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SETON SMITH

PRESSE

EXPONAUTE

12/01/2017

Le Rendez-vous des galeries #Janvier

Laura Bourdon • 12 janvier 2017

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Le Rendez-vous des galeries revient en ce début d'année : nous vous livrons une sélection non-exhaustive et volontairement éclectique de quelques-unes des expos à ne pas manquer, convoquant à la fois des figures majeures de l'art moderne et contemporain et de la scène émergente. Photographie, sculpture, peinture et installations : voici notre sélection de janvier !

Guest House, Seton Smith, galerie Anne-Sarah Bénichou



Seton Smith © courtesy galerie Anne-Sarah Bénichou

Seton Smith immortalise avec poésie les lieux qui la fascinent. Photographe de l'épure, elle manie l'espace architectural et dévoile dans des clichés poétiques un univers intime, intérieur comme extérieur, en ne laissant qu'une place fantomatique à l'homme. Présente dans les plus grandes collections mondiales, elle a su imposer sa signature parmi les photographes d'architecture. Seton Smith vit entre New-York et Paris, ville qui l'a fait connaître et qui nourrit son travail.

Guest House, Seton Smith, jusqu'au 25 février 2017

TÉLÉRAMA SORTIR

11.01.17



Photographie

Seton Smith – Guest house

TTT On aime passionnément | ★★★★★ (aucune note)

Du 7 janvier 2017 au 25 février 2017
Galerie Anne-Sarah Bénichou - Paris

Voir les dates

L'Américaine Seton Smith cultive un art de la ligne fondue, d'une délicate imprécision. Dans la série « Row House », par exemple, elle montre quatre gigantesques fragments d'une même maison en bois, lessivée par le vent. En bougeant son cadre de quelques centimètres, elle installe un léger trouble. Et parvient, avec la photographie, à traduire une perception sensible de l'architecture. Des espaces, des surfaces, qu'elle ausculte avec minutie, lui permettent d'interroger le souvenir des lieux de son enfance. Un travail rare et subtil.

Par Frédérique Chapuis

NEW-YORK SPACES
18 Octobre 2016

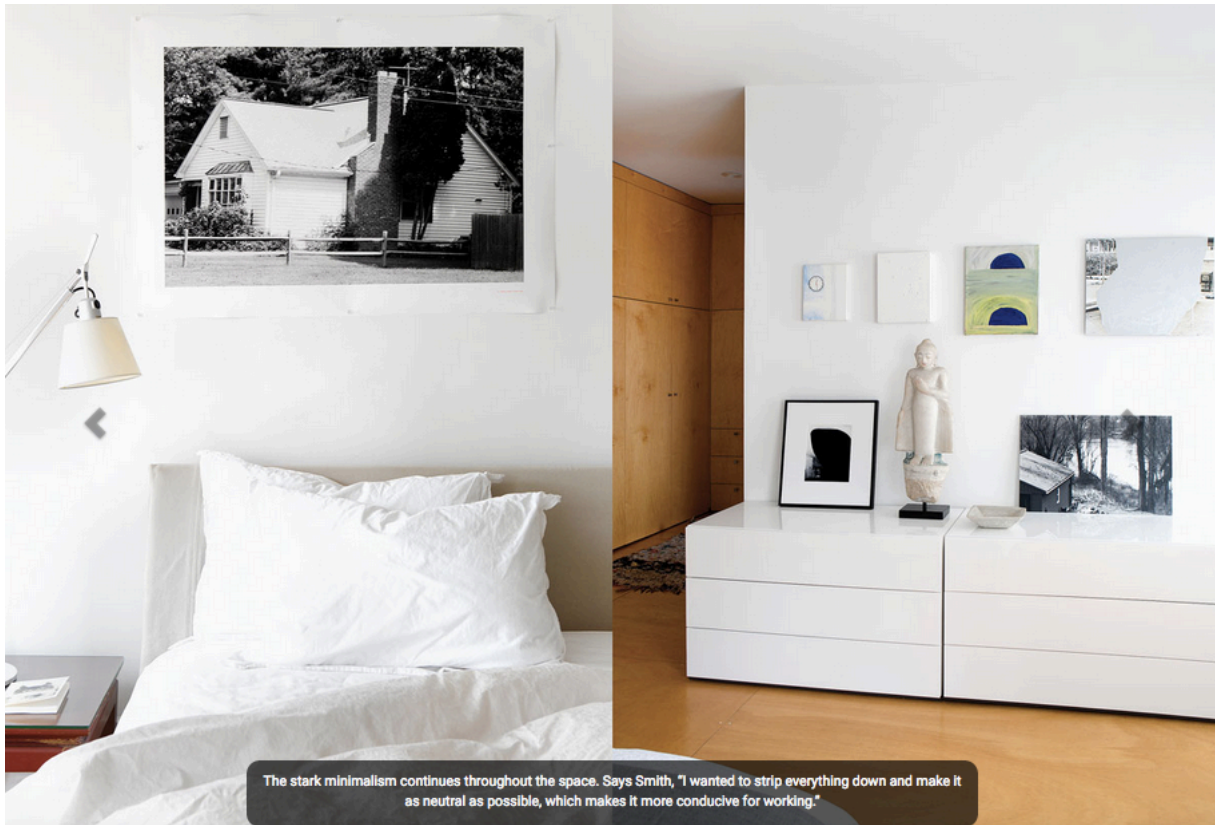


October 18, 2016

Artist Seton Smith's Minimalistic Lower East Side Apartment

Photographer Seton Smith's home on the Lower East Side is a reflection of her artistic point of view.

by Deborah L. Martin **photographer** Costas Picadas



The stark minimalism continues throughout the space. Says Smith, "I wanted to strip everything down and make it as neutral as possible, which makes it more conducive for working."

