

Modern Art

Michael E. Smith

28 September-11 November 2023

Bury Street, SW1

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

Michael E. Smith begins each exhibition by collecting and loosely assembling his materials in the studio. He calls these 'material sketches'. This process also involves a rigorous investigation of the associations each object or material has: its relationship to the world and to people, its culturally specific referents, its place in the economy. To get to know the meaning of an object as closely as possible is also to make it suddenly become strange, unfamiliar, alien. The materials that find their way to Smith tend to be objects or part-objects at the end of their lifespan of usefulness. Functionally spent, they evoke a variety of fragile states – physical, emotional, economic and political. Yet, in their brute materiality, they remain obdurately existent, orbiting the outer stretches of everyday life. In the gallery, Smith responds to the environment of the exhibition space, these materials finding their final arrangements in relation to how they behave semantically in the room and with one another. Often the space itself is altered in subtle ways such as the removal of lighting, the addition of sound, or interventions into the way the room is moved through. In this way, absence or emptiness itself shapes Smith's work, the tension built into it resonating between order and harmony and disarray and depression.

Smith's exhibition for Modern Art contains new works made from a collection of recently found objects: a used leather couch, lenticular plastic, quartz crystals, basketballs, and television stands, among others. These articles are as though dredged from the artist's own youth in Detroit, evoking the iconography of 1980's banality, both familiar and made once again strange through Smith's working over of them. Showing for the first time in the gallery's intimately-scaled Bury Street space, Smith's new works convey an unstable atmosphere that shifts between a familiar sense of family life, domestic consumption and aspiration, while being threatened by something far darker, a bleak undertow of a Frankenstein-like horror.

Michael E. Smith was born in 1977 in Detroit, Michigan, and lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. He received his BFA from the College for Creative Studies, Detroit (2006), and completed his MFA at Yale School of Art (2008). His work has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2023); Modern Art, London (2022); the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2021); Secession, Vienna (2020); Kunsthalle Basel (2018); MoMA PS1, New York (2017); S.M.A.K., Ghent (2017); and Kunstverein Hannover, Hanover (2015). Smith has participated in international group exhibitions including the Whitney Biennial (2022 and 2012); the 58th Venice Biennale (2019); and the 13th Baltic Triennial (2018). He has shown in recent group exhibitions at the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow (2022); Fondation Carmignac, Hyères (2021); La Panacée, Montpellier (2020); The Power Station, Dallas (2019); Kunsthau Zürich (2018); and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2017). Smith's sculptures are held in collections including the Columbus Museum of Art; Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst, Aachen; MCA Chicago; Mudam, Luxembourg City; RISD Museum, Providence; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

For more information, please contact Pascale de Graaf (pascale@modernart.net).