

## ART PAPERS

Fall 2017

### Stefan Tcherepnin: *Forgetting* Paul Anthony Smith: *Walls Without Borders*

Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta

Excerpt:

[...] Paul Anthony Smith's *Walls Without Borders* presented works that were high in labor and production value. Smith's idiosyncratic approach to art-making first involves producing or sourcing photographs from the places he has lived— sometimes these images are family snapshots, sometimes raucous disposable camera shots taken in his Brooklyn neighborhood during long, daily walks into Manhattan and back. Once scanned, reworked, and broken down into new collages via Photoshop, Smith then prints these new hybrid pictures, and meticulously etches their surfaces, transforming these deeply personal, almost scrapbook-like images with elaborate geometric patterns reminiscent of quilts or brick walls. This picotage technique creates a screen over his photographs, protecting or disguising the layers between the subject and viewer of the work, and allowing Smith to both share and withhold his personal experiences.

Exhibited behind glass in neat frames, these works nonetheless maintain the obsessive, even frenetic energy of their making, and perhaps of the scenes depicted therein. Bits of paper and shards of images dust the bottom of the inside of the frame like white flecks on the floor of a dormant snow globe. Architectural memory and urban development are leitmotifs throughout Smith's works as they record the rapid gentrification of the artist's home country (Jamaica) and home borough (Brooklyn) by tracing the ubiquitous, stark patterns of bricks and building walls, or the decorative ironwork typical of both locales. The building materials and architectural forms present in *Walls Without Borders* become signifiers of identity and memory in an exhibition whose very title alludes to the transcendence of these things—that is, to the ability of the essence of a person or place to move unrestricted by boundaries, simply through recollection. Through his picotage, Smith seems to propose that we perforate the walls that enclose our environments and movements, and ask architecture to perform with the flexibility of memory, to become fluid so as to better slip the restraints of the class difference and structural racism built into our cities' plans. Would such a liquid architecture cause landlords and developers to morph, or to disappear? I would hope so.

– Erin Jane Nelson



Above: Paul Anthony Smith, *Blurred Lines, (Beads3) Black/Olive Green*, 2017, Oil stick on canvas with acrylic beads, 96 x 66 x 8 inches [courtesy of the artist and Atlanta Contemporary]

ZIEHERSMITH  
ARTNEWS

Castles for the Afterlife: The Coffins of Paa Joe Make Their Way from Ghana to New York

BY *Robin Scher* - POSTED 08/22/17



Installation view of the “The Coffins of Paa Joe and the Pursuit of Happiness” at the School | Jack Shainman Gallery, Kinderhook, New York. - COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

*Excerpt:*

[...] And there is fine arrangement in another room of various antique African and Asian wooden masks used for ritual and decoration, a photograph of Nan Goldin shrouded in shadow, titled *Self Portrait at Age 18* (1970), and Paul Anthony Smith's *Giant Steps* (2016), which presents an enlarged photograph of a woman in the midst of a carnival parade, distorted by an etching technique typical of the young New York-based artist.

The expansive display [...] evinces a deep love for collecting art, and it embodies, in Shainman's words, “man's quest for wanting to better ourselves for achievements, for spirituality, for questions, answers, and a kind of greatness.”

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# HYPERALLERGIC

## How to Embed a Shout: A New Generation of Black Artists Contends with Abstraction

A new wave of black abstract artists are exploring ways to push the language of abstraction and still retaining their cultural specificity. And they're not doing it alone.

Seph Rodney – August 23, 2017

*Excerpt:*



Paul Anthony Smith, "Afternoon Brew" (2016) 95 x 48 inches  
(photo courtesy ZieherSmith Gallery, New York)

[...] Several black artists have risen to prominence by resolutely working with the black figure, shifting it from the margins of culture. Kerry James Marshall, Fred Wilson, Kara Walker, Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, Chris Ofili, and Jordan Casteel have all championed the black body, reinserting it into the art histories from which it had been excised. [Tomashi] Jackson tells me that this work "let's us be physically alive in a world that is constantly trying to disappear us." For this gift, she says she is glad to be among a "generational cohort that I love and respect." At the same time she acknowledges, "What I see in the market is a desire for black figuration, blunt and blatant figuration." This mode of presentation does make the black body visible and esteemed. However, [Tariku] Shiferaw, Jackson, and [Adam] Pendleton have taken a divergent, strategic approach in which, as Jackson tells me, the body is implicit, but these artists carefully calibrate how and under what conditions it is seen. It is not for ready consumption. This body will not provide sustenance for appetites desiring the exotic, the sumptuous ethnic flesh that in the larger culture is as much longed for as it is held in contempt.

Other artists have work that aligns with this wave, including [Paul Anthony Smith](#), a 29-year-old artist born in Jamaica but raised in Miami, whose photo-based works, shown at [ZieherSmith gallery](#) utilized images of black people in a parade underneath a scrim of pointillist geometric patterns, and they derive their titles from classic jazz albums [...]

# ZIEHERSMITH

Creators **VICE**



Images courtesy of ZieherSmith, NY

## THIS ARTIST RECREATES MEMORIES WITH PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLAGE

LAURA HUTSON HUNTER - Jun 27 2017, 2:26pm

Paul Anthony Smith turns photographs into pointillist representations of social constructs.

By working with many metaphorical layers, artist Paul Anthony Smith turns simple photos into chill-wave diamond patterns on fever-dream seascapes, faces that look like [African cowrie shell masks](#), and [chain-link fences](#), [cinderblocks](#), and [door-bead curtains](#) made from multicolored plastic gemstones. His method is an idiosyncratic process he calls *picotage*, and it's something he developed in his childhood in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica.

"I grew up looking at family photos" Smith tells *Creators* from his studio in Williamsburg, "and later on used my ceramic tools on photos that constructed something new." He takes the same hand tool ceramicists use to cut shapes into clay and tears tiny, rhythmic spots into the surface of a photograph, lifting it just enough to obstruct the image without actually removing it. The result is a pointillist photograph that functions like collage, but instead of adding images, Smith's method subtracts from them.



