

Michael E. Smith

1 October – 14 December 2019

Vyner Street, E2

Private view: Monday 30 September, 6-8pm

Modern Art is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new work by Michael E. Smith at its Vyner Street gallery. This is Smith's first solo exhibition with Modern Art.

Michael E. Smith's sculptures are made out of objects combed from the by-products of today's world. Sometimes these are nondescript things, for instance, a black sweatshirt and a fog machine, or a rusty bicycle frame and a used water pitcher. They appear as articles of disuse, retrieved from a wasteland. Other times, death itself is present in Smith's work, such as dried bones of animals, or taxidermy. Combined and arranged, Smith's sculptures become orators in a language that is difficult to pin to words. They operate instead through affective and lyrical registers, suggestive of political and social experiences that may be shared - ecological crisis, capitalist consumption and waste - as well as those that are not always shared – such as violence, death and social injustice.

Smith's approach to exhibition making is characterised by a chilling and powerful sparseness. Space, lighting and atmosphere are as important to the experience as the few, highly-charged artworks, making the exhibition site a virtual extension of the work itself. In the ground floor gallery of his exhibition at Modern Art, the intentionally dim lit gallery is empty save for two aged kayaks upturned on the floor of the gallery. With their once white underbellies exposed, they appear like bloated sea creatures, washed up on some shore. Hidden within each of these vessels Smith has installed a theremin - an electronic musical instrument controlled by two hands but without physical contact, which emits eerie sounds through an amplifier. When played in the gallery Smith's theremin's have a mournful pitch, and echo through the space like the melancholic soundtrack of a seance for whales.

Smith's work is often contextualised in reference to an economically depressed urban landscape. But his work is not allegorical, nor illustrative. Indeed, the qualities of poverty and vacancy with which his exhibitions are imbued recall such conditions, yet these attributes of Smith's work are as much in dialogue with the lineage of minimalism and conceptualism of the USA's 1960s and '70s. Educated at Yale in the class of Jessica Stockholder, Smith's work is at the same time a descendent of the sculptural approaches of appropriation and assemblage, as it is acutely sensitive to the semantic specificity of things: attending both to the affective potential of materiality and to the social value of objects – not as commodities, but as carriers of histories, as a means of communication.

Michael E. Smith was born in 1977 in Detroit, Michigan, and lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including Kunsthalle Basel (2018); SMAK, Ghent (2017); Kunstverein Hannover, (2015); De Appel, Amsterdam (2015); Sculpture Center, New York (2015); La Triennale di Milano, Milan (2014); Power Station, Dallas (2014); CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, (2013) and Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis (2011). Smith's work has been included in group exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2017); David Roberts Art Foundation, London (2015); MoMA PS1, New York (2014); Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2014); and MOCA Cleveland, Cleveland, (2013). He participated in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, Venice Biennale 2019, the 2018 Baltic Triennial and the 2012 Whitney Biennial.

For more information please contact Alexander Glover: alexander@modernart.net

Modern Art Ltd
50–58 Vyner Street, London E2 9DQ
+44 (0)20 7299 7950 www.modernart.net

Registered in England Company No.11495219 VAT GB 306 7805 02

Modern Art

Reception

Untitled, 2019
door
196.5 x 76.5 x 3.5 cm
77 3/8 x 30 1/8 x 1 3/8 ins
(MA-SMITM-00107)

Untitled, 2019
hands, popcorn
3 x 20 x 29 cm
1 1/8 x 7 7/8 x 11 3/8 ins
(MA-SMITM-00093)

Ground Floor Gallery (clockwise from entrance)

Untitled, 2019
kayak, theremin
396.2 x 60.9 x 45.7 cm
156 x 24 x 18 ins
(MA-SMITM-00089)

Untitled, 2019
kayak, theremin
396.2 x 60.9 x 45.7 cm
156 x 24 x 18 ins
(MA-SMITM-00090)

First Floor Landing

Untitled, 2019
door
187.5 x 76 x 3.5 cm
73 7/8 x 29 7/8 x 1 3/8 ins
(MA-SMITM-00106)

First Floor Gallery (clockwise from entrance)

Untitled, 2019
Cement, basketballs, bedding, steel rod
105 x 48 x 38 cm
41 3/8 x 18 7/8 x 15 ins
(MA-SMITM-00104)

Untitled, 2019
chair, hose
95.5 x 57.5 x 135 cm
37 5/8 x 22 5/8 x 53 1/8 ins
(MA-SMITM-00091)

Untitled, 2019
backpack, catfish
80 x 34 x 20 cm
31 1/2 x 13 3/8 x 7 7/8 ins
(MA-SMITM-00095)