

preceded and followed. On paper, simple forms—circles, rectangles, and triangles—that bend according to human effort are like words that have lost their gravity yet have not ceased being elements of a unitary vision. Drawings, sculptures, and selections from the artist's writings displayed on the gallery walls were thus able to construct a space that enveloped the viewer within an environment of lyrical abstraction that tended to indicate the degree to which the relationship between sculpture and painting was a natural condition in the development of Smith's artistic practice.

As the title suggested, the exhibition granted a commensurate role to color, and in particular to the act of applying it with an industrial tool such as the spray can. Thus the floating forms that Smith welds to the page in spray paint absorb the same characteristics that the artist associated with metal—strength, structure, movement, progress, suspension, destruction, and brutality. In this way, Smith marked the passage of one material state to another within a single creative way of thinking, confirming once again Rosalind Krauss's interpretation of Smith's work as a crucial "passage" in the history of modern sculpture.

—Paola Nicolin

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

## Vanessa Billy

BOLTELANG

In this age of technology, materials have become a major concern in contemporary sculpture, with artists showing keen interest not so much in their intrinsic properties as in the meditative observation of their *behavior*. Rather than being manipulated and transformed according to someone's aesthetic decision, materials *perform*; they take on a role that turns out to be just as active as that of the artist, or even more so. Formerly a *maker*, the artist is relegated to a more contemplative—and often perplexed—position. Sculpture is the vessel of a force, the container of a drive that conveys endless expectation. Vanessa Billy's work epitomizes this trend: She sets a stage where matter is put into motion.

In a show in Brussels last year, Billy hung two car engines from the ceiling (*The Living and the Dead I and II*, 2015). Despite the mechanical nature of these objects, a sense of organic liveliness prevailed across the space, suggesting the presence of some amphibian entity. This evocation should not be taken lightly, as the coalescence of multiple opposing formal possibilities lies at the heart of Billy's practice. Matter, in fact, be it natural or constructed—from flower petals, small volcanic rocks, or seaweed to a modem, as in the artist's solo show in Zurich in 2013—is inextricably subjected to a process of transmission whose origins are difficult to trace, as if, in Clarice Lispector's words, the universe had no beginning.

Billy's work evolves out of a game of reminiscences—echoing her own previous pieces, which will surely prefigure others to come. In her recent show "all is porous," a similar automobile engine lay on the floor covered by a transparent silicone sheet; its ironic title is *Monument* (all works 2016). The lumpy membrane seemed to wrap the engine like a second skin, but instead of protecting it from the outside, the sheet connected the engine with the organic atmosphere of the gallery and, thus, with us. Rather than presenting a tension or friction between the organic and the constructed, or between the human and the machine, this piece offers something more like a mutual awareness, an acquaintance between solid and ductile forms, an intimacy between immediate actions and the probable effects of those actions—affinities of all sorts occurring in a climate of empathy.

This show featured a particularly beautiful group of works in the last space of the gallery, where five pairs of objects on the floor, from



Vanessa Billy,  
*Monument*, 2016,  
car engine, food-  
grade silicone,  
51 ¼ × 47 ¼ × 27 ½".

the series "Refresh, Refresh," 2013–16, consisted of casts of what seemed to be lemon halves, some apparently untouched and some squeezed, made from various materials ranging from hard bronze to bio-resin. In her previous exhibition here, Billy showed the first work in the series, made of aluminum and mounted on a wall. A comparison of Billy's various versions of this motif suggests that her sculptural interests are ultimately focused on what might be called epidermic concerns—that is, on the study of the possible crusts and surfaces of matter. Surface has also reflected a telluric dimension throughout her career. In a recurrent move, the energies channeled below the earth, the data or the electricity conducted through cables and wires, for instance, are either metaphorically or literally made visible. In *Surge*, electrical cables hanging down from the ceiling resemble an uprooted tree with exposed copper wiring as its roots. Like all of Billy's works, it evokes life's basic functions through materials that have an existence of their own.

—Javier Hontoria

## ZUOZ, SWITZERLAND

### Bethan Huws

GALERIE TSCHUDI

"If I were a frog I'd live in a fountain": The very title of Bethan Huws's recent exhibition told a little story. But this was no fairy tale—the idea of a frog who is really an enchanted prince waiting to be transformed by a kiss holds no interest for her. If she were a frog (or a Frenchman?) she'd be wide-awake and sitting precisely where Marcel Duchamp began his role-playing game with the readymade—namely, in the "fountain."

In 2007, Huws made a neon work bearing the words AU FOND DU CERVEAU IL Y A UNE FONTAINE. In 2009, he made a version featuring the English translation—AT THE BASE OF THE BRAIN THERE IS A FOUNTAIN. For Huws, in other words, a fountain doesn't only stand for the readymade. Here it is also a concept from which new visual and linguistic objectifications are constantly emerging. It can refer to "origin," to an absolute and unconditioned beginning, and it can also cover "source," an inexhaustible, constantly bubbling spring. "Fountain," 2001–11, is a series of large-format photographs, nine of which were in this show. Set on blocks of wood and leaned against the wall, each depicts one of Rome's many elaborate fountains. In a text work, *Origin and Source*, 1993–95, Huws compiled a vast compendium of notes on precisely the distinction between these two titular concepts. In so doing, she revealed the complex ways in which her art moves between originality and a