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BRAD FORD SMITH

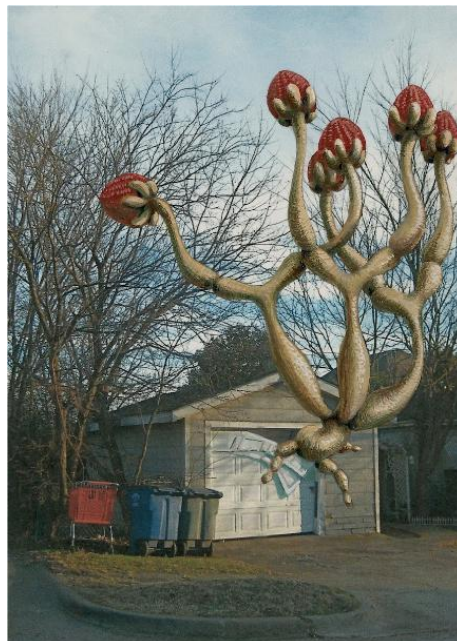
at RO2ART
by Todd Camplin

When visiting an art gallery, you don't expect to see an exhibition of scientific research. But, RO2 Gallery has a kind of science fair booth display featuring the research findings of artist/scientist Brad Ford Smith.



Spore Sprouting Test
Presented by the Nomadic Fungi Institute

Anyone fortunate enough to go to the opening got to play along with Smith's performance as a scientist. His show titled The Nomadic Fungi Institute: Spore Sprouting Test was set up like a science fair booth, with explanations, experiments, and his results were on display. Smith has been inspired by the Cordyceps, which is a genus of ascomycete fungi. This type of fungi will infect and grow inside an insect. Then the fungi will burst out of the insect and grow long stems to release spores that will infect more insects. In some cases, the fungi will even control the insect's action in order to get the maximum spore distribution.



Nomadic Fungus Document: Ever Vibrant Corporation, 2016
Gouache on ink jet print. 10 x 8 in



Once you begin to read his material on the recorded sightings, photographic evidence, and shady research done by a defunct science lab; a kind of conspiracy theory narrative begins to form. Smith plays with this false conspiracy by saying that The Institute's research is not officially recognized by the government. Smith and his Institute of Crytomycologists could have been on an episode of X-Files. I am surprised that men in black suits didn't come into the show and confiscate the research. Who knows, maybe they will when the show closes. The humor of this work runs through every aspect of the show. From the acting to the objects, I couldn't help but laugh with joy and excitement looking at each little car with fungus like structures made with wire, thread, and fuzzy bits. To further illustrate the pseudoscience look, many of his experiments are in random shaped jars. A show with no university scientific standard equipment, but rather that middle school science fair look. The humor of the show is tempered by his subversive message that these fungi are really mutations caused by misuse of chemicals. Smith isn't pointing directly at a company or individuals, but rather a broad message of warning, similar to the way many science fiction novels might tackle a topic.



Untitled (Cars in Jars), 2015-2016
Diecast cars, recycled jars, hand woven wire, paper mache, lacquer

What is exciting about the show is the work "test," because much of the works look like sketches or models for much larger pieces that could populate the landscape. I began to imagine cars in places all over the country with huge fungi sprouting out of them. It would be gorgeous.



NFI Lab Sample: High Octane,
Die cast car, hand woven wire, paper mache, lacquer, paper

Brad Ford Smith hasn't come to this experiment for fungus shaped objects out of the blue. He has been making organically shaped sculptures since the early aughts. His Cat Food Garden series, Pocket Candies series, and Servings series all invoke this look of an object naturally grown. Much of his drawings also reflect his obsession with the organic form. Smith may use humor to get his point across, but his more serious undercurrents breathed life into this series of work.

Brad Ford Smith will be showing at RO2 through July 23rd.