Seton Smith is an artist born into a family of artists. Her father, Tony Smith, was an architect, visual artist, and pioneering minimalist sculptor. Her mother, Jane Lawrence, was an opera singer and actress who posed for Jackson Pollack's *Painting, No. 7*, now owned by the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**. Seton's sister, Kiki, is an acclaimed artist and sculptor, and their sister Bebe was an underground actress who died of AIDS in 1988. Seton's distinctly visual point of view was formed at an early age.



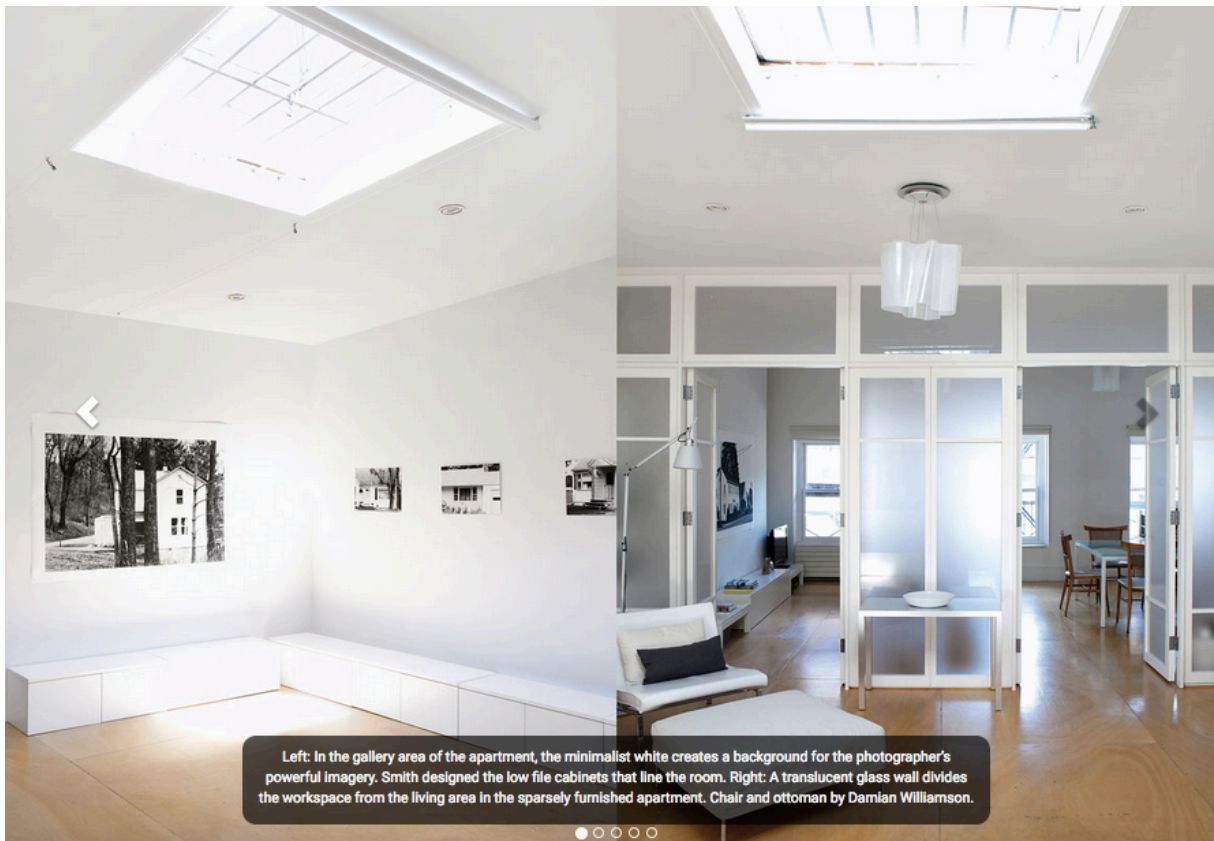
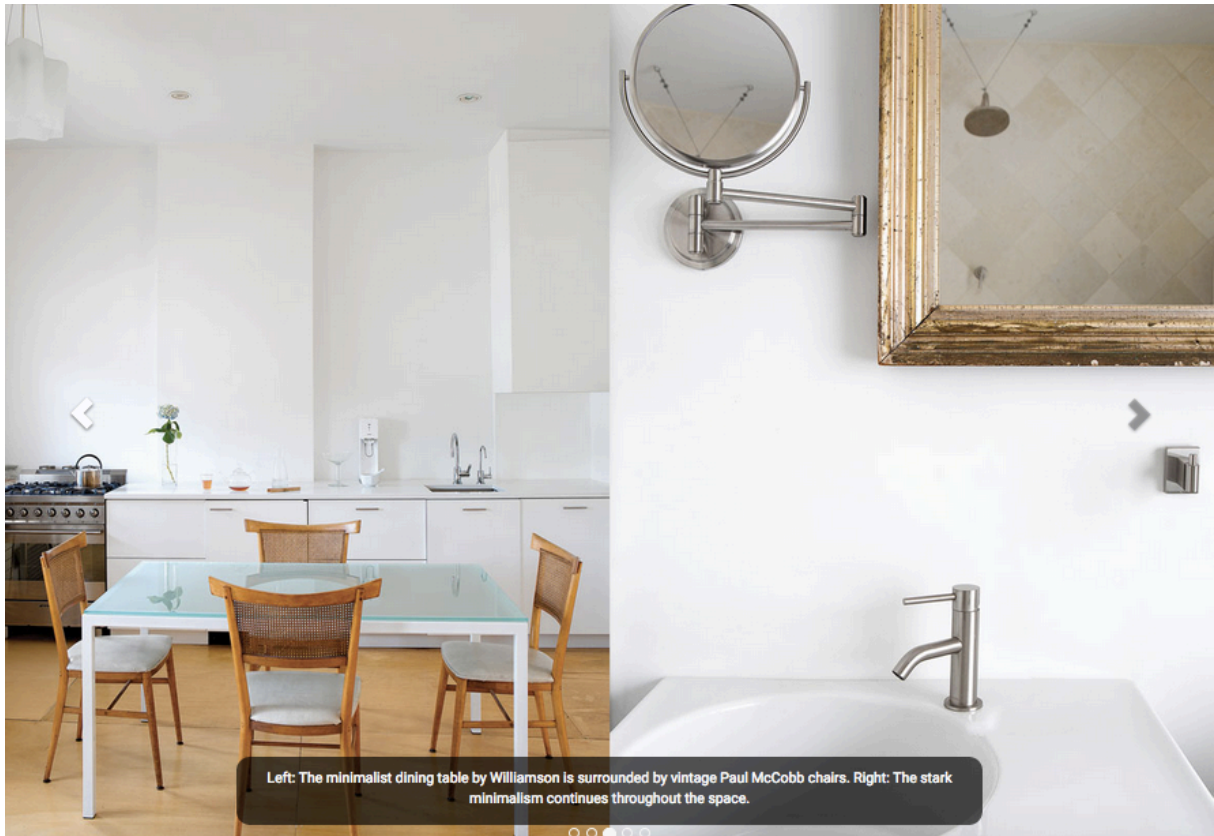
Seton Smith at home.

