

Press release

Lausanne, 24 September 2020

Kiki Smith. Hearing You with My Eyes (9.10.2020 – 10.1.2021)

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1. Press release

Exploring the body and the senses: a major Swiss show on the work of Kiki Smith

The work of the American artist Kiki Smith is the featured subject of a major temporary show this fall at the MCBA Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne. Boasting a selection of nearly one hundred works, some of which are on display for the very first time in Europe, this survey covers almost four decades of artmaking, focusing on a theme that is central to her output yet has been little explored until now, i.e., sensory perception.

Devoted to the work of Kiki Smith (born 1954), the show *Hearing You with My Eyes* is a rare opportunity for the general public to get to know the major themes that run through the American artist's output, themes that spring from her observation of the human body. Since the early 1980s, Smith has been interested in the body and its workings, its symbolic and political meanings, and its representations and status in social space. She initially sought to describe it fragment by fragment. With books on anatomy serving as her guide and inspiration, she began by copying the organs and systems of the human body, turning an objective eye on a structure that was familiar and foreign to her at the same time. Smith then began to deal with the body starting at its envelope, the skin, a shift in focus that led her to human figures. She introduced a repertory of female figures for the most part, drawn from Biblical and mythological stories as well as folk and fairytales. This added a more narrative dimension to her work. These characters, to whom she has lent her own features at times, have enabled her to go back over a common cultural store of knowledge that is the basis of our imagination. With a contemporary, committed viewpoint, Kiki Smith questions the notions of nature and culture, driven by the will to assert the power of the feminine, the simultaneous vulnerability and force of humans, and our symbiosis with the animal kingdom.

The importance granted our senses can be seen in the shift from the microscopic to the macroscopic. It is in light of that shift that MCBA is showcasing today a body of work that plays out in a great variety of techniques. Smith reminds us that the senses are a means of acquiring knowledge. She points up their interconnectivity in the phenomena of perception – as the title of the show suggests – and explores a whole range of sensations, engaging those of visitors, who will find themselves fully involved in turn in confronting the works on display. Finally, even in the materials she has employed – all very tactile, especially paper – she has sought an equivalence with the characteristics of the human body.

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Smith places human beings at the heart of the living once again, in connection with other animal species, but also with the plant kingdom and the cosmos. Doing so, she has delivered a vibrant plea for both respecting nature and the harmonious and joyous experience of nature that is available to all of us. Likewise she invites us to be mindful of its presence in the world and the fact that it is part of a vast whole. Her work echoes then, especially in the current moment, the growing awareness of the fragility of natural resources.

Save for a few works seen in various group shows, Kiki Smith has not exhibited in Switzerland since 1990 when her first international solo show was mounted at the Centre d'art contemporain of Geneva in partnership with Amsterdam's Institute of Contemporary Art.

Exhibition curator: Laurence Schmidlin, curator of contemporary art

Dates of the show: 9.10.2020 – 10.1.2021

Catalogue:



Laurence Schmidlin (ed.), *Kiki Smith. Hearing You with My Eyes*, with essays by Amelia Jones, Lisa Le Feuvre, and Laurence Schmidlin. 192 p., 126 color ill., Fr./Eng., copub.: Zurich, Scheidegger & Spiess, 2020.

Price: CHF 39.- (at MCBA only: CHF 35.- during the exhibition)

The exhibition and accompanying publication enjoy the generous support of



Pace Gallery on quai des Bergues 15-17, Geneva, is featuring in parallel the exhibition *Kiki Smith. Light*, on view until 31 October 2020.

For further information: <https://www.pacegallery.com/exhibitions/kiki-smith-light/>

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2. Media photographs

[Photos can be downloaded: here.](#)

Views of the show will be available starting Thursday, 8 October 2020.

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Following publication of the document, we would be grateful if three copies of the publication were sent to Service de presse du Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne.

1.



Kiki Smith
Untitled, 1992
Graphite on methylcellulose with hand-dyed Nepalese paper,
160 x 47 x 138 cm
D.Daskalopoulos Collection

Photo : Courtesy Pace Gallery

2.



Kiki Smith
Peacock, 1994
Papier-mâché and Nepalese paper with ink
67.3 x 44.5 x 54.6 cm (figure)
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art,
purchase

Photo: Ellen Page Wilson, courtesy Pace
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3.



Kiki Smith
My Blue Lake, 1995
Photogravure and lithograph in 3 colors
on Arches En-Tout-Cas paper
110.5 x 139.1 cm
Printer and publisher: Universal Limited
Art Editions, Bay Shore, New York
Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions

Photo: Courtesy Universal Limited Art
Editions, Bay Shore, New York

4.



