

Shinique Smith: STARGAZERS

Presenting a new body of work created during the past several years, *Shinique Smith: STARGAZERS* highlights the breadth of the artist's practice, focusing on her studies in spirituality and spiritual identity; geometry, the cosmos and cosmic patterns; and the role of clothing and cloth in personal freedom and identity. The exhibition includes paintings, drawings, sculpture, photography, installation, and a new video work *Breathing Room: Moon' Marked Journey*. The exhibition also includes a wall drawing with body prints created by the artist on-site, as well as a new fabric drapery installation in the Galamba Lobby.

Through her large-scale calligraphic paintings, bundled anthropomorphic sculptures, and smaller-scale, more intimate works, Smith weaves a story of marks, words, and colors into a twisting, moving timeline. Exploring ideas of transformation and ritual through materials and concepts such as fabric, clothing, personal belongings, breath, bundling, collage and gesture, Smith has built a complex visual vocabulary that resonates on intimate and social scales. The exhibition features a series of works the artist made during quarantine, as well as some paintings created while blindfolded during the George Floyd Protests which called for justice across the United States in May of 2020. Through these works, the artist sought feelings of solace and reverence for life, as she channeled the multitude of emotions that welled during the tumult of that year, and that time. The work is layered, colorful and vivid, even riotous in its palette. Other paintings utilize collage, working fabric into the abstractions. Her large-scale sculptures are both brutal and delicate constructions of bundled and tied clothing and cloth; the ritual of making them imbues her work with totem-like significance and even bodily presence. Cyanotype tapestries also center the story of the body in fabric; the artist's shadow appears in the work.

Smith's work will be familiar to greater Kansas City audiences because it has been included in local art exhibitions *Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today* (2017), Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, and *30 Americans*, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (2019).

Breathing Room: Moon' Marked Journey

This new, evolved version of Breathing Room is about indigo, blue, the body, my body as a Black woman, and the effect that the blue can have on the body, on memory, and spirit. The film recognizes the amazing blue in every piece of life and the indomitable spirit of Black women. It brings together a sensual experience of fabric, color, breath, light, memory, movement, textiles, sound, and sculpture. --Shinique Smith

Breathing Room: Moon' Marked Journey takes viewers on a metaphysical voyage through breath, indigo, and the color blue. Shinique Smith traces the underpinnings of this film to her earlier piece *Bundle Me*, 2003, in which she wrapped herself into a sculpture on video. Another precedent was her 2009 installation, *Twilight's Compendium*, which she composed with calligraphy and Prussian Blue body prints - paintings created by using the body and a painting tool, applying pigment directly to the wall or surface using her own body. Smith first performed *Breathing Room* at Open Spaces Kansas City in 2018, followed by a presentation at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 2020, each time the work is evolved into its own iteration.

The film is written, directed, and produced by Smith and features a cast of talented creators and yogis. The vocalist Georgia Anne Muldrow performs improvised vocals within the *Breathing Room* ceremonial performance of cloth and breath. Throughout the film, body wrapping is performed by dancer Jessica Emmanuel and breathwork performed by yoga practitioner Sana Malik. The film links together imagery and locations that reference Smith's adoration of indigo blue and how the color has manifested in her artworks over the last twenty years.

NOTE: Indigo refers to both a large family of deciduous shrubs that thrive in tropical settings, as well as the dye extracted from the leaves. Around the world this dye has been used to color everything from the robes of royalty to worker's clothing. The most familiar use of indigo dye was to lend denim its characteristic blue color—hence the term “blue jeans.” Historically, indigo was considered in many cultures to represent the path to the infinite and bring one closer to the sky. Indigo was a significant cash crop alongside cotton during the slave trade and used as currency. According to Smith's research, “The painful truth is realizing that hundreds of thousands of individual African lives were each traded for 2-3 measures of this beautiful blue cloth.”

Artist Biography

Shinique Smith was born in Baltimore, Maryland and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. Her multidisciplinary practice includes painting, sculpture, video, photography, installation, and performance.

Smith's work has been included in exhibitions and collections of many prestigious institutions, including the Baltimore Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Denver Art Museum, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Whitney Museum of American Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, MOCA North Miami, National Portrait Gallery – Smithsonian Institution, New Museum, The Frist Center for the Visual Arts, and Deutsche Guggenheim. Her works were featured in the 10th Busan Biennale in Korea, the 12th Bienal de Cuenca in Ecuador, the 9th Istanbul Biennial, and Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt.

In addition to exhibiting internationally, Smith has produced large-scale public art commissions for New York MTA Arts in Transit, The Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston, UCSF Medical Center in San Francisco, Mural Arts in Philadelphia, Los Angeles County Metro Arts, The Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, and Chicago Transit Authority.

Smith has received numerous awards and fellowships from Anonymous Was a Woman, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, the Joan Mitchell Foundation, and others. The artist earned her BFA (1992) and her MFA (2003) from Maryland Institute College of Art, which awarded her the Alumni Medal of Honor (2012) and for whom she served on the Board of Trustees (2013-2016). In addition, Smith earned an MAT (2000) from Museum School and Tufts University.