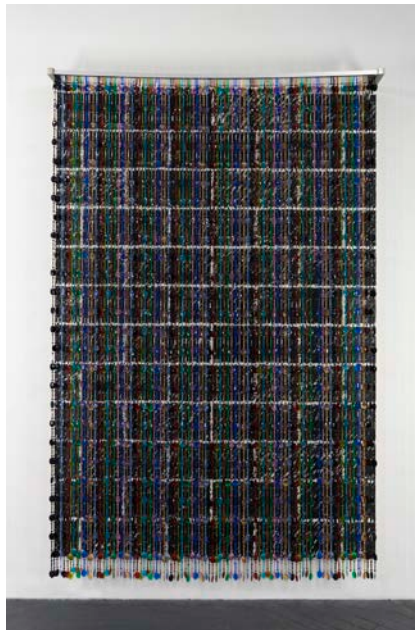
*Nostrand*, 2016 unique picotage on Inkjet print 48 x 71 in (121.9 x 180.3 cm)

# ZIEHERSMITH

"The items in photographs acts as an engine, directing the work to its final stage," says Smith, who compares his art making process to a dance. "Often times I aim to disguise certain subjects—unlike what modern photography was constructed to do, revealing and capturing moments in time."

In the past, Smith's work has covered faces with mask-like patterns, references to African scarification and ritual magic. For a new series of works currently on view at Atlanta Contemporary, Smith has pared his conceptual palette down from masks to walls, a change that shows Smith's capacity for artistic evolution while staying true to his conceptual foundations. He moves from masks, which obstruct personal identities, to walls, which obstruct social landscapes.

"For years I've been interested in cinder blocks and walls," Smith says, "and how they create social structures. I've also been interested in the ways images are read, when memory becomes broken and fragmented." The works not only show photographs of walls, but also cinderblock patterns carved into the surface of photos of Smith's Jamaican homeland and photos of crowds that seem unremarkable, if it weren't for the time-consuming remnants of Smith's *picotage* layer.



*Blurred Lines, (Beads2) Multi-Colored*, 2017 Oil sticks on Canvas with Beads 96 x 66 x 8 in (243.8 x 167.6 x 20.3 cm)

*Nostrand*, an inkjet pigment print from 2016, captures a graffiti-covered plywood construction wall, a storefront gate, and an orange-and-white striped traffic barrier covered with Smith's cinderblock *picotage* pattern. The repetitive nature of his technique evokes the obsessive quality often seen in outsider art, and turns what would otherwise be an unremarkable image into a cohesive vision of how memory works, and how personal histories color reality.

"We all have time when we create walls to restrict others but don't necessarily need borders," Smith says. "Often times it's a fear. We're afraid of the unknown."

The Paul Anthony Smith exhibition *Walls Without Borders* is on view through July 30 at Atlanta Contemporary. To learn more about the artist, [click here](#).



## Review: Atlanta Contemporary's trio of thoughtful exhibitions by Smith, Braunig and Gary

Catherine Fox - May 9, 2017



*Excerpt:*

[...] Smith emigrated from Jamaica to the U.S. at age nine, and the show's title, *Walls without Borders*, alludes to the immigrant's conflicted relationship with homeland and new country — that sense of belonging to both cultures, and neither. In a wall text, the New York-based artist also invokes W.E.B. Du Bois' "double consciousness," a term coined to describe the similarly fraught experience of being Black and American. Although thoughts about current events or experiences may prompt a particular piece, a will to acknowledge his overlapping African, Caribbean and American selves seems to be a subtext of the three major bodies of mixed-media works at the Contemporary.

In-betweenness is also embodied in the multiple meanings of recurring imagery. Walls obstruct and protect. Masks can hide and constrain, like the ingratiating social face African Americans wear in Paul Dunbar's 1913 poem, "We Wear the Mask." But they also allow a liberating anonymity and, as with the case of masks in African rituals, even transcendence.

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Smith takes a different direction in the most recent series. In *Blurred Lines*, strings of beads curtain a canvas painted in rich scribbly black marks to masonry wall. Making for a lovely effect, the beads, which vary in hue from piece to piece, shimmer in light and move with air currents. He notes they are used to separate spaces in Jamaican homes and that the sound they make alerts occupants that someone is entering: walls without borders. Here, they beckon but part to reveal a dead end.

Smith's pithy merging of form and content, command of his materials and ability to find the universal in the personal make him an artist to watch [...]

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**artnet**<sup>®</sup>

## The Story Behind RAGGA NYC, The Caribbean Queer Collective Seizing the Spotlight at the New Museum

*The group is fostering a creative community of dynamic and talented people.*

Terence Trouillot, May 4, 2017

*me: oh ok... so, ma, my friend chris has a group—let's say, called RAGGA*

*mami: RAGGA?*

*me: uh-huh. he's jamaican, he throws parties and interviews people from the caribbean that are from the lgbt community, he asks them: where they're from, how has their culture inspired their work, the connection between their work and their culture—and things like that... so he hired me for a party and interviewed me as well. that came out a couple of months ago. i was talking about how i felt as a dominican coming to the US after having lived in Santo Domingo for 6 or 7 years... and just about being dominican and how i felt about looking mixed, you understand?*

This is artist Maya Monès talking to her mother. The conversation, originally in Spanish, is available to listen to as an audio recording (or read as a translated transcript) as part of a group exhibition at the New Museum, "[RAGGA NYC: All the threatened and delicious things joining one another](#)," part of the Bowery institution's just-opened fleet of spring shows (which also include [Carol Rama](#) and [Lynette Yiadom-Boakye](#)). Monès's quote gives a glimpse of the community-building behind RAGGA, a loosely connected network of artists, poets, and designers that serves as both a creative group and support network for queer artists from a Caribbean background.



Paul Anthony Smith, Port Antonio Market #4, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Zieher Smith

The "friend Chris," mentioned in Monès's dialogue, is multi-disciplinary artist [Christopher Udemezue](#) (Neon Christina), the artist and impresario who founded [RAGGA NYC](#) in 2015. (The name comes from the voltaic musical genre that originated in 1980s Jamaica.)

In a dynamic exhibition brochure, Udemezue gives his own picture of the ferment that brought the group together. RAGGA, he says, represents "a hybrid of ideas that began as late-night conversations over familial island roots, current social politics, empanadas vs. beef patties, pum pum shorts, scamming, and a longing for an authentic dancehall party that would also provide a safe space for queer Caribbeans and their kin."

The two-part sound installation that makes up Monès's piece, *Ciencias Sociales* (2017), mirrors this lively mix of concerns.

