

Sable Elyse Smith
Ordinary Violence

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Queens Museum

New York City Building
Flushing Meadows Corona Park
Queens, NY 11368

T 718 592 9700

F 718 592 5778

E info@queensmuseum.org

queensmuseum.org

@QueensMuseum #SableElyseSmith

Image: Sable Elyse Smith, *Men Who Swallow Themselves in Mirrors* (video still), 2017. Courtesy the artist

Sable Elyse Smith: Ordinary Violence is made possible by the Jerome Foundation. Exhibitions at the Queens Museum receive significant support from Ford Foundation and the Charina Endowment Fund. Major funding for the Queens Museum is generously provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, Lambert Foundation, Booth Ferris Foundation, the Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Inc., and the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund.

Sable Elyse Smith is a recipient of the 2016-2017 Queens Museum/Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Emerging Artists, and has spent the past year working closely with curators and other staff members, optimizing opportunities to expand her practice. Smith, Julia Weist, and Ronny Quevedo were selected by a panel that included Michael Conner (New Museum, New York), Lydia Yee (The Whitechapel Gallery, London), and Hitomi Iwasaki, Director of Exhibitions/Curator, Queens Museum.

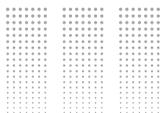
The images are made so that I can see the people in them, so that I can see me. The self is contextual; contingent upon geography, system, relationship, memory, knowing...And violence can be quotidian, like the landscape of prison shaping itself around my body. The images are made so that I can see me. I am haunted by trauma. We are woven into this kaleidoscopic memoir by our desires to consume pain, to blur fact and fiction, to escape.—Sable Elyse Smith

Through her practice, Smith shares a profound reflection on the dehumanizing and often unseen impacts of societal structures and norms. For her exhibition *Ordinary Violence*, the artist explores the ways in which the effects of mass incarceration register on the bodies of subjected individuals and their communities, and uses poetic and cinematic forms to ask how these experiences can be visualized, imaged, and grasped.

Among several poignant graphic and textual works combining found and original material—nearly abstract images of the body in motion, coloring book pages for children entering courtrooms, and regulatory instructions for prison visitors—Smith focuses on the ubiquity of the murals found in penitentiary visitation rooms. These are often painted by inmates, and form the backdrop for the Polaroid photos taken of inmates with their visitors. These portraits must be purchased for the equivalent of more than 20 hours of inmate labor, on average. Two photoworks, *7665 Days* (2017) and *7665 Nights* (2017), tell the story of this microeconomy and the unspoken negotiation embedded in these images, by emphasizing how the intimate moments they capture are choreographed by the strictures of the visitation and the agents that enact them, including the muralist and the roomful of spectators: guard, photographer, inmates not receiving a visit, inmates receiving a visit, and their visitors.

Many of Smith's works at once connect us to her personal experience and the implicit, but radiating psychosocial space of the prison system in the U.S., which has the highest incarceration rate in the world. In two videos, *Men Who Swallow Themselves in Mirrors* (2017) and *How We Tell Stories to Children* (2015), the artist uses fragmented cinematography and soundscapes, marrying original and appropriated footage that ranges from familiar images of urban streets, to a clip from Charles and Ray Eames' documentary *Powers of 10* (1977). In this way, Smith's *Ordinary Violence* maps the reach of the prison sphere, highlighting the silent brutality of a cycle that begins well before one enters the visiting room, and extends well beyond it.

Sable Elyse Smith (b.1986, Los Angeles, CA) is an interdisciplinary artist and writer. She holds a BA from Oglethorpe University and an MFA from Parsons, The New School for Design. Smith's work has been featured at venues such as The Museum of Modern Art, and MoMA PS1, New York City; and Birkbeck Cinema with the Serpentine Galleries, London. She has received awards from Creative Capital, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Franklin Furnace Fund, NYSCA, and Art Matters. This fall she is also exhibiting at New Museum, SIGNAL Gallery and Recess Assembly, New York City. Smith is a fall 2017 visiting faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University, and currently lives and works between Richmond, VA and New York City.



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