

Carpenter Center

Press Release

[Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: The Art of Harry Smith](#)

July 12–December 1, 2024

Levels 1 and 3

Free and open to the public

Artist Talk and Fall Opening Reception: Thursday, September 26, 2024

Free and open to the public

Artist Talk: Carol Bove

6:00pm – 7:00pm, Theater, Lower Level

Opening Reception

7:00pm – 9:00pm, Level 1

The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is pleased to present *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: The Art of Harry Smith*, a landmark exhibition of the life and work of Harry Smith (1923–1991). Smith was a painter, filmmaker, folklorist, and musicologist. Although his creative output includes paintings, films, poetry, music, and sound recordings, he may be best known for his compilation of recordings from the 1920s and '30s titled *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which has achieved cultlike status among many musicians and listeners since it was first released in 1952.

As a fervent collector and radical nonconformist, much of Smith's work defies categorization, and much of it no longer exists. His work often consisted of extensive collections of overlooked yet revealing objects, such as string figures and found paper airplanes, covering vast territories of disciplinary knowledge and mediums. Creating a coherent exhibition of Smith's work presents many challenges. Co-curator of the exhibition, artist Carol Bove—who has long been a steward of Smith's work and has incorporated it into her own projects—devised the exhibition's formally innovative exhibition design.

[Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: The Art of Harry Smith](#) puts the artist's life on display alongside his art and collections. It follows him from an isolated Depression-era childhood in the

for the Visual Arts



Pacific Northwest—a time when he was immersed in ecstatic religious philosophies and Native American ceremony—to his counterculture youth of marijuana, peyote, and intellectualism in postwar Berkeley, California. The exhibition traces his path through the milieus of bebop and experimental cinema in San Francisco to his decades in New York, where he was an essential part of the city's avant-garde fringe.

Keenly attuned to changing technologies, Harry Smith embraced innovation and used whatever was new and of the moment. At the same time, his lifelong interest in abstract art, ancient traditions, metaphysics, spiritualism, folk art, and world music came to the fore even as he devised ingenious ways of collecting sounds and creating films. These concerns make Smith's work feel increasingly prescient as collecting and sharing come into view as creative acts that are necessary for drawing meaning from the glut of images and juxtaposition of cultures we encounter today.

Exhibition Catalogue

An exhibition catalogue will be available in November 2024. The publication will include texts by Dorothy Berry, Carol Bove, Dan Byers, Philip Deloria, Kelly Long, Greil Marcus, Rani Singh, and Elisabeth Sussman.

Symposium

Friday, September 27, 2024

A symposium on Harry Smith's practice and the broader cultural and historical context of his practice will feature catalogue contributors and additional scholars and artists. More details to be announced summer 2024.

Exhibition Credits

This exhibition is co-organized by the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University and the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#) in New York where the exhibition opened in October 2023. *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: The Art of Harry Smith* is curated by artist Carol Bove; Dan Byers, John R. and Barbara Robinson Director of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts; Rani Singh, Director of the Harry Smith Archives; and Elisabeth Sussman, Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art; with Kelly Long, Senior Curatorial Assistant, and McClain Groff, Curatorial Project Assistant, Whitney Museum of American Art;



and Danni Shen, Senior Curatorial and Public Programs Assistant, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.

Generous support for *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: The Art of Harry Smith* is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

This exhibition is made possible by Teiger Foundation. Essential support for Carpenter Center programming is provided by the Friends of the Carpenter Center.

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CARPENTER CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

Free and open to the public, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is the center for contemporary art and artists at Harvard University. Through exhibitions, new commissions, public events, publications, and residencies, the Carpenter Center is dedicated to artist-centered programming and to building a vibrant community around contemporary art. This community is defined by an ethos of experimentation, diverse perspectives, and making connections across disciplines and fields. Housed within Le Corbusier's only building in North America, the Carpenter Center's projects are enriched by the educational mission of the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies, and the cultural resources of a large research university.

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