It includes intimate audio of Monès talking to her mom, revealing how her art practice functions as a way of thinking through her African heritage as a Dominican woman. Their dialogue plunges deep into a candid discussion about the rampant racism in Dominican culture against their Haitian



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neighbors, and their own African roots—what the artist calls a “cloudy sense of pride in a sort of racial limbo.”

But, at the same time, *Ciencias Sociales* foregrounds the artist’s ambient music, a song she recorded with conga drums called *Mami*, filling the gallery with melodic Afro-Caribbean beats.

Curated by Sara O’Keeffe for the New Museum’s residency program, the exhibition gives a sampling of the creativity marshaled by the RAGGA network. Multivalent in style, the show reflects the group’s emphasis on celebrating diversity, and its determination to wrestle with the racial complexities of Caribbean consciousness.

Highlights include the sculptures of Renée Stout and Tau Lewis. Both look at creole traditions in the US. Stout’s work recalls the advertising signs of root medicine shops in New Orleans and DC, while Lewis offers an affecting marble portrait bust, presented on a plinth of cinder blocks, and with chains for hair. (The material is meant as a nod to so-called “creole marble,” mined in Pickens, Georgia, and incorporated into monuments across the country.)

Paul Anthony Smith’s prints use a process called ‘picotage,’ a kind of pointillism where the points are torn or scratched off the surface of the work to create a textured pattern of white hatch marks. The artists also selects from his “Grey Area” series, silkscreen prints, reminiscent of Lorna Simpson, of scattered images of men he encountered in Jamaica at the time of this uncle’s funeral, with images of burial grounds.

Udemezue’s own contribution are colorful set-up photos, imaginatively re-staging the Vodou ceremony at Bois Caiman, which marked the Haitian revolution, and depicting Queen Nanny, an Obeah woman who fled from slavery in Jamaica and became the leader of the group of escaped slaves known as the Maroons.

*Chaos-monde* (2017), a collaboration between RAGGA artists Carolyn Lazard and Bleue Liverpool, incorporates an astrological map. A set of totems places on the map’s surface include leaves, sand, shells, and dried sugarcane, items that suggest Caribbean religious practice, which has been so important in claiming an identity in the face of both Christian missionaries and colonialism. The specific positions of these markers on the star map point to two days important in the assertion of Caribbean identity: January 1, 1804, the day independence was declared in Haiti, and October 27, 1979, the day St. Vincent gained independence.

The trick of the installation is that all this symbolically resonant stuff is barely visible, viewed only through a trap door in the floor that only lets you see fragments—a fitting metaphor for identities only now coming into view in shows like this one.

*“RAGGA: All the threatened and delicious things joining one another” is on view at the New Museum, New York, from May 3 to June 25, 2017.*



Paul Anthony Smith, *Grey Area #5*, 2014. Courtesy the artist and Zieher Smith.

ZIEHERSMITH



*All the Threatened and Delicious Things Joining One Another*  
by Magdalyn Asimakis

RAGGA NYC

THE NEW MUSEUM | MAY 3 – JUNE 25, 2017

In Édouard Glissant's book *Poetics of Relation*, first published in 1990, he considers the idea of opacity as something that can nurture relations between “all the threatened and delicious things.” In contrast to articulated transparency, opacity creates space for complex, diverse and non-fixed existence.<sup>1</sup> It is in this spirit that the exhibition on the fifth floor of the New Museum takes its title. *All the threatened and delicious things joining one another* puts Glissant's concept of opacity into practice through the works of artists from the RAGGA collective. Each engaging in distinctive practices, the artists included in this exhibition are presented in a manner that protects both collectivity and difference.

The first encounter in the exhibition is with the work of Tau Lewis. A sculptural bust portrait called *Georgia marble marks slave burial sites across America* in plaster and cement with heavy chained hair is positioned with her back to two cacti from Lewis's “poorly potted plants” series. Made from the dust generated during the production of *Georgia*, the cacti grow out of cinder blocks, their spines made of delicate milk thistle and dandelion. The weight of the cement counters this foliage both in vulnerability and mobility—prominent themes of tension in Lewis's contemplation of the diasporic condition. The cacti in particular gesture to this as plants that have been removed from their native environments and continue to flourish, while the cinder blocks both allude to temporary residence and negating the need for museum structures of display.

Through a hand-dyed, tassled room divider, *The Rootworker's Table* by Renée Stout is teeming with spiritual potency. A mix of hand-blown and found glass bottles house natural elixirs used in root medicine shops, at once reference and reconfigure West African, Caribbean, and American mystical practices and Western modernism. In a poetic curatorial play on the spiritual remedies that Stout explores, Carolyn Lazard and Bleue

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Liverpool's *Chaos-Monde* cuts into the floor of the museum and creates an astrological map beneath an opaque piece of Plexiglas. Made of natural materials such as leaves, sand, and dried sugarcane, these forms recreate the arrangement of the stars on January 1, 1804—the date of the Haitian Revolution—and October 27, 1979—the day St. Vincent and Grenadines gained independence. The simultaneous physical penetration of this work into the museum structure and its resistance to transparent visibility makes it one of the most poignant articulations of Glissant's theories.