She divides her time between a Hausmannian/modernist apartment in Paris and an apartment on the Lower East Side where her sister Kiki lived and worked for 20 years. "When Kiki moved out in 2000, my friends and I bought the building. I gutted the apartment and started with an empty shell," says Smith. It is both her living space and studio. "I use the walls in all the rooms to hang the prints that I make here, as well as final full-scale images that are made in a lab."

The spare interior functions as a neutral space. "I didn't want to have any color or extra objects influence my work. I bought new furniture, mostly designed by **Damian Williamson**, and saved the Paul McCobb chairs [in the dining area]." Smith continues, "Coincidentally, around 5 years ago I started making elemental black and white horizontal photographs of exteriors." To separate the living and studio space she added a translucent wall with doors allowing light to flow through the space. "I follow the sun. I have east and west exposures with a skylight in the middle, so I end up with the late afternoon sun in my bedroom where I spend time reading."

Shelter is a deeply important subject for Smith. She says, "Different building types have been a significant theme in my work, as they provide a language for how we read architecture and analyze its emotional and psychological effects." She is often attracted to historical house museums in the United States and abroad. "I love the Ford Mansion where George Washington stayed during a harsh winter in Morristown, New Jersey. Its rooms are very sparse and I can remember the windows and campaign beds." She is currently focused on photographing the exteriors of vernacular houses in the United States. "Houses propose a questioning as to how we are formed and influenced in the spaces where we live, socioeconomically, as places of nurturing and safety, of repression, growth, and aging."





HYPERALLERGIC

15.10.2015

HYPERALLERGIC
Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Finding Fulfillment in Images of Empty White Rooms

by [Joseph Nechvatal](#) on October 15, 2015



Seton Smith, "Insel #1" (2013), inkjet print (all images courtesy the artist and Sisso Gallery)

PARIS — The silence of [Seton Smith](#) was significant. On September 21 at a special [event](#) at the [Columbia Global Center in Paris](#), *In Conversation: Artist Seton Smith and Curator Ami Barak*, Barak did all the talking. He explained and historicized Smith's photographic work in terms of the punctum as defined in *Camera Lucida*, a short book on photography published in 1980 by the French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes. The book develops the twin concepts of studium and punctum: studium denoting the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph; punctum denoting the wounding, personally touching detail that establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it.

Smith sat attentively on stage next to Barak, but uttered no words of intention, explanation, or contradiction. Though warm and charming in her presence, she outdid mute Warhol there. I suppose everything she had to say about her work was in the images that she produced for her Parisian comeback show, *Second Mark*, curated by Barak and currently on view at [Galerie Sisso](#).

Smith's large photographic images of places devoid of human presence are mounted on a stiff support and mercifully left unprotected by reflective glass. More like a painting than a photograph, they hover just a bit off the white walls of the gallery. Their delicate surfaces, which resemble

paintings in scale, are left exposed, and this adds much to the aching feelings engendered by them. Through this exposure, they invite a search for a “pure” opticality, an issue essential to formalist minimal painting back in the 1970s.

Through this sweeping, delicate opticality, Smith creates subtle tension. The surface materiality of her smooth, technically produced images is put into slight contrast with the smoothly painted white walls on which they are hung. This close textural continuity draws our attention into an expanded, subtle field of white light that, for me, has mystical implications. A comfortable luminosity radiates out from her dominantly pale photographs and onto the white gallery walls that present them to us — walls that have come to represent modernist ideals of purity and neutrality.



Seton Smith, “Secession and in Vienna – Second Mark Dyptique” (2007), C-print (click to enlarge)

This radiance is most evident in the engulfing diptych “Secession and in Vienna – Second Mark Dyptique” (2007), from which the show takes its name. For me it is angelic and quixotic. The whiteness of the diptych uses the whiteness of the gallery walls to lend the images a numinous quality. The hazy white optical field in the work spills out over the confining edges of the diptych to fill — symbolically — the entire wall and space (and even us). Certainly the white room and the art images are unified in flowing feeling. The walls become a part of the work, and by blurring the difference between photo and wall, Smith extends our consciousness into an expanded situation that suggests angelic, virtual bodies in relationship to yawning space and light. Moreover, by allowing us to see through the eye of her unfocused camera, she offers us the possibility of imagining ourselves hovering behind her as she works. We can imagine ourselves as a quasi-material body that cannot be circumscribed by place or endowed with an exact position. That is very much the point of this body of Smith’s work, a point that has suddenly regained prominence in our market-driven art world with the publication of Charlene Spretnak’s [The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art: Art History Reconsidered, 1800 to the Present](#).