Kiki Smith
Curled Up Body, 1995
White bronze and glass,
50.8 x 86.4 x 4.7 cm (figure) and 7.6 x 19.7
x 10.2 cm (glass)
© Kiki Smith, courtesy Pace Gallery

Photo: Ellen Page Wilson, courtesy Pace
Gallery

5.



Kiki Smith
Sainte Geneviève, 1999
Double-sided drawing: ink on Nepalese
paper
272 x 215 cm
Galerie Lelong & Co.

Photo © Galerie Lelong & Co.

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6.



Kiki Smith
Rapture, 2001
Bronze
170.8 x 157.5 x 66.7 cm
© Kiki Smith, courtesy Pace Gallery

Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay, courtesy
Pace Gallery

7.



Kiki Smith
Moon on Crutches, 2002
Cast aluminum and bronze
Installation dimensions variable
© Kiki Smith, courtesy Pace Gallery

Photo: Ellen Page Wilson, courtesy Pace
Gallery

8.



Kiki Smith
The Blue Feet, 2003
Book of cut-and-folded etching and
drypoint on handmade colored
Japanese paper, adapted text by Sister
Juana Inés de la Cruz
46 x 63.5 cm (unfolded)
Printer: Fernando Sandoval, Oaxaca,
Mexico
Publisher: Carpe Diem Press, Oaxaca,
Mexico
© Kiki Smith, courtesy Pace Gallery

Photo: Kerry Ryan McFate, courtesy
Pace Gallery

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9.

Kiki Smith
Congregation, 2014
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
294.6 x 193 cm
Publisher: Magnolia Editions,
Oakland/CA
© Kiki Smith, courtesy Pace Gallery

Photo: Tom Barratt, courtesy Pace
Gallery



10.

Kiki Smith photographed in her studio in
Upstate New York in August 2019.

Photo © Nina Subin

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3. Artist's biography

1954

Chiara (Kiki) Lanier Smith was born in Nuremberg on 18 January 1954. Her mother, the opera singer Jane Lawrence Smith (1915-2005), was on tour in Europe at the time, where her husband, the artist, architect, and pioneering minimalist Tony Smith (1912-1980), had come to be with her.

1955-1973

In the spring of 1955, the family settled in South Orange, New Jersey, shortly before the birth of her twin sisters, Seton (*1955) and Beatrice, called Bebe, (1955-1988). During their childhood and adolescence, the Smith daughters helped their father create his artwork and met his artist friends, including Barnett Newman (1905-1970) and Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), as well as Richard Tuttle (*1941), who was his assistant. The girls also regularly visited museums with their father. The parents read them fairytales and stories; the world of these fictions was to influence Kiki Smith's own work in no small way.



Kiki Smith photographed in her studio in Upstate New York in August 2019. Photo © Nina Subin

1973-1976

Kiki Smith moved to San Francisco, where she lived for a few months with her cousin the musician Prairie Prince (*1950). She returned to the East Coast in 1974 and enrolled in the Hartford Art School in Connecticut. She dropped out after a year and a half, traveled by car around the United States with her sister Beatrice, and took classes in filmmaking in San Francisco. She eventually settled in New York in 1976, where she joined the underground arts and culture scene in the Lower East Side. Over the next few years she would hold a number of odd jobs, working by turns as a laborer in a clothing factory, an assistant electrician, and a waitress in a bar.

1978

She joined the artists' collective Collaborative Project, Inc. (CoLab), whose ranks notably included Jane Dickson (*1952), Jenny Holzer (*1950), Rebecca Howland (*1951), Alan W. Moore (*1951), and Tom Otherness (*1952). The group organized numerous actions and exhibitions on the fringes of the commercial gallery system. Smith also took engraving classes at the Lower East Side Printshop and produced her first monotypes.

1979

She began copying out plates from Henry Gray's book, *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical* (1858), later popularly known as *Gray's Anatomy*.

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1980

Her first silkscreen, *Corrosive*, printed on a T-shirt, was exhibited as part of the group show *The Time Square Show*, mounted by CoLab in New York.

1982

She attended Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, where she exhibited plaster and wood objects as well as scarves and printed textiles in a show called *Fashion Moda Store*, after the name of an independent art space in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York.

1983

Her first solo show, *Life Wants to Live*, was held at The Kitchen in New York. Part of the exhibition was dreamed up in collaboration with her friend the artist David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), whom she had met the year before.

1984

In New York, Smith continued to explore printmaking and learned to do line engraving, notably etching. The same year the AIDS virus was identified. The consequences of the pandemic would leave deep scars on Smith's work and personal life. She would lose many close friends and her sister Beatrice to the disease.

