

# CHRIS SHARP

---

## Michael E. Smith

09/13/24 - 10/12/24

Chris Sharp Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Michael E. Smith for PST: Art and Science.

Upon first glance, the connection between art and science and the work of Michael E. Smith might not be so obvious. After all, a fair amount of what Smith creates or depicts seem to be things breaking down, malfunctioning, and/or betraying their own obsolescence. At the very least, he would seem to doubt that which underpins scientific development: the core enlightenment value of progress. He is demonstrably less interested in the latest breakthrough than what it leaves behind, its literal and psychic aftermath. In this way, he and what he creates brings to mind Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History." The oft-quoted description is worth citing in full:

"This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." —Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

Of course, Michael E. Smith's work cannot be reduced to mere illustration, or even allegory, but no matter how you look at it, its skepticism is palpable. It not only challenges our understanding of the every day by using givens (milk cartons, basket balls, etc), but it often renders them unrecognizable as such. A common experience of his work entails an initial incomprehension (i.e., "What the hell is that?") which ultimately never resolves into anything like real comprehension, even after learning what its constituent parts are. If anything, the incomprehension only expands and deepens. Thus is the work animated in part by a kind of refusal, which is paradoxically not without an element of affirmation. If Smith rejects a blind faith in progress, among other things, as an intrinsically good thing, he nonetheless foregrounds art's power as a testament, however twisted it may be, to our essential humanity.

*Michael E. Smith (b. 1977, Detroit, MI) lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions that include: Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2023, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, 2021, Secession, Vienna, 2020, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, 2018, SMAK, Ghent, 2017, Kunstverein Hannover, 2015, De Appel, Amsterdam, 2015, Sculpture Center, Queens, 2015, La Triennale di Milano, Milan, 2014, Power Station, Dallas, 2014, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, 2013 and Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis, 2011, among others. Smith's work was included in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, the 58th Venice Biennale, and additionally, he participated in *Quiet as It's Kept*, the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, as well as the 2012 edition of the Whitney Biennial. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, SFMoMA, San Francisco, MCA Chicago, SMAK, Ghent, and Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Germany, among others.*