In “Secession and in Vienna – Second Mark Dyptique” I also detect a certain American exuberance in contact with a generally refined (even restrained) French sophistication and ennui. (Smith, an American, has lived on and off in Paris for two decades.) Taken together, the two halves of the diptych produce in me a hypersensitive image of something hovering above distinctions. I also could easily imagine tipsily dancing in the spaces they depict, achieving a state of lightness or blurred being suggestive of *ignudo spirito*, a type of out-of-body-ness typical of the virtual.



Seton Smith, "Insel #2" (2013), inkjet print (click to enlarge)

By Smith placing "Insel #1" and "Insel #2" (both 2013) next to each other, she and Barak invite us to imaginatively tumble into a lush minimalism based on the beauty of negative space. Like in the masterful films of [Yasujiro Ozu](#), Smith's images here have the effect of placing us in the middle of a vacant scene, or inside the head of an imaginary cinematographer or architect. Here we are judging, appreciating, and playing with the emptiness of space as space. As such, the images speak to the broad poetics of space and its powers of latent liberation in an almost apocalyptic fashion. Where have all the people gone? Yet unlike post-nuclear visions of devastation, Smith's empty and silent style renders images of human absence eloquent, sometimes ravishingly beautiful. Like Ozu, Smith is a master of the ellipsis, often represented fleetingly in text as "..." — the narrative device of omitting a portion of events so as to allow us to fill in a narrative gap.

That absence of human presence in our narcotic selfie age is more than refreshing; it is revitalizing visual art on the basis of the abstract formal principles pioneered by 20th century greats, like [Florence Henri](#) — for example her "[Fenêtre](#)" (1929). Like Smith, Henri too applied a few of the formalist problems of painting composition into the technological possibilities of a new photography based on the idealization of light.

Smith is from a family of internationally renowned artists, the daughter of the sculptor [Tony Smith](#) and sister of [Kiki Smith](#), but unlike the work of her contemporary [Nan Goldin](#), there are no heroes (or villains) in her pictures. Smith is probably better known for her innovative blurry technical style and almost minimal, Zen composition than for her humanist, narrative content. Far from bleak, the absence of any figures in her images suggests a post-human spiritual stance that offers a model for thinking about [androcentric](#) humanist values in a technological age where art is caught up in the spinning machine of the global economy and its digital infotainment environment.



Seton Smith, "Charleston Series – Slave House #17" (2015), inkjet print

"Leeds Series – Two Trees Before House" (2012) and "North Dakota Series #0016" (2014) are more sharply focused and more conventional, recalling the objective/conceptual photographic work of [Bernd and Hilla Becher](#). "Charleston Series – Slave House #17" (2015) has some of that too, but is sad, inward, and taciturn, mining the negative depths of the Deep South. With "Charleston" I somewhat missed the blurriness of her earlier work, as I think it might have provided a sense not of virtual angels, ghosts, dreams, or drink, but of seeing through a haze of anger or a veil of blood. Its inclusion in the show, with its downbeat memories of human brutality, creates a pensive section that punctuates with counterpoint the ephemeral, soft, angelic, Zen photographs. It thereby amplifies their silent tenderness.

Seton Smith's [Second Mark](#) continues at [Galerie Sisso](#) (90 rue de la Folie Méricourt, 11th Arrondissement, Paris) through October 31.

[Ami Barak](#)[Galerie Sisso](#)[Paris](#)[photography](#)[Seton Smith](#)

ART IN AMERICA

27/08/2011

REVIEWS AUG. 27, 2011

Seton Smith

NEW YORK,
at Winston Wachter

by Tim Maul



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Increasingly absent from image culture's pageant of tourism, lifestyle, obsolescence and urban sublime is evidence of the impulses that once allowed "fine art photography" to offer refuge to personal sensibilities like the poetic. Seton Smith managed the poetic along with well-reasoned physicality in this exhibition of nine chromogenic photographs (some 72 inches square, others 30 inches square). Smith foregrounds characteristics of the photographic print evoking (for those who remember it) Super 8 film, specifically the fuzzy grain and the blur of motion—an effect which often appears in narrative cinema and television to indicate nostalgia. In some works here Smith projects this "warm" sensibility onto "cool" environs—unpopulated interiors of Vienna's renowned Secession building. Architectural details are marginalized in her lens's sweep of rarefied Viennese air. Smith's inquisitive drift of images recalls the camera work in the dubious "paranormal investigation" programs on cable television. *Looking* and *Looking Up* (both 2007) situate the artist on a staircase of the Secession, providing beautiful demonstrations of photography's long-standing "absence and presence" conceit; the works settle on ostensible vacancies that upon enlargement provide the viewer with a great deal to see.

Indoors, Smith's lyricism is almost feverish; outdoors, she regains composure. Tweaking our anxieties with a series of ordinary houses, she stalks the perimeters of the properties on which the structures stand. An unsettling mood of trespass prevails. One shadowy home is glimpsed through a bush, another has holiday lights up in summer. In *Side of House with Addition* (2009), an extra story has been built below the roof of a modest dwelling, attracting the artist's mechanized eye. As in Jeff Wall's occasional unaltered "straight" images, we regard Smith's houses with mild apprehension and intensified scrutiny, wondering what knowledge the artist withholds

ATTENTION SHOPPERS

from us. Something of a breather was provided by *Paper Room #5* (2006)-bushes and trees viewed from below against the sky.