1985

Smith met the artist Nancy Spero (1926-2009) and took part with her in a show devoted to the perception of male sexuality at Arts City, New York. With Beatrice, she trained as an ambulance technician, for three months in Brooklyn, another way for her to gain a better understanding of human anatomy.

1989

First solo show in a major art institution, the Dallas Art Museum. The well-known fine arts publisher and print studio Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) in Bay Shore in the State of New York, invited Smith to work with them. The invitation marks the start of a long history of collaborating with the studio.

1990

Smith's first solo show in Europe was held at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva. The exhibition also traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam. She also produced her first standing sculptures of the human body.

1994

The artist joined Pace Gallery, which has represented her to the present, along with several other galleries.

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1996

Smith broadened her iconography to include nature and animals, thanks in particular to a residency at the Print Department of the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, where she studied the collection of stuffed animals. The Musée des Beaux-Arts of Montreal devoted a retrospective to her work, her first such show in a museum. The artist left Manhattan's Lower East Side and settled in a house in the East Village.

1997

Her output shows her fascination with heavenly bodies, the cosmos, geology, and natural history. She also began working with the fine arts publisher and print studio Harlan & Weaver, New York. The following year the historian of American art Helaine Posner (*1953) published the first monograph devoted to the artist.

2002

Smith took part in a performance by Francis Alÿs (*1959), *The Modern Procession*, which marked the temporary relocation of the Museum of Modern Art of New York from Manhattan to Queens. She headed a parade as an icon of modern art, seated on a sedan chair. She began teaching printmaking at Columbia University.

2012

Fascinated by the *Apocalypse Tapestry* of Angers, which she had first laid eyes on in 1976, Smith began working in textile in monumental formats.

2017

She exhibited at the 57th Venice Biennale, paving the way for a number of retrospective exhibitions of her work in Europe (including in Munich, Vienna, Oxford, Paris, and Lausanne) in the following years.

2019

Smith relocated to a converted train depot in Hudson Valley (New York State). She currently divides her time between this home and studio and her house in Manhattan.

2020

First solo show in Switzerland since 1990.

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4. Excerpts from the catalogue

“The evolution of Kiki Smith’s work is often described as running through several stages in a logical progression. The initial focus on fluids, secretions, systems (circulatory, digestive, endocrine, muscular, etc.), internal organs, and the smallest anatomical elements gave way to an assessment of the body in its entirety, and finally, to the perception of human beings in their surroundings through their reciprocity with other animals, nature, and the cosmic order. This developmental arc from the microscopic to the macroscopic, from the inner to the outer body, and from fragmentation to the whole and even to its dematerialization (the consciousness of the living and the spirit of the dead) is clearly present thematically and iconographically, and retrospectively attested by the artist herself. Nevertheless, I think it is equally possible to consider these forty or so years of artmaking as one true body of work, in order to point out its internal interactions, rather than as succeeding phases of the artist’s output. We can indeed observe numerous mechanisms of interconnectivity that create the conditions for a singular sensory situation, one that directly affects our perception. Although she has never expressed it in this way or deliberately worked it into her art, the artist demonstrates in her *body of work* the active nature of perception. Whether by heightening our senses or reconfiguring their hierarchy, she creates a situation of synesthesia – in the sense of an illogical interaction between them – that seems naïve at times but always stimulating and alive. This phenomenon is never more powerful than in the context of an exhibition, where her works collide and run into one another in a space that visitors move through and around and look, multiplying their points of view.”

Laurence Schmidlin, “The Prodigious Body,” pp. 111-112

“These acts of disrespect Kiki Smith claims piece by piece, celebrating the dislocated body. She notes that much of her work ‘is about living with the shame of being female in public. [...] It seems important for me to hang out there with my experience to be a girl-child, to see if I could live through that in public.’ Her method is to deploy materials that are tactile, familiar, loaded with histories of art and labor. There are drawings, sculptures, prints, paintings. There is bronze, there is horsehair, porcelain, glass, tapestry, wax, terra-cotta. Again and again she makes use of paper. It could be a surface for ink, or mixed with glue to form papier-mâché, or thickened with indigestible methylcellulose to become three-dimensional. ‘Paper,’ the artist describes, ‘is a nice material to talk about the body with. It has the two foremost qualities that life has: it is very strong and very fragile.’ Smith talks of paper being like the skin of the body, a porous boundary to an internal system we all live with but barely know. To work with paper, she noted a quarter-century ago, is to use ‘materials that nobody cares about, that are discarded. It is like being a woman in society, being marginalized, and what you do is discarded. So it seemed good to pay attention to all those other things that have been discarded.’”