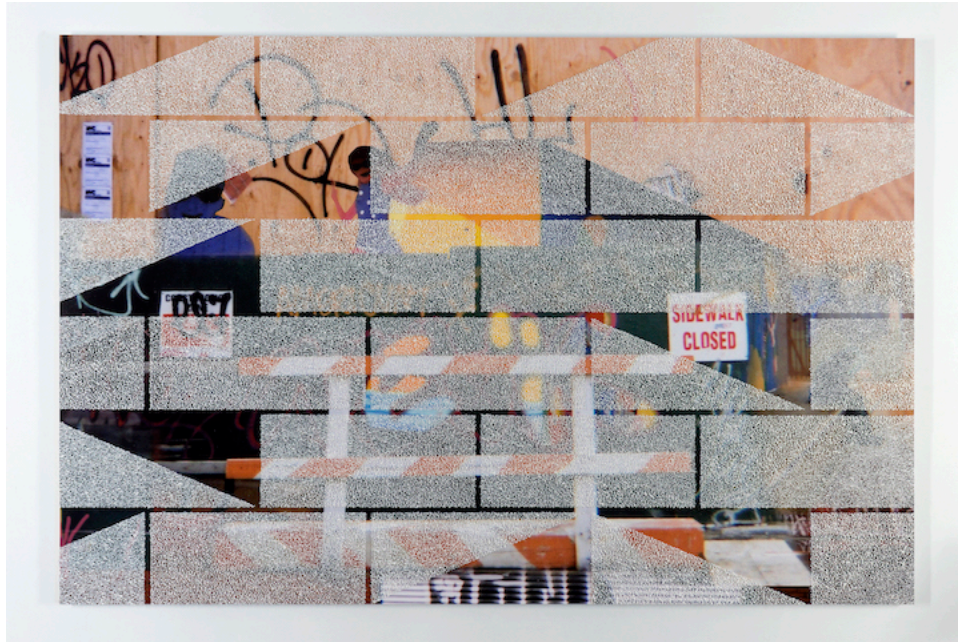
Glissant's writing conceptually threads its way through the exhibition not only through the idea of opacity and the "relational poetics" of Caribbean culture as an organism of local historical and contemporary elements, but also in the common interests between himself and the artists presented. Christopher Udemezue's photographs, for example, depict staged scenes of Queen Nanny the Jamaican leader of the Maroons. A group of escaped slaves who created their own refugee communities and raided plantations, the Maroons' consistent resistance against colonial structure and action is reflected in these spiritually opulent color photographs. Glissant was very interested in the changing representation of the Maroons over time, and thought of them as *Negators*—those who refuse the values of colonialism. Paul Anthony Smith's "Grey Area" series of silkscreens collage photographs of his acquaintances in Jamaica collapse time and memory into constellations of interrelated lives and impressions, further obscured through the monochromatic printmaking technique. In both the "Grey Area" and picotage works—a laborious technique in which the artist stipples the paper surface—Smith explores the protective aspects of opacity in the visible sense.

Ambiently throughout the exhibition, Maya Monès's captivating sound piece *Ciencias Sociales* fills the space with recordings of conversations she had with her mother mixed with her playing conga drums. The two women have a series of discussions that pivot around their African heritage and Dominican location. The dynamics of this transcultural dialogue fill the space audibly and conceptually, the emphasis on language crystalized in the appended reading room. In many ways this piece connects the dialogues of the exhibiting artists, and its presence throughout the space echoes the collectivity of RAGGA and the potential of Glissant's opacity.

ZIEHERSMITH  
ARTNEWS

FACE VALUE: PAUL ANTHONY SMITH ON HIS  
MANY MASKS

BY *Robin Scher* - POSTED 09/13/16 11:52 AM



Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled 2*, 2016, unique picotage on inkjet print.

COURTESY ZIEHERSMITH

Scores of costumed children ran around me, screaming, as I made my way through the Hasidic area of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to meet the artist Paul Anthony Smith at his studio a few months ago. They were dressed as doctors, animals, and, bizarrely, SWAT team members. On that sunny afternoon, the harvest festival of Purim was afoot.

Incidentally, the work that Smith makes, which I was on my way to see, is also rooted in disguise. Twenty-eight, and born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, he adorns people in found photographs, both personal and historical, with intricate, iridescent masks, using a ceramic needle tool. The laborious etching process, borrowed from an 18th-century French technique of making patterned holes on images, goes by the term picotage.

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In the past Smith has likened the results of his pictage to “scarification,” and indeed this ancient practice of permanently marking one’s skin resembles Smith’s work in both both process and form. Typically, the result sees Smith’s subjects covered in speckled constellations which often completely shroud their appearance.

A fine example of this work, *Masked Woman No. 3 (2013)*, is on view in the Brooklyn Museum’s show “Disguise: Masks and Global African Art” through Sunday, September 18, an appearance that comes after recent solo shows in Milan and New York.

Smith’s interest in disguise began in 2010 when he performed with the artist Nick Cave at the Kansas City Arts Institute. Wearing one of Cave’s inimitable masks, Smith had an insight into the potential that disguises hold for revealing people’s hidden natures. “You get this spirit, nobody knows who you are, it comes with this sort of power,” Smith said.



This was in 2012, and Smith had up until then spent his time focusing on ceramics at the Kansas City Arts Institute in Missouri. During this period he was also working as an archivist at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Digitizingimages from the Hallmark photographic collection. Having grown tired of “all the dust” from ceramics, and surrounded by photographs, Smith came upon his tactile approach to image making.

The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie II was the first to fall victim to Smith’s needle. “I wanted to rough it up,” said Smith, referring to an iconic photograph he used of the emperor taken during his historic visit to Jamaica in 1966. Smith’s impulse led him to tear the photograph’s surface in a consistent pattern, forming a sort of static. Many Rastafarians considered Selassie to be the messiah. Distorting the emperor’s visage, Smith saw his action as an attempt “to cover up this idea [of history] that you’re brought up with.”

Smith explained this all to me in an excitable, yet relaxed manner as he paced his brightly-lit studio, wearing an Adidas sweater, track pants, and a cap, and then told me more about his upbringing.

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Smith spent the first nine years of his life in Jamaica, and then moved to Miami with his family. He has returned to the country only a handful of times since. Although he said that he would easily come to assimilate into his new home, each visit to Jamaica reminded him of his semi-interloper status in both countries.

On a trip back in 2011, for instance, Smith noticed a group of workers on the airport tarmac. Something in the worker's relaxed appearance and the contrasting uniform of reflective vests paired with white collared shirts appealed to Smith. It felt both familiar and foreign. He photographed the workers, later turning them into painted prints during a residency in Colorado. "I grew up in the working class, so I have a lot of respect for them," said Smith, who depicted the workers with minimal facial details—his first venture into portraiture through obfuscation.

The inspiration for the masked portrait hanging in the Brooklyn Museum came from the Kuba tribe of the Democratic Republic of Congo. "It's about the history of the strength of woman, but also their downfalls," said Smith. "It was a way for me to show the struggles of life, but through that reveal another greatness."

Underneath the mask is a photograph of his mother. "She would send me a picture every year and a half or so," he said, explaining that he blew up one of these to make the work. "I haven't lived with my mom since I was nine. She lives in the U.K. and I try to visit her once in awhile, so those images kept me up with her and I wanted to turn them into something." And so he applied that extra layer to her face, making her unrecognizable to all but the artist himself, personalizing her but also obscuring her—a fact that brought to mind something he had told me earlier in the visit: "I've been thinking a lot about how memory acts as a surrogate for reality."