The idea of selective memory could suggest an editing room in the brain littered with images deemed either "too early" or "too late" to represent the events that make the official recollection folder. Smith might relish sorting through these compelling outtakes. The signals sent by her photographs are the same ones conveyed by cinema and painting at their most conceptually challenging, taking us aback-a rare place to find oneself in a Chelsea gallery.

Photo: Seton Smith: Side of House with Addition, 2009, chromogenic print facemounted to Plexiglas and aluminum brace, 72 inches square; at Winston Wächter.

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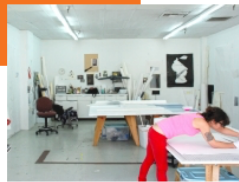
NEWS

Artfully Haunted Hudson House Features Kiki Smith, Seton Smith, Valerie Hammond

by David Ebony

New York State's Hudson Valley is known for its grand old mansions, some haunted by storied pasts. One such place is currently filled with art courtesy of Kiki Smith, her sister Seton Smith, and...

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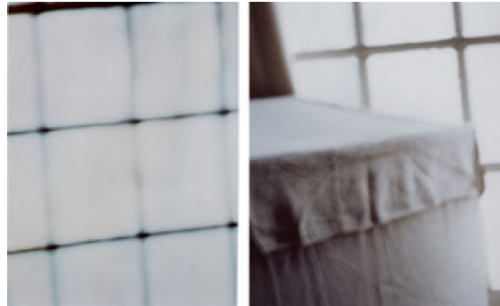
February 6th, 2008

INCONVERSATION

Seton Smith with Eve Aschheim

On the occasion of the artist's current exhibit at Winston Wächter Fine Art (January 31–March 4, 2008), Seton Smith welcomed painter Eve Aschheim to her Lower East Side studio to talk about her life and work.

Eve Aschheim (Rail): You grew up in South Orange, New Jersey, and in the 1970s went to Boston University, where you studied painting and art history and later photography at the Museum School and Massachusetts College of Art. We met in Paris in the late '90s. A few years ago, you moved to New York after living there for 20 years. What brought you to Paris, and why did you stay?



Window and Bed, 1997, 72" by 96". Courtesy of Winston Wächter Fine Art

Seton Smith: In 1984 I had been invited to participate in an exposition entitled *Paravents* curated by Paul Andres and Jule Werner in her Schloss outside Köln, through an article that included my work in the Dutch magazine *Metropolis M* about Collaborative Projects (Colab), of which I was a member. I had been living in the Lower East Side at the time and painting was the dominant medium. I had seen some German artists' installations related to architecture, Hermann Pitz, Thomas Schutte, and Raimund Kummer, among others and decided that was the direction that interested me. I returned to Paris in 1985 with a friend, not really meaning to stay but realized I needed to take the opportunity to learn more about other cultures.

Rail: Your subject matter has included antiquities, archeological sites, museum objects in vitrines, museums in general, furniture and interiors, architectural details and features including stairs, windows, doors, mirrors, as well as scenes from nature, trees, flowers, etc. It all relates to the idea of architecture/environment. How did this interest evolve?

Smith: When I was studying in Boston, I started photographing low walls in the countryside, with the idea of documenting delineated spaces in the landscape; the influence of earthworks was current at the time. I started photographing construction site foundations and painting on them to obscure extraneous information. I concentrated on the idea of there being chosen sites, like one sees on the

mesas in the Southwest where Native Americans selected a particular spot to build a settlement.

I started reading about architecture: *Learning from Las Vegas, Architecture Without Architects*, and about the architecture of war. When I moved to New York in 1979, I started making paintings of architectural facades on canvas screens 6 feet by 9 feet. The idea was that you could install different architecture scenes within your own environment, of various building types and historical styles.

I initially went to France to photograph parks and buildings to apply on screens, so that they could be produced and made inexpensive and available. I started looking at architecture as a language. After a year of being in Paris and taking photos, I made paper models of collapsible portable rooms. Then, I added wall sections and models of stairs, pools, doors, and other simple architectural elements. I photographed them with the idea of making installations on a life-size scale. I realized the installations in wood, marble, and copper. Later, I added black and white 6 by 9 foot photographs and combined them to suggest different metaphorical associations. It was as if they were all in flux because the photos were leaning and not fixed. One could slide in and out of history and consider how we make choices to create our environment.

Rail: Since your 1998-99 show at the Whitney Museum, *Pale Guide to Transparent Things*, curated by Adam D. Weinberg, your work has haunted me. It's because of a mysterious and hallucinatory quality that your images sustain. A feeling like maybe this really isn't here; this is something that we're just imagining.

I've seen mirages in the desert in Africa where one sees bright blue water in the middle of the desert where there is no water and these images are hazy like your images and also are surrounded by a brightness of light.

Smith: It's interesting that you see it in that way. In the Whitney's projects room I made a series of 12 light boxes. They were very painterly in a sense, hazy black and blue forms that you would not imagine were taken in an auditorium. So they were quite abstract looking. There were also some pictures of Chinese chairs in the installation. In my work, I am often juxtaposing different kinds of spaces as if they are presenting different realities that we are living in simultaneously. Another element of the project was a 20 foot square scrim on the windows of a forest from Wales that was semi-transparent in the day and spotlit at night to seem opaque.

My making things out of focus is saying that I am not trying to give a literal interpretation since we expect certain kinds of real information from photography. I want to make it obvious from the beginning that the viewer is invited into a psychological space.

