

NICOLETTI

PRESENTS

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DIVINE SOUTHGATE-SMITH

NAVIGATOR

Exhibition text by Divine Southgate-Smith:

*Navigator* is an exhibition about movement – the movement of history, memory, and ideas across time. It engages with archives as temporal instruments, mapping how the past refracts through the present and gestures toward possible futures. Right now, however, I feel like I'm at a standstill. This exhibition comes at a moment where I find myself looking back – at the year that has passed, at everything that has moved through me. And I keep asking: *Where am I going?*

Lately, I've been thinking about care and rest, especially in relation to my practice, which often confronts difficult histories and contemporary tensions. The state of the world – what we are witnessing in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, Haiti, Lebanon – has made it hard to find the right words. The political landscape feels ablaze. Across continents, burning tires mark rupture, urgency, and a demand for change. For a fire to occur, four elements must be simultaneously present: oxygen, heat, fuel, and a spark. I think of *hope* as the oxygen in that equation—the thing that makes transformation possible.

*Breathe.*

In *Navigator*, I extend my ongoing interrogation of archival imagery and its entanglement with memory, agency, and institutional control. This latest body of work magnifies archival photographs (previously used in my series *What I've Been Doing Lately*, 2023) to the point of dissolution, where once-recognizable subjects slip into abstraction, severed from their original contexts. The act of extreme zooming fractures the notion of ownership, challenging the bureaucratic structures that govern image rights acquisition and the politics of access. In this act of reimagining, I propose abstraction as a counter-memory, a way to navigate the constraints of institutional violence while reclaiming the right to self-representation.

For me, storytelling isn't linear – it is layered. I see my own experiences as points of entry into something much larger, something deeply connected to a collective memory. At the heart of the work is a meditation on who has the authority to represent, to document, and to claim the visual narrative of our histories. Through distortion, fragmentation, and reconfiguration, I disrupt the extractive logic of the archive, offering an alternative visual language rooted in opacity and refusal. The resulting compositions, hovering between visibility and invisibility, evoke a spectral presence – figures withheld, yet insistently there.

I think about movement, both literal and metaphorical – migration, displacement, and the way histories shift as people and objects traverse space and time. My practice isn't bound to one medium, and my process isn't just about what is being depicted but about how materials carry memory. Printmaking, for example, has a lineage that speaks to both tradition and reproduction, to preservation and dissemination. I play with those tensions. The shift between digital and analog, the contrast between old and new – it's all a way of navigating ideas of presence, absence, and transformation.

*Navigator* doesn't try to answer 'where are we going?' Instead, it lingers in uncertainty, exploring what happens when an idea, an energy, a moment refracts through time. I quote Nina Simone: 'An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times.' And I ask myself: 'What will you do this time, when you feel like you have nothing to say?'

So I collect fragments. Relics.

I piece together something that reflects my humanity—my work, my life, my dreams.

I want people to leave this exhibition feeling something visceral—a sense of navigation, of searching, of moving between past and present. Most importantly, I want them to leave with a sense of possibility.

Southgate-Smith was born in 1995 in Lomé, Togo, and currently lives and works in London, UK. In 2022, she/they received her/their Postgraduate Diploma from the Royal Academy Schools (The Royal Academy of Arts, London), having previously completed her/their undergraduate study in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins (London, 2017).

Selected solo exhibitions include *Aspects of Things Existing*, Frieze London with Nicoletti (2024); *Am I Porous or Imploding*, EAST Gallery, Norwich University of the Arts, UK (2024); *What I've Been Doing Lately*, CEU open gallery, Budapest, organised and supported by The British council, as a part Photo Festival (2024); *SPIT*, Duo exhibition with Emmanuel Awuni, Public Gallery, London, UK; *TEETH KISSIN'*, Soup Gallery, London, UK (2023)

Selected group exhibitions include *Power Plants: Intoxicants, Stimulants & Narcotics*, Sainsbury Center for Visual Arts, Norwich, UK (2024); *Field of Difference*, Palmer Gallery, London, UK (2024); *The last train after the last train*, PUBLIC Gallery, London, UK (2023); *Globalisto: Fragments of a Community*, curated by Mo Laudi, 31 PROJECT, Paris, FR (2023); *Galerina x Arcadia Missa, Ways of Living 3.0*, Arcadia Missa, London, UK (2023); *DAWA*, curated by Latif Samassi, 3537, Paris, FR (2023); *The Ultimate Bootleg Experience*, Studio Chappel, London, UK (2023); *Of Mythic Worlds*, curated by Harold Offeh, Sainsbury Center for Visual Arts, Norwich, UK (2022); *144*, Reference Point, 180 Strand, London, UK (2022); *FEÿ*, Feÿ Arts, Château du Feÿ, Villecien, FR (2022); *The Practice of Listening*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (2022), *FRENTE n2*, Desterro, Lisbon, PT (2019); *Europe Under Construction*, SCHRILL, Braunschweig, DE (2019); *(Putting words) in my mouth*, Galeria Foco (2019), *Mellifluous Elephant*, Casa da Dona Laura, Lisbon, PT (2019); *PADA STUDIO presents Capitulo*, Auditório Municipal Augusto Cabrita (2019); *Feedback*, The Switch Gallery, Lisbon, PT

(2019); and *Dis (Places)*, Galeria Foco, Lisbon, PT (2018).

In 2022 she/they published her/them first book as part of an ongoing series: *TEETH KISSIN' Where Elephants Reside*, published by Lichen Books, and All Purpose Studios.

Southgate-Smith's work is part of a number of permanent collections, including The Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK; Casa Do Design, Porto, PT; Lexus Private collection, Brussels, BE.

Award nominations include; Frame Awards (2021); Mullen LoweGroup Nova Award (2017); International Takifuji Art Award (2017); and The Art Academy Drawing Prize (2014).