

Emily Watlington, "The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century," *ARTnews*, March 5, 2025

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The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century



BY The Editors of ARTnews, Art in America
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A global recession, a pandemic, 9/11, the Arab Spring, Brexit, the rise of Web 2.0, unrest in the face of economic stability, wars in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere: these were but a few of the many events that have defined the past 25 years, a period characterized by tumult and uncertainty. That all may explain why art appeared to change faster than ever all the while, with artists burning through styles and tendencies with each coming year.

With the 21st century now at the quarter point, we've taken the opportunity to pinpoint the **greatest artworks** of the past 25 years. For ourselves, it was no small task—one made more difficult by the restless creativity of artists during this period.

The joy of an epic list like this one is that it can't encapsulate everything: we know we've left some artworks off, simply because there was no shortage to choose from. We hope you'll discover some amazing pieces here, reflect on some the merits of others. And moreover, we hope to learn of new artworks through the conversations we hope our list inspires.

Below, a look back at the greatest 100 artworks of the 21st century so far, as selected by the editors of ARTnews and Art in America.

21 Anicka Yi, *You Can Call Me F*, 2015



Anicka Yi: *You Can Call Me F*, 2015.

Photo : Photo Jason Mandella/Courtesy the Kitchen/©Anicka Yi/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

For her breakout show at the Kitchen in New York, Yi swabbed DNA from 100 women in the art world and mixed all the samples together. Working with synthetic biologist Tal Danino, Yi installed the bacteria in a glass vitrine, where it bloomed to spell out the titular phrase. The show ushered in a whole new generation of bio art, work that involves using living material as a medium. But unlike the bio art of yore, exemplified by Eduardo Kac's glowing green bunny, this new wave drew less from synthetic biology and resisted dominating nature. Rather, the bio art Yi heralded reveals and reveres the dense networks of organisms that we depend on to survive. *You Can Call Me F* melds this idea with a feminist critique of the lone genius, highlighting the support network behind the artist. —E.W.