## alphasixty

### *In the Studio with Paul Anthony Smith*

Jenny Bahn  
Photos by Atisha Paulson  
Mar. 22, 2017

*Excerpt:*

Paul Anthony Smith's exteriors often work to direct a viewer to his subject's hidden inner core, if only to speculate, dream, wonder. Whether it's the manipulated surface of a photograph or the blocky lines in an oil painting, Smith's attention to the outer-facing begs the question: *What lies beneath?* It's a more roundabout meditation on identity, more abstract than on-the-nose. As Smith once put it himself, "Masks disguise the figure allowing them to be free."

Jamaica born and Brooklyn based, Smith's work—from his paintings to his ceramics to his photographs—mines themes like history, politics, and class struggles. There is often an element of looking back, whether that be at his own heritage or of the country of his birth. Smith moved to Miami with his family when he was just nine years old. Later, Smith landed at Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri, where his focus on ceramics began to wane in favor of a curious and long-forgotten technique for which he would become best known: picotage.



Using a ceramic needle, Smith picks and plucks at the surface of his photographs. The picotage method, which Smith uses to effectively maim an image until it practically shimmers, is borrowed from 18th century France. The result is gorgeous images full of disguise, often lending his everyday subjects a pomp and grandeur they are too often not afforded in real life. It's a theme that continues throughout Smith's work, no matter the medium he chooses to use. He urges you to look deeper [...]

## ARTILLERY

### PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

ZieherSmith Gallery

by Arthur Ivan Bravo - March 7, 2017

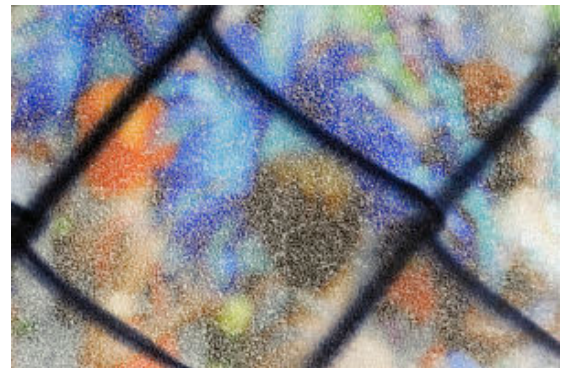


Paul Anthony Smith's third solo exhibition at ZieherSmith represents an ultimately fruitful distillation, apparently in both the methods of his practice, and subsequently in the visual nature of the roughly dozen works that make it up. "Procession," as Smith's latest collection of works is titled, features the practices and mediums, visuals and themes that have characterized his art; however, in a welcome provocative development, it also finds him honing aspects of his practice.

Smith has long mined the Jamaica of his childhood and family—alongside his identity as an American and immigrant—and of his imagination, for inspiration in his paintings, prints and other multimedia works. Likewise, he has more often than not distorted and obscured what he has chosen to depict, and then layered over, overlapped or applied upon these already rich images from a limited set of patterns, themselves evocative of either scarification and the Kuba stylings of the African Congo, or physical boundaries such as cinder brick walls. These patterns have been created mostly through Smith's trademark method of "picotage," inspired by an 18th-century French practice associated with textile arts, in which he utilizes a ceramic tool to laboriously pick away at and from the surface layer of his photographic prints. The resulting effects can mean different things

to different people: decorative, damaged, shimmering; to me they looked like tiny dabs of white paint, meticulously and strategically applied and arranged.

For "Procession," Smith has focused on particular aspects of his practice even as he has transcended its boundaries. The locations and events the photographs which make up the 'body' of the exhibition were taken in and of—Vieques, Puerto Rico, and Brooklyn's 2016 West Indian Day Parade—suggest Smith's geographical and cultural interests expanding beyond Jamaica, towards the pan- or diasporic Afro-Caribbean world. In works citing Miles Davis and John Coltrane compositions, for example *Kind Of Blue I and II* (2016), which consist of blurred picturesque tropical snapshots picotaged with abstract brick wall patterns, nature now shares as much visual representation as the human subjects that have always interested Smith; other works, like *Giant Steps, So What, and Afternoon Brew* (all 2016), all of which impose Caribbean carnival scenes onto those of tropical-esque nature, centering on female dancers, introduce a newfound enthusiasm for the kaleidoscopic. In all of the aforementioned works too, Smith is found to have further mastered and refined his picotage process, effecting a heightened juxtaposition between abstract and more figurative elements.



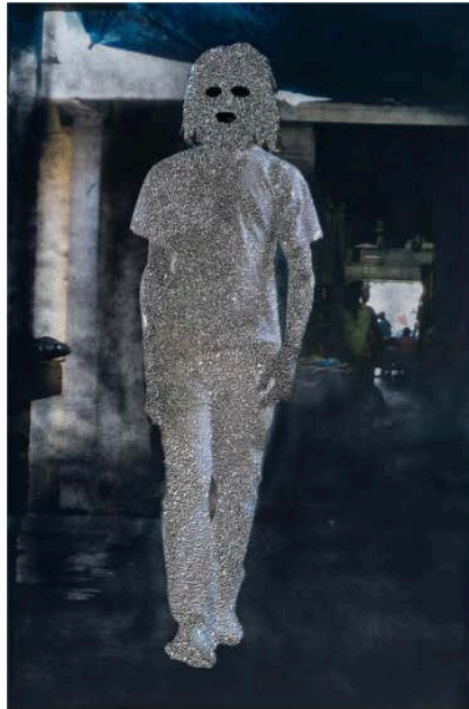
Alongside his continued employment of brick wall imagery, representative of boundaries, Smith has introduced that of chain-link fencing on works such as 'Manhood,' and in the 6-part 'Blurr' series, where images of scenes are obscured to unrecognizability, becoming compositions of color, glimpsed through a pattern spray-painted in the style of said fencing. Collectively, Smith's receptiveness to new locales—both literally and conceptually, and the maturation of his unique methods and skills, all herald an artist coming into his own, all while in the thick of developing his practice.



# The New York Times

## Review: 'A Curious Blindness' at Wallach Art Gallery

By HOLLAND COTTER MAY 7, 2015



Paul Anthony Smith's "Port Antonio Market #3" (2013)

If, as it is sometimes said, we live in a postracial era, why are reports about race and racial conflict in the news every day? This is more or less the question asked by three students in the critical and curatorial studies program at Columbia University — Vivian Chui, Tara Kuruvilla and Doris Zhao — in a cogent group exhibition called "A Curious Blindness." The show brings together 18 young artists focusing on the functional fantasies that revolve around race and the purported colorblindness it engenders.... One of this exhibition's great strengths is that much of the art is not easy to parse. By scraping and painting photographs, Paul Anthony Smith turns people in his hometown, Port Antonio, Jamaica, into clouds of scintillation.... This is a beautiful thing.