Rail: Your unconventional installation of large photographs—large framed photographs, light boxes, some leaning on the wall, some attached, photographs on scrim, etc., creates a virtual museum out of a myriad of different objects from different cultures and time periods. Your show at the Whitney had images of Attic vases, chairs, tables, and windows, which transformed the space into another environment that transgresses time but also transcends it, is outside of time, and echoes memory.

Smith: I look at objects and furniture in museums as

proposing a continuity of time and place. Taken from their original time and location the objects are dispersed and migrate around to different museums, out of context, implying they are vehicles for the recreation of various cultures. My photographs are meant in a sense to redirect that illusion and bring them back to the level of individual presences.

Rail: The blurriness may make the object unnameable, like an apparition. Sometimes you lose the surface detail, which means you dissolve the plane, and then the volume. You build the space and empty it out, a virtual form. In the case of these new photographs, there's a tension between a suggestion of three-dimensional space, and also a flattening of that space. It's as if you're responding to architecture by flattening it or dissolving its materiality.

Smith: The photographs are propositions of spaces that may provoke our memories or connect to the inventory of spaces we have encountered. They invite you without telling you. I think there is also a relationship to the body, they are hung low and due to their size, 6' x 4', they relate to real architectural scale; you feel like you can actually walk into the space. My images are representational but can give the optical impression of abstract fragments of color.

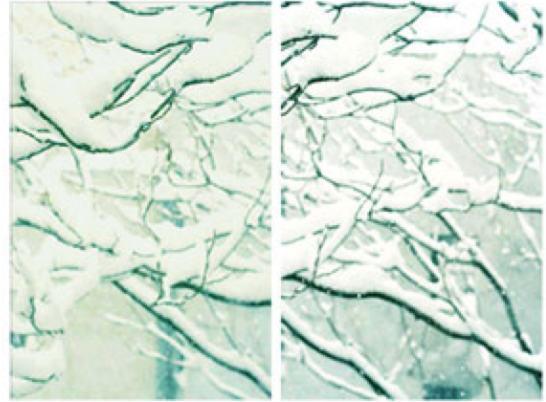
Rail: You render unnameable objects and spaces that would otherwise be familiar. House museums are personal spaces turned public, which you then defamiliarize.

Smith: The spaces are not completely random, not heroic or anecdotal. By that I mean that I am not trying to represent a story that has occurred in a given location. Places that can hold one's attention like a pause. Looking and seeing where the corners reside. A certain temperature or atmosphere taken out of context and reexamined in its own light, like an object. In the second monograph about my work, *Without Warning*, Doris von Drathen quotes Max Raphael in speaking of different artist's paintings as embodying types of spaces; Vermeer the "space of unconsciousness", in Tintoretto the "space of transition between life and the hereafter", in Egypt "the space of the infinite void", in India the "space of plenitude and contemplation" and so on. She goes onto say that I am blurring the boundaries between inside and outside, between the real and the unreal, between what is recognizable and what is not.

Rail: Yes. Further, the space in your photographs is expandable and becomes immense. As the viewer approaches the form it seems to feel infinitely far away. The space of pure terror. In movies often the part that is most disturbing comes after a moment that is quiet with no music and little action. What exposure do you use to get these effects?

Smith: I'm using a very slow speed because of the low light in museums and the camera being hand held and without a flash, that's why the color is very saturated looking.

Rail: You've done many things with windows: You've turned them into different things, dissolved



Snow Trees #3, (2006). 72" by 96". Courtesy of Winston Wachter Fine Art

the plane itself, rendered them opaque, used them for reflections or as a reflection. In the current work, you take a shop window and door, which are normally clear, and make them opaque. And in one photograph the glass door shows the reflection of a car, so you're showing us another reality within this reality that's also opaque. There's a bouncing back where you can't enter—you don't know where you are: You're in between these two hard, reflective surfaces that keep you out.

Smith: A lot of my work has to do with interiors and exteriors, and that's also related to the metaphor of the inner body and its membrane separating the exterior world. A few years ago I shot some work in Japan where that's so present. There is an abstract quality to the traditional white screens that gives an austerity to the interior spaces, but you know they open onto a garden that is very lush and rich in color. In the new work there is also the same kind of minimal information that then explodes into the frenzy of trees. The facades keep you on the exterior, and there is no distance between them and the trees, or room to enter.

Rail: But yet in the piece "Car in Door" you see a reflection from the real world, which is maybe what you're interested in.

Smith: This is a different kind of reflection than I normally have in my work. There is a confrontation between the temporal and the immediate with the glass door as a screen where the information is always changing. It's citing a different kind of photography that captures an instant by chance.

Rail: What about the idea of mirrors? They have connotations of possibility, meditation, reflection, mediated experience, voyeurism, surveillance, entrapment, and escape. You did a show in 1993 with the intriguing title *Distracted Mirror*. How do you think about mirrors?

Smith: Well, I think you could say a mirror is also a witness, so it's aware of everything going on in the space around you. What is reflected in mirrors isn't what you would see normally looking at something directly. You are also seeing what is behind you. I think I started photographing things in mirrors as if they're slices of reality from different perspectives, which also relates to the installations. Mirrors can also seem like passages to other spaces. In the installations I would indicate that the objects and photographs are portable objects, because they would be leaning. Some were doors, blank doors, trap doors, or a symbolic door to a garden. There's this sense of flux and images and objects could be moved around to create new environments.

Rail: That's like exploded Cubism, but instead of a still life it is life-size rooms and spaces that are juxtaposed and intersect.

Smith: like Schwitters's *Merzbau*.

