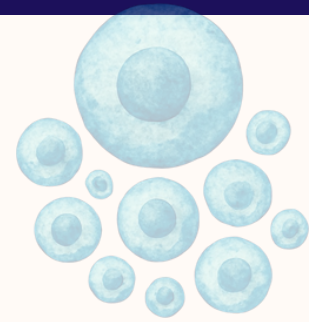


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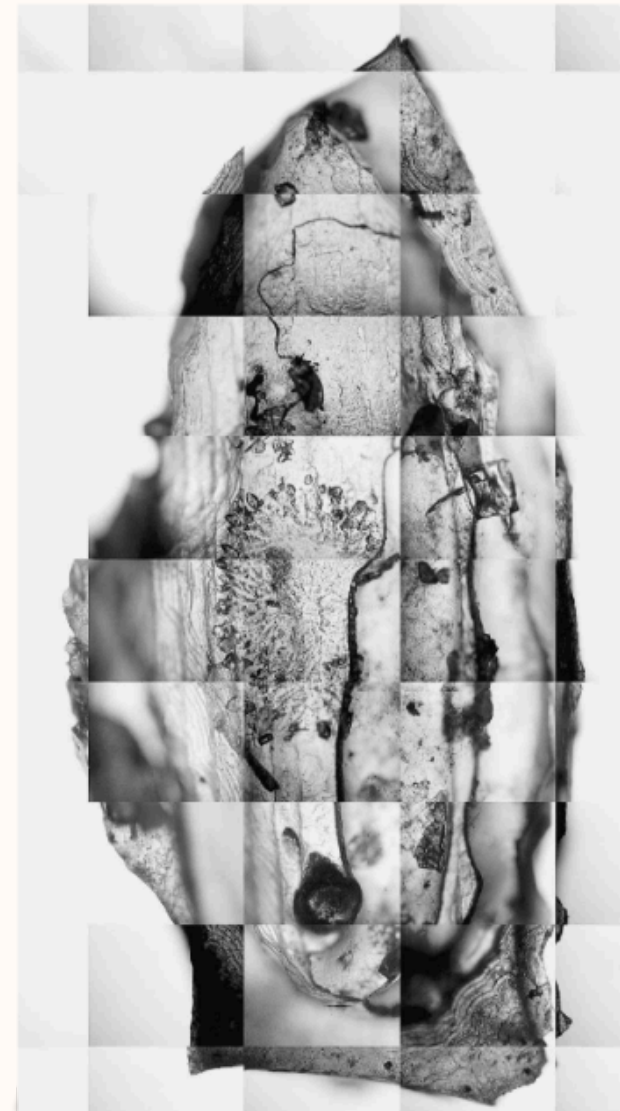
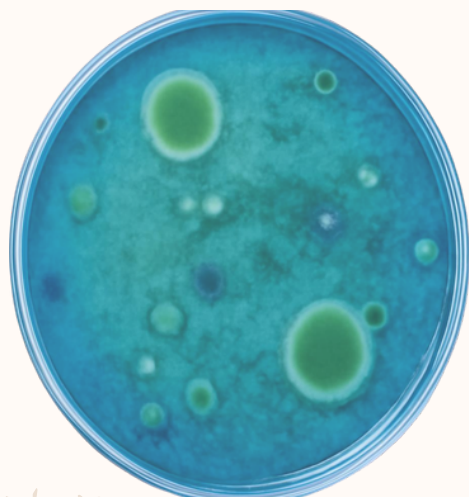
Exploring the dialogue between psychology, neuroscience, and the human experience



Can Living Cells Become Art?

BioArt, perception, and the human brain

In this issue of *Cortex & Culture*, we look at bioart: artwork created with living cells, tissues, and biological materials. Through projects like the Semi-Living Worry Dolls by Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr. At the center of it all is the brain: the organ that helps us see, remember, feel, and decide what living matter means when it becomes art.



. Spear 1, digital montage, 70 3 130 cm, 1999. (© Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr and Guy Ben-Ary. Photo © Ionat Zurr.) Muscle tissue from mice was grown over a hydrogel replica of a neolithic stone tool c. 10,000 years BP. The image was acquired using an inverted microscope and an X/Y motorized stage. Each square represents a frame from a microscope.

When people say, “It’s an art, not a science,” they usually mean that art and science belong to separate worlds. Art is seen as emotional, creative, and subjective. Science is treated as logical, measurable, and evidence-based. But neuroscience makes that divide harder to defend.

The brain is both the organ that studies the world and the organ that experiences beauty, memory, and emotion. When we look at art, we are not just passively seeing an image. Our brains are choosing what to notice, comparing what we see to past experiences, attaching emotional meaning, and using context to decide what the object means. That is where bioart becomes especially interesting.

Bioart uses living systems, cells, tissues, and biological materials as part of the artwork itself. One example is The Tissue Culture & Art Project, created by artists Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr. Their work includes “semi-living” sculptures made through tissue-engineering methods, such as growing living cells on artificial structures in controlled laboratory conditions.

One of their most striking projects is the Semi-Living Worry Dolls. Inspired by the Guatemalan tradition of whispering worries to small dolls, these figures were grown using skin, muscle, and bone cells. Instead of simply representing life, the dolls were partly made from living biological material.

That changes the way viewers respond.

The dolls are memorable not only because of how they look, but because they combine something familiar and emotional with something scientific and unsettling. A small object meant to hold worry becomes a living artwork shaped by human hands.

This connects to neuroaesthetics, a field that studies how the brain and body respond to art, beauty, and sensory experience. From this perspective, art is not just decoration. It is something the brain interprets through attention, memory, emotion, and meaning. So maybe art and science are not opposites after all. Art can make science feel visible and human. Science can help explain why certain images stay with us. And the brain sits at the center of both.