A version of this review appears in print on May 8, 2015, on page C22 of the New York edition with the headline: 'A Curious Blindness'.

# ZIEHERSMITH

# DETAILS

Thursday, July 09, 2015

## 8 Emerging Artists to Watch Right Now

Remember these names—you'll be hearing a lot more about these up-and-comers soon enough.

BY **MAXWELL WILLIAMS**



### **Paul Anthony Smith**

**AGE:** 27

**MEDIA:** Photographs scored to obscure the identities of their subjects; gauzy paintings of Jamaican laborers

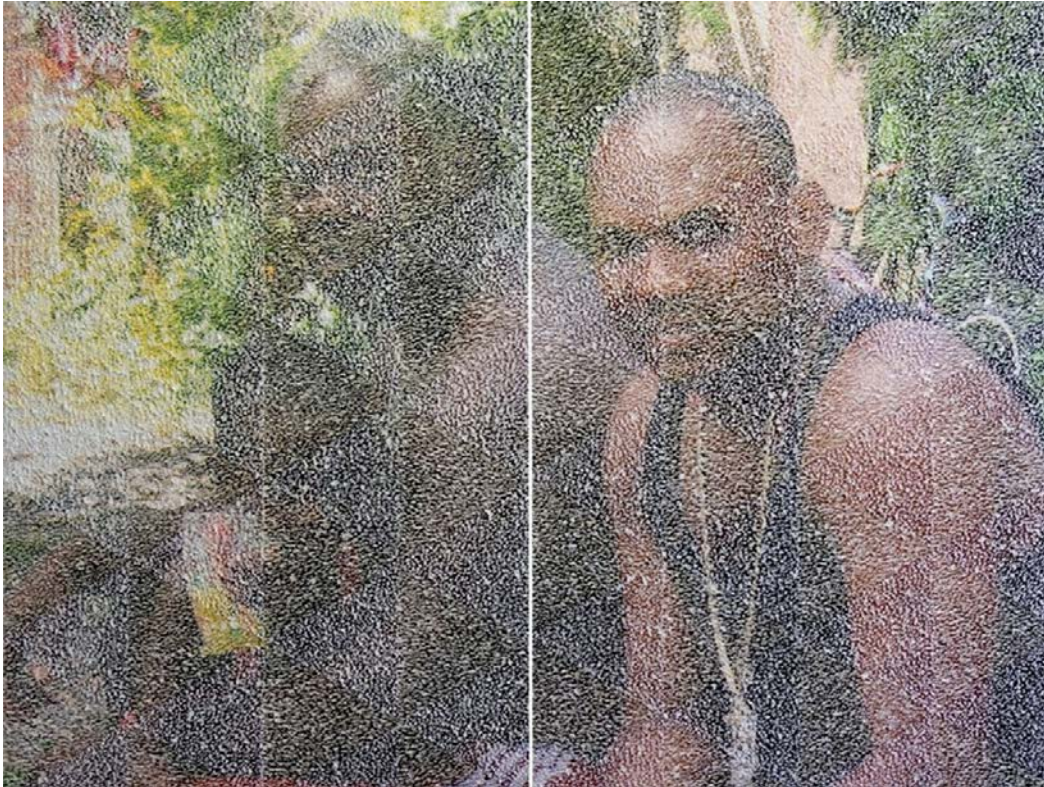
**BONA FIDES:** Represented by **Zieher Smith & Horton** in New York, where his works fetch up to \$12,000; included in numerous museums' permanent collections

**BACKSTORY:** Every couple of years, Smith travels from his base in New York City to his childhood home of Port Antonio, Jamaica, where he takes photos of the working-class locals. But he's not a photographer, per se; he either paints over the prints or turns them into "picotages," pricking hundreds of tiny holes in the surface. The resulting works—which the *New York Times* described as "clouds of scintillation"—look like still pictures beamed over a staticky television set. "I'm re-pixelating the image," he says. "With these photos, you don't know the complete story. I'm only showing you the idea and disguising the figures." The process and subject matter reveal the influence of art from the African diaspora. "Paul is a cut-and-mix creator—his painting-picotage aesthetic negotiates political and social inequities," says Erika Dalya Massaquoi, who included Smith in the traveling group show "Disguise: Masks & Global African Art," which visits the **Brooklyn Museum of Art** next year. This focus on the black experience and his Jamaican heritage is a running theme in Smith's work. "I don't know if it's something I'm always going to explore," he says. "But I yearn to know what I was destined to do if I'd stayed there. It's kind of a missed connection."

# ZIEHERSMITH



June 5, 2015



## *Summer Reading*

**When:** June 18-27 2015

Zieher Smith & Horton, the gallery in New York's Chelsea neighborhood that has hosted pop-up exhibits in town for the past few years, is bringing *Summer Reading* to a late 19th century building in downtown Nashville for one week only. Alongside work by Nashville-based artists like Karen Seapker and Vadis Turner, the exhibit includes work by Hope Gangloff, Rachel Owens, Allison Schulnik and Paul Anthony Smith. Smith makes work that is completely different from just about everything I've ever seen. His technique involves large-scale photographs, typically shot during his trips to his native Jamaica, which he picks at with a tool just enough to lift the surface of the photograph and displace it without removing it completely. He repeats this method meticulously until the photograph is patterned with geometric forms and looks like pointillism from a distance. Zieher Smith & Horton's pop-ups have typically been a highlight of Nashville's summer calendar among art collectors, students and just about anyone with eyes. Don't miss it.  
LAURA HUTSON



## Skin Deep

by William Corwin - JULY 15TH, 2014

PERLE FINE: WIDE TO THE WIND  
MCCORMICK GALLERY, CHICAGO | MAY 2 - JUNE 14, 2014

PAUL ANTHONY SMITH: MANGOS AND CRAB  
CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY, CHICAGO | MAY 3 - JUNE 28, 2014

Perle Fine was a great but under-recognized Abstract Expressionist painter; Paul Anthony Smith is a painter, originally from Jamaica, who recently moved from Kansas City to Bushwick. Their innovations in the art of manipulating the form and surface of paper make them odd but not unwilling bedfellows.

