg Smith

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

Nothing in Greg Smith's exhibition here was particularly pleasant to look at, which he probably wouldn't be too wounded to hear. Encaustic-caked assemblages were gouged with runic marks and bolted to the wall with bits of wood, piled with pairs of fabric-stuffed nylons (calling to mind horrible camp sausages or lengths of intestine), or simply pressed with so much wax that it looked like lard was mashed into the works' surfaces. Flotillas of jetsam comprised the derelict little raft sculptures on the floor; the largest of them was outfitted with a motorized armature that whipped a screen door around with a desultory thwacking sound. Indeed, Smith's impressively messy tapestries of scrap clothing colonized a lot of the space; buried inside these pieces were snippets of language, though most of it was unintelligible. Everything was mesmerically repulsive (and possibly unwashed), chaotic in a way that had to make you laugh.

All of this was in service of Smith's critique of the cryptocurrency/Web3/NFT set, whose utopian promise of decentralized governance, dorm-room anarcho-capitalism, and a more equitable art world (if you accept that such a dream ever existed in the first place) has by now devolved into a rat's nest of wealth extraction, metastatic capitalism, and barely veiled pyramid schemes. Since 2020, when NFTs made their rude debut, they've been a source of sluice-box speculation and repulsive cartoon art, their depressing vulgarity excused by evangelists as a necessary step toward a more just, verdant future. Meanwhile, their creation necessitates the deployment of ghastly server farms, which produce the carbon equivalent of a battalion of running semitrailers—NFT proponents like to say this absurd energy consumption is nothing compared to the sins of the traditional art world, the validity of which is immaterial, because there's nothing redemptive about NFT art. The promise of Web3 looks a lot like a Hollywood Western production, the propped-up saloon facades giving way to a hollow core and a lot of melodrama.

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Smith took as his governing thesis here the BIP39 protocol, a mnemonic device that strings together a twelve-word phrase from a 2,048-word vocabulary as a pass code to one's digital crypto-wallet—which is effectively a load of drivel, and what trying to explain any of this sounds like, too. Smith's sculptural crazy quilt of wood, paint, hardware, textiles, and other materials *Chronic Divorce: Month Upon Month Among Time Scale Multiply When Never Under Stand What End Appear Like* (all works 2022), is a bad dream of crypto-discourse. The work features the titular gnomic phrase haphazardly painted on a tarp-like length of stitched-together fabric. Several other artworks served to form a calendar, but because BIP39 lops off the words for six months of the Gregorian version, some are identified by pidgin phrases that read as either concrete poetry or the ravings of a madman, such as MONTH UPON SYMBOL USED TWO WRITE LIST THAT ENABLE YOU TWO ESCAPE END. These experiments were droll but soon turned dire: Excised pages of writings by Umberto Eco, Carl Sagan, and Susan Sontag were rendered meaningless, their text corrupted by an invention meant to secure financial assets.

Smith's chaotic, makeshift-looking constructions knock against the popular image of tech-optimized sheen and the slick confidence of blockchain jockeys, effectively materializing the latter's sloppy logic (to be fair, Smith's work has always looked like this, but here his aesthetic found new purchase). In its disorienting muchness, the show offered a vision of a postlapsarian world in which language has not so much broken down as been willfully discarded, its degradation a marker of pride among a cohort of finance captains who think they've unlocked some essential truth but are mostly just trying to fleece one another. The dream was perverted, like most everything else, by money. This is really nightmare stuff, but as Smith inferred here, it stands to get worse.

— *Max Lakin*