Rail: You've also made a lot of diptychs in which different kinds of relationships happen between the pairs. In some cases, the pairing of two slightly different foci implies the movement of a viewer, like frames in a movie, a disjunctive panorama. In "The Snow Trees" diptych, something I have never seen before happens. The two panels almost seem to form a continuous picture that simultaneously separates into two almost identical panels. What appears to be repetition is not. Perception is

Rail: Emptiness? the spaces in between things being emphasized.

Smith: I think that is where your eyes can rest at a space—looking at something and you are not necessarily conscious of it. You could become a person in the interior image, in a sense, superimposed or transplanted. I like the nearly empty institutional spaces in Ilya Kabakov's work, where there is just a line of molding on the wall. I made lots of little paintings when I was in my twenties, of rooms with just a table, some chairs and a door. When we think of empty spaces, in our minds we can see prisons cells, entry halls, stages, arenas, places where an action will occur, influenced by life, film, and literature. Real emptiness can be very loaded.

Rail: What initially attracts you to a particular place that you photograph?

Smith: When I photograph interiors, I really don't want to know what's inside the space before I get there. For various reasons, I just suspect there might be something interesting in it. I really like to go in cold and just function in an intuitive way. In Europe I was photographing in public spaces, which are either in museums or chateaux, house museums, and decorative arts museums. Now that I am back in the U.S., I feel like going back to photographing the vernacular American architecture and landscape.



Portrait of the artist, 2008. Photo by Kiki Smith.

I almost always photograph when I travel, so I'm discovering something at the same time while I'm shooting it. When I was in France, I used to say that I was in the 18th century. But I'm not there anymore.

Rail: So now that are you living in New York, are you in the 21st or just the 19th?

Smith: No, no, the 21st.

Rail: Your work has many historical references, period furniture, antiquities, architectural details that date it.

Smith: That can be relative too. Since I was living in Europe, those things are common. Some French people would say I'm using "la vie quotidienne," but of course it is not the same quotidian for an American person.

Rail: So when you came back to the United States, your subject matter naturally shifted?

Smith: Yes, I think so. I mean, it's a process and I'm discovering it now. I went cross-country around '82, and made lots of black-and-white photographs of desolate houses and the countryside. What does it mean now with the history of photographs like those by Lewis Baltz and Dan Graham and others? The ubiquitous suburbs and developments. How are we looking at the landscape and what does it mean in our time? In the city we only see nature in a car commercial. Can we just add a

palm tree to a shopping mall or do we really need something else? I think our attitudes vis-a-vis nature are very complex. We stand in awe of its majesty, and we are willing it to remain intact, untouched in our imagination. We reserve the idyllic illusion even though peril is advancing. It is very difficult to photograph nature without having the generic look we cling to. Simultaneously we see the devastation in the photos of Robert Adams.

Rail: These new works are less aestheticized, tougher, in a way, less romantic.

Smith: That may be true.

Rail: You're almost like a foreigner now, coming back to see this with fresh eyes.

Smith: A little bit. That's true. Being out of one's culture helps to look at it in a more critical manner. I think it's interesting living in a different culture, after some years you're not in your culture and you're not in their culture. So you exist mentally in a hybrid kind of space, it makes one a better Flanneuse.

Rail: Have you read *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard? Barthes, Foucault, Luce Irigaray or other philosophers or writers?

Smith: Some, but now I enjoy reading the work of Beatriz Colomina, Giuliana Bruno, Michael Sorkin etc. I take classes on American history, sociology and history related to urbanism, the history of the suburbs, modernity, the middle class/globalism, and currently environmental history. I'm interested in reading about the development of cities, how people in our time are creating public spaces, the forum of the internet, the space of fear, of the walking city, points of contact and spaces of desolation, ethnic and class based enclaves.

Rail: Can you discuss a few of your art historical influences?

Smith: I always say I like Giotto, Persian miniatures, and minimalist abstract painting, partly because I grew up with it. And it seems to be some kind of answer. I am also interested in sculptures that could be considered funereal architecture like Egyptian sarcophagi, the low marble tombs of St. Denis, the Chinese Spirit road, mastabas and stupas.

Rail: That's interesting. Giotto and Persian miniatures both flatten perspective and use these little hexagonal forms, just like you have in this new body of work.

Smith: Pavilions. I've had a pavilion focus for a long time.

Rail: What's a "Pavilion focus" ?

Smith: I have liked them from Islamic paintings and miniatures, the "Annunciation" space of early Renaissance paintings, the primitive hut, garden follies, Chinese pavilions, ski platforms, underpasses, igloos, beehives, bath houses, and so on. I started collecting boxes when I was young, in retrospect they are all related. Drawing lines in space, delineating, defining, separating one space

from another in relationship to positives and negatives. Some open-air pavilions in gardens were designed as an idealized place for contemplation, literature and music in the landscape symbolic of a harmonious human coexistence in the universe.

Rail: Yes, and as with Giotto and Persian miniatures, some of your work has cues for flatness and three-dimensionality at the same time, and also has a stage-set format.

Smith: In general, there are no shadows.

Rail: Who are some other painters you like?

Smith: I like Imi Knoebel, your work, Mary Heilmann, and many other contemporary artists as well as Medieval and Renaissance works, Indian and Chinese works, not to mention the Abstract Expressionists, and so on.

Rail: You have photographed nature extensively.

Smith: I started photographing nature and trees in 1990, and I just became completely fixated on trees and their presence as witnesses to history. It goes back to how, in general, we perceive the landscape. I attended many conferences on landscape and garden history, how they were rendered in Dutch naturalist vision of the 17th century and other European painting to their early appearance in photography for a European and American audience of exotic places around the world, how these images helped form how we perceive nature, the sublime, Manifest Destiny, the Hudson River School and political boundaries.