The epithet “work on paper” has come to represent a catch-all phrase, one which spans the vast continent of “prints and drawings” and just about any of the small, hard-to-pin-down islands that resist traditional ideas of drawing but are definitely paper-related. Both of these artists draw, but in their strongest works, they assemble or deconstruct form via the material of paper itself.

Fine’s swirling, folded, and laminated collages exude a desire to amp-up painting just a notch—not to mid-career Stella—but to a point where the illusion of shadow and thickness achieves a marginal reality and literal presence. Similarly, but inversely, Smith’s self-styled *Picotage* technique of working into the surface of large format photographic prints yields a blurred, abstract, and symbolist re-reading of what might be considered the incontrovertible authenticity of a photograph.

Picotage is a method of pricking a surface in order to create pattern. It generally applies to fabric but by applying it to photographs, Smith applies the technique metaphorically to his subjects as well as his images, moving beyond merely scoring the surface for highlighting purposes. His portraits, taken at home in Port Antonio, Jamaica, one year ago are, for the most part, chest level photographs of men. The glossy pigmented surface of the paper has been torn into, turning up countless little flayed chads and creating a field of tiny delicate fingers of paper. The surface intervention is largely consistent over the surface of the image yielding an impression of static; the artist has set up a barrier between the viewer and his subjects. In “Untitled 01” (2014), Smith creates great effect with slight gestures: rubbing away small sections of the print; highlighting the silhouette of a shoulder; delineating the top of a head by doing nothing at all. Smith similarly emphasizes the eyes and mouth of his main subject, a man, by leaving his eye-sockets and lips dark, transmogrifying him into a mask. “Untitled 07” (2014), adjacent to 01, is the reverse, with bulging eyes and whited-out mouth—a vaguely threatening cartoon-like figure. Smith makes the men, who are black, white, superficially painting them with white dots and forcing us to register both readings simultaneously. Picotage becomes the spell of the magician and the historian in the same stroke—resurfacing the reality of the photograph with a colonial patina that is both stereotypical and stereotyper.

Perle Fine situated her jumping-off point as a re-reading and re-imagining of the major art innovations of the first half of the 20th century, which, when the works in this exhibition were originally made in the late '50s, was a personal reassessment, rather than an academic or historicist

# ZIEHERSMITH

exercise. Fine's etchings present themselves as an over-dinner conversation with Klee, Miro, and Kandinsky: "Weather Vane" (1944) is a work of dramatic contrasts wherein the fragile lines of the drawing are almost overpowered by the sheer absence of ink, while shadowy clouds of residual darkness around the edges and corners have a menacing effect. Later drawings, on the other hand, seem to be a discussion over digestifs with de Kooning and the early work of Guston, among other AbEx artists—her then contemporaries. "Wide to the Wind" (1955), Fine's woodcut from which the show draws its name, utilizes the swooping cyclical motion of the etchings and also points towards the open topographical quality of the drawings from the 1957–58, but its use of irregular and interlocking forms demonstrates the artist's place as an abstract Expressionist innovator. The various forms of "Wide to the Wind" weave and navigate around each other, casting shadows and leaving outlines of themselves in their muted colors—form and void become interchangeable.

"Encounter aka Brouhaha 3" (1959) presents these forms liberated while pasted to a blue paper background. The appliqué method here is not merely a trite means of generating false volume—the cutouts are avowedly flat—but the collage has given them the opportunity to react and critique their surroundings. They leave imprints on the blue field like snow angels, referencing themselves, refusing to engage in pattern or repetition. The blue cut-outs of "Brouhaha" fold and flip-over, revealing a white background and mocking the act of painting itself. In "Curses" (1959), a looming black form like the shape of a bomber or destroyer sits uncomfortable on a bed of writing. Sharp white tooth-like paper cutouts are accentuated by black charcoal lines, but for the most part, Fine relies on the thickness of the paper to define her shifting forms.

Despite their extensive use of paper, both Fine and Smith consider(ed) painting to be their primary medium, as much based on artificial art hierarchies as an artist's aspirations. The institution of painting no longer outranks drawing and paper based works, especially in the face of conceptual art and the delegated fabrication of work taking place in the contemporary artists practice. This added wiggle room, afforded when an artist doesn't feel the world is looking over her/his shoulder, often allows for production that rivals more serious and finished work in its innovative capabilities. As a result, the works in these two exhibitions equally contends with each artist's larger painted canvases, both in their originality and execution.

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July/August 2014 Review



CHICAGO

**Paul Anthony Smith: "Mangos and Crab"**  
at Carrie Secrist Gallery

Jamaican-born, Brooklyn-based artist Paul Anthony Smith has become known for a technique he calls "picotage," in which he uses a sharp ceramicist's tool to pick and tear at the surface of a photograph, pulling up the white paper from beneath the glossy surface. From a distance, the effect of this process appears as if glitter or flocking has been strategically adhered to the photo's surface, but up close, this laborious action is not additive, but delicately destructive. Equally as significant as how this effect is administered, is onto what type of imagery it is applied. Each of these intricately torn photographs is a portrait of an average Jamaican citizen, their faces carefully disguised by flecks of picked paper. Immediately imparted in a series of untitled picotage portraits are undertones of the history of racism; the sitters' identities and individualism are dissolved through the repetitive picking pattern, and their dark skin is overtaken with the unnatural white of the paper. This manipulation of complexions also nods to the controversial trend of skin bleaching, popular among many Jamaicans. However, countering these troubling associations are positive ones as well. Smith cites the picotage process as a reference to coming-of-age tattooing and scarification traditions, while several of the portraits feature picotage patterning that highlights eye sockets and mouths—subtle, formal nods to traditional Jamaican tribal masks. In these works, Smith's masking alternates deftly between the suppression and the power inherent in anonymity.