Lisa Le Feuvre, “Feeling Subjects,” pp. 139-140

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“Bringing feminist art into new realms of sensuality coupled with violence, Kiki Smith’s materialities give bodies time. These works reach toward the physical actualization of the intensities of grieving, a process in which she was immersed and which therefore (if we know or imagine something about it) connect us to her through the works. As if specifically channeling Bergson’s fascinated description of how art can function, Smith herself has noted: ‘things have energy. If you make something, it has the energy of your body and your consciousness, sometimes not much and sometimes maybe too much. I believe in objects.’ What Smith has pioneered, through a feminist attention to bodies and things, is a range of strategies that reactivate bodily sensation and feeling through attention to and expression of intensities through materialities that convey the body and its contents in visceral and emotionally charged ways. The joys of recreation and birth become uncanny experiences of the fragility and ridiculousness of its components; the terrors of death become horrifying yet matter-of-fact extensions of the abjection of every body, as it hangs in space here and now waiting for the end. Engaging in such a dialogue, as Kiki Smith seems to understand, keeps us alive to and for the moment.”

Amelia Jones, “The Time of the Body: Kiki Smith’s Intensities,”
p. 167

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5. Public engagement– Public outreach services

Reservation required (seating limited) → mcba.ch/agenda

Special events

Lecture

Thursday 22 October, 6:30 pm

Art et médecine: perception du corps à travers les âges

Dr. Gérald d'Andiran, doctor and exhibition curator

Free admission

Performance

From Thursday 12 to Sunday 15 November, during opening hours:

10 am – 12:30 pm and 2 pm – 5:30 pm, every half hour

MINUS 9 crossing the sound barrier of the here / hear / ear

K&A (Karla Isidorou & Alexandra Bellon)

Length: 14' | 18 years and older | CHF 12.–

Performance limited to one adult at a time

Adult workshop

Saturday 21 November, 2 pm– 5 pm

Modelage corps/animal

With Lucie Kohler, artist

CHF 70.– / 50.– (reduced admission)

Kids workshop

Saturday 7 November, 5 December, 2 January, 2 pm– 4 pm

Danse avec les œuvres

With Natacha Garcin, dancer, and Dragos Tara, musician, together with the AVDC -
association vaudoise de danse contemporaine

7-11 years old | CHF 15.–

Family tours

Sunday 1 November, 3 pm – 4:30 pm

Au fil des contes

Tour of the exhibition and stories with which to tame the animals peopling Kiki Smith's
tapestries

With Céline Cerny, author and storyteller

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Sunday 6 December, 3 pm – 4:30 pm

Dans tous les sens

What connects us with the world? Exploration of our senses in front of Kiki Smith's works

Sunday 3 January, 3 pm – 4:30 pm

Dedans/dehors

Listen to your heartbeat and what else is going on inside you... Discover the human body while touring the show

7 and older | Free for children. Adult admission ticket only

Final guided tour

Sunday 10 January, 3 pm

With Laurence Schmidlin, the exhibition curator

Regular events

Guided tour (in French)

Thursdays at 6:30 pm, Sundays at 11 am

Guided tour (in English)

First Sunday of every month at 11 am

Noon tour

First Thursday of every month at 12:30 pm

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6. Museum services

Book and Giftshop

The MCBA Book- and Giftshop has stocked a large selection of books and objects in connection with Kiki Smith's work. The artist has emphasized hand-made materials like paper in her own work; visitors will find a wide range of items involving paper, most coming from producers in the region.

Several items recalling works by the artist that are on view in Lausanne come in a variety of forms, including cotton bags, mini-puzzles, scarves, and notebooks, along with many other objects worth discovering in the shop.

The Book- and Giftshop also features items that show a connection with the body, animals, or nature in general, themes that are central to the current show. We have made sure these subjects also appear in formats meant to appeal to even the youngest visitors, in order to spark the curiosity of every age group.

Hours: Tues., Wedn., Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10 am – 6 pm / Thurs.: 10 am – 8 pm / Mon. closed

Le Nabi Café-restaurant

Before or after your visit, *Le Nabi* invites you to take a break. The menu, reflecting the open, welcoming spirit of our museum, is both family oriented and refined. Drinks are all artisanal and the menu emphasizes local products that change with the seasons.

Hours: Tues., Wedn., Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10 am – 6 pm / Thurs.: 10 am – 8 pm / Mon. closed
Reservations: T. 021 311 02 90 / info@lenabi.ch

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7. MCBA partners and sponsors

The MCBA building was inaugurated on 5 April 2019. The museum's new premises were built by the Canton of Vaud with the generous support of the City of Lausanne and the following private partnerships:

Fondation Les Mûrons

Loterie Romande



Fondation Anita et Werner Damm-Etienne

BCV



Fondation Gandur pour l'Art



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