Rail: You have also done a dozen temporary site-specific public projects in France. Your project on highway signs sounds ingenious.

Smith: In 1991, I photographed a local landscape in Brittany, and then adhered the transparent photographs onto regular road signs; you could see the image of a tree for example in 5 kilometers. So it was an advertisement of the local landscape for the residents as well as for tourists.

Rail: So you replaced the sign with the photograph of the real thing?

Smith: Yes, I have made several projects of installing photographs of nature in nature, for a variety of reasons. The most recent project I made, in 2006, was in a water garden and I added a 10' x 30' scrim onto a triangular support of an image of the stairs that led up to the chateau, an imaginary staircase.

Rail: Who are the photographers you look at?

Smith: Some of the German photographers documenting architecture, like Candida Höfer, Thomas Demand and others. We have a connection with the same subject matter, but we are working with it in a very different ways. The artwork that most interests me at this time is, oddly enough, post-Minimalism. I recently saw Steven Parrino's retrospective in Paris and was enthusiastic about how

he combines minimalism with Rock and Roll and motorcycles. Culturally it makes sense. I like many different artists' work: Kara Walker, Sarah Lucas, Andrea Blum, Tony Feher, the car hoods of Richard Prince, and many others, and some of the younger artists in the "Unmonumental" show at the New Museum. I look at a lot of work.

I have a new interpretation of how post-Minimalism has now been reconfigured. I just bought a book of Christopher Wool photographs taken from the street, in black and white. And for me that's post-Minimalism. They are found objects in a sense, or situations that have no privilege of privacy, like ready-mades in the environment around us.

Rail: In your new show, how do you hope the installation of photographs of storefront windows and those of nature work will relate?

Smith: I think the photos of storefronts set up a context of flat planes and a monochrome palette. On one hand, we are reassured that we recognize what they are and also see there is something they are not telling. The trees propose a completely unexpected reality, a near chaos. They have been described as psychedelic.

CONTRIBUTOR

Eve Aschheim

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

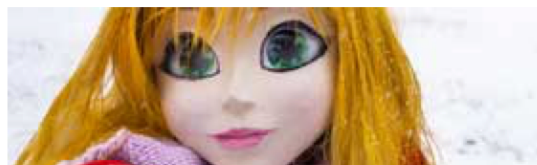
INCONVERSATION



RONA PONDICK with Phong Bui

MAR 2013 | ART

On the occasion of her forthcoming exhibit of sculptures and drawings at Sonnabend Gallery (*Rona Pondick*, March 23 – April 27, 2013) sculptor Rona Pondick welcomed publisher Phong Bui to her East Village studio to discuss her life, work, and more.



INCONVERSATION

LAURIE SIMMONS with Phong Bui

MAR 2014 | ART

While in the midst of preparation for her new exhibit *Kigurumi, Dollars and How We See* (March 7 – April 28, 2014) at Salon 94 Bowery, the artist Laurie Simmons took time to welcome publisher Phong Bui to her Tribeca loft/studio to talk about her life and work.



INCONVERSATION

MAISON EUROPEENNE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

12/1997

EXPOSITION

19.11.1997 - 08.02.1998

MAISON EUROPÉENNE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

SETON SMITH
"BLUE STAIRS"



La démarche de Seton Smith, fondre la dynamique de l'environnement dans des superpositions photographiques, n'est pas destinée à concrétiser une idée particulière ou une quelconque vérité. Ses installations incitent le spectateur à se remémorer les réverbérations du réel ou de l'imaginaire.

Être confronté à des images photographiques conventionnelles accrochées au mur et se trouver dans une pièce avec le travail de Seton Smith sont deux expériences tout à fait différentes. La façon qu'a Seton Smith de manier l'espace architectural, le paysage urbain et la nature, photographiés ou réels, appartient plus à la sculpture postmoderne qu'à la présentation photographique traditionnelle. Parce que Seton Smith n'utilise pas les matériaux de la photographie comme une entité indépendante, elle est très rigoureuse et très déterminée en ce qui concerne le positionnement de la photographie.

Son travail est souvent conçu pour être montré dans des lieux spécifiques, qui transformera l'intervention de ces éléments photographiques : à Reims la photographie d'un jardin de Champagne a été installée dans un parking, celle d'une forêt ornait les fenêtres fin de siècle de l'Opéra-Comique de Paris et du Théâtre du Casino d'Enghien-les-Bains. Ici, à la Maison Européenne de la Photographie, le visiteur se trouve entre les boîtes lumineuses et l'effet ombreux des photographies transparentes d'arbres verts montées sur les vitres donnant sur la rue François-Miron. Des escaliers, des issues et des

passages jouent un rôle considérable dans le vocabulaire photographique de l'artiste.

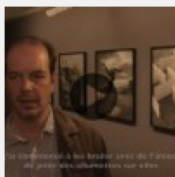
Ces éléments d'architecture, étapes transitoires, suspendent l'équilibre de ceux qui les traversent. Des images fragmentées apparaissent, figées dans des boîtes lumineuses, d'un bleu électrique, et attendent le spectateur pour réactiver sa mémoire et faire resurgir son expérience personnelle par rapport à l'espace architectural. Dans ce contexte la métaphore de la nature comme espace paisible, idyllique et protégé est mise en question. La démarche de Seton Smith, fondre la dynamique de l'environnement dans des superpositions photographiques, n'est pas destinée à concrétiser une idée particulière ou une quelconque vérité. Ses installations incitent le spectateur à se remémorer les réverbérations du réel ou de l'imaginaire.

Deborah Irmes



[Retour à la programmation](#)

KALÉIDO SCOPE



EXPOSITION

Interview de Marcos Bonisson