Where the picotage works are highly detailed, Smith's oil on canvas works in this exhibition are simple and graphic. In his paintings, Smith's interest in depicting average Jamaicans takes the form of airport workers. In several small paintings that share the title *44.2258° N, 76.5967° W*, Smith isolates the reflective, striped vests worn by those who work on the runways. These small works are flat and formal, supplementary to *004 TARMAC*, the most powerful piece in the exhibition. Here, four employees are casually gathered beneath the shadow of an airplane wing, and unlike the sitters of the picotage photographs, viewers can see the unique features of this painting's subjects. These figures are depicted from a vantage point slightly above, as if from an airplane window, effectively turning the viewer into a visitor, a tourist, getting only a glimpse of the lives of these working-class citizens. Both in his picotage works and his paintings, Smith is adept at keeping the messages of his identity-based practice open, complex and rich.

—ROBIN DLUZEN

"44.2258° N, 76.5967° W #1"  
2014, Paul Anthony Smith  
OIL ON CANVAS, 44" X 34"  
PHOTO: COURTESY CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY

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# photograph

## PAUL ANTHONY SMITH : MANGOS AND CRAB

By Jason Foumberg - 05/23/2014



Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled 06*, 2014.

The artist calls his pricking technique *picotage*. He borrowed the term from an 18th-century textile decoration process invented in England and popularized in France, in which groupings of pinpricks from a printed matrix create shadowed or patterned impressions.

Smith's *picotage* process defaces and disfigures his portraits. The people become unidentifiable, although vague traits remain: some are men, some are female, and all have black skin. The all-over pocks of white paper evoke the current Jamaican beauty ritual of skin bleaching in the former British colony, in which black faces are lightened.

Even if Smith is effectively destroying his prints, introducing a critical commentary on his subject matter, the obsessively hand-worked objects also reflect an intimate engagement with the photographs. Whoever these people are, their faces have been consumed by the artist's hand and absorbed by his memory. The private relationship of artist and sitter is pointedly made inaccessible, even while it's on public display.

*Mangos and Crab* is Paul Anthony Smith's excellent first solo show at Carrie Secrist Gallery (through June 14). The title recalls two foods endemic to the artist's birthplace in Jamaica; indeed, Smith conceptualized the series of altered photographs and several oil paintings during a recent visit there. He now lives and works in Brooklyn.

Smith's subject matter is portraiture. For this show, he altered nine inkjet prints of portraits (all untitled, from 2014) by pricking their surfaces with a mechanical tool. Hundreds of raised paper flecks destroy the surface of each print but create a pattern of optical effects. Viewed from either oblique angle, right or left, the faces in the portraits emerge or dissolve. The effect is subtle, with careful attention to the eyes and mouth, those expressive portals of personality.



Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled 06*, 2014.



The International Review of African American Art  
Summer 2013

FEATURES



Paul Anthony Smith  
*Alfred*, 2011  
oil on panel,  
24 x 18 in.  
Courtesy of  
ZieherSmith  
Photograph by  
E.O. Schenckel

## PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

### IDENTITY INSIDE OUT

JODY B. CUTLER

*"I am made of the irrational; I wade in the irrational. Irrational up to my neck. And now let my voice ring out."*

FRANTZ FANON, "THE FACT OF BLACKNESS,"  
*BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS*.

IN SPRING 2013, PAUL ANTHONY SMITH (b. 1958) presented a dichotomous artistic identity in his first solo exhibition, *Transience*, at ZieherSmith in New York. A series of original photographs pricked at the surface to adorn their prosaic subjects in faux-furry costumes—or "picotages," as Smith calls them—are juxtaposed with straightforward, figurative paintings and works on paper. Inevitably, a dialogue emerges between the two series, which contrasts interior and exterior experience, public and private identities, and naturalistic and surrealist tendencies in art.

The figurative works are based on casual photographs of airport workers on the job. The locale in these, as well as the picotages, is Smith's native Jamaica. Since relocating to the United States at age nine, he has studied its history and cultivated an active cultural memory of his homeland. The transport theme in his exhibition evokes empirical and metaphorical links with Caribbean society throughout its modern history.

Labor in the Jamaican tourism industry looms large, as Smith

expresses in this body of work with an emotional reserve. Unified in color and symbolic occupational caste, the subjects appear collectively self-absorbed and beneath the radar of those whose journeys they facilitate. Subtle postures and gestures read as codes of character as well as communication. For example, the weight-shifting stance of the figure at left in *Tarmac #4*, 2013, or the slight shrug of the male in *Skell*, 2013, read as reactions within the scene but also mannerisms recognized and differentiated among colleagues. Indeed, these are individuals who have grown out of Smith's earlier interest in more conventional portraiture with the specific aim of representing Jamaican people.

The picotages bridge the commonplace to the otherworldly. Their speckling, which appears fuzzy from close up and shimmering from a distance, is created with a sharp clay-trimming tool, signaling Smith's easy shift between mediums; he worked extensively in ceramics through art school at the Kansas City Art Institute along with painting and photography. The non-tourist settings of these dimly-lit works—scraps of yards and backstreets—are animated by subjects made strange through the hand-hewn ornamentation.

Smith's transformation of the mundane to the uncanny brings to mind the aesthetics of Surrealism. The main goal of early Surrealist art was to confound viewers with odd, illogical imagery,





Paul Anthony Smith  
Nightwalkers, 2012  
unique pictage and spray paint on pigment print, 29 x 24 in.  
Courtesy of ZieherSmith, Photograph by Joshua Ferdinand

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thereby freeing the mind from the conventional reasoning that left a morally bankrupt Europe vulnerable to widespread fascism. Polymath Frantz Fanon, associated with the *Négritude* movement, had more personal motives for “wading in the irrational,” as he explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

*I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason.*

Fanon would go on to claim and thereby self-define the white misnomer of blackness, prefiguring the “Black Is Beautiful” slogan of the following decade. Smith’s pictages tread on this psychological terrain.

### A Second Black Skin

Smith makes explicit an Afrocentric and diasporic direction in two pictages that superimpose beaded Kuba masks, picked over to brighten their optical buzz, onto straight portrait photographs; all recall Caribbean carnival and African masquerades. The images of some figures include a balaclava-type hooding that conjures armor, criminal disguise, and space suits. Beneath them, the subjects are shielded from the outside, yet shining from the inside out, or, from another perspective, simultaneously hiding and preening.

The frequent wide-open, staring eyes of Smith’s subjects through their masks emphasizes a spiritual dynamic harking back to the metaphoric “veil” and “second sight” of W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903. Du Bois describes the negative cast of “the veil” maintained by whites to shut out black autonomy and access in US society:

*I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt.*

It does leave the black man (Du Bois’s collective subject) “gifted with second sight” as some form of compensation. