

## **Cauleen Smith**

### **My Caldera**

November 4 - December 22, 2022

Morán Morán is pleased to announce an exhibition featuring Cauleen Smith's new work, titled *My Caldera*, which is her first solo presentation at the gallery. Articulating Smith's range, this show includes video and sound, textiles, sculptures, works on paper, and site-specific installation devices. The overall effect is an immersive environment that thematically analogizes aspects of volcanoes, as indicated by the show's title: "caldera" is the word for the depression that results at the apex, post-eruption. Smith uses the volcano as a metaphor to signal crisis, to figuratively express intense emotion, or the planet's force, but also to consider the regenerative properties of eruptions – how these events create new land, ones without the burden of human history.

Upon entering the space, the first banner, in a sequence of a dozen hand-sewn versions, carries a written message on one side and a visual indication on the other. Sometimes these phrases and pictorial declarations are cryptic, a few more literal, while others lean poetic. One piece has the French "donner avec" (give with) sewn appliqué using a shiny magenta fabric over a painted gradient blue backdrop, dotted with clear crystal droplets, countered by an image of a cloud hovering over a faceted mineral. Another piece images a crow in black silhouette falling from the sky, with the contradictory phrase "You survived" on the reverse. Each banner is strikingly composed and makes use of the various textures and sheens inherent in fabrics ranging from satin to velour, which conjures the directive of processional devices; yet here the message feels more like warnings than celebrations.

Throughout the gallery, Smith has installed gels over the skylights in deep colors of purple, blue, and orange, casting a hue over the space and implying another visual metaphor – the stained-glass ceiling. Two sculptural works placed underneath the banners add to the theme of Earth's layers and the elements. These pieces present large-scale functioning candles with several wicks within each, raised on steel tables, composed in stratified wax sections mixed with various dry elements like crushed stone, soil, sand, and natural pigments. The candles burn in the exhibition, with each wick behaving as its own self-sufficient volcano.

The exhibition culminates with the titular video, *My Caldera*, projected into a corner on a screen that is stretched wall-to-wall using clamps so that it is suspended in space. The imagery of the film is of volcanic scenes in various life stages, from pouring magma to inert mountain, with colors unnaturally saturated – purple, blue, and orange. The scratchy, chaotic aesthetic is created through Smith's proprietary process of placing TikTok video stills onto 35 mm film, then rendering it in 4K as an artifact of the original footage. A driving, heavy metal soundtrack provides an apt audio accompaniment to the visual onslaught of nature's rage. A common thread in Smith's work, this exhibition looks to nature for an alternative – to draw an analogy to human dynamics.

Coinciding with this exhibition is the release of Smith's chapbook, titled *Volcano Manifesto*, as an edition of 200. The text within the publication employs geology as a metaphor and tool for the dismantling of capitalism, challenging the anti-Black position that Man holds ownership over Earth.

***The volcano makes new land.***

***Who owns the new land of the volcano?***

***Lava becomes land that becomes contested by people and places  
that are already***

***contesting things that aren't really theirs.***

***The volcano obliterates all boundaries, and collapses all orders.***

***If the lava oozes over your dotted line do we share?***

***Do you give it?***

***Do I leave it?***

***Who can have it?***

***Who needs it?***

***The volcano alchemizes everything in her wake.***

***I curl up in her caldera and wait for glacier-melt to wash me into  
sediment and***

***turn me into smoky quartz.***

***A boat floats out and I reach for it. From the bow we watch the  
world begin again.***

***Pahoehoe builds a bridge from the caldera's lip to our boat  
asking us to hasten***

***our metamorphosis from flesh to mineral.***

***-Cauleen Smith, Volcano Manifesto (2022), p. 10***

# MORÁN MORÁN

Cauleen Smith (b. Riverside, California, 1967) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. She received her BFA from San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA, and her MFA from University of California, Los Angeles, CA. Smith is the recipient of several grants and awards, including the 2022 Heinz Award; Guggenheim Fellowship; Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize; Ellsworth Kelly Award; The Herb Alpert Award in the Arts; and a Rauschenberg Residency. Smith's works have been featured in solo exhibitions at institutions such as Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX; and Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, among others. Her work is included in numerous public collections, such as the Art Institute of Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Studio Museum Harlem; Smithsonian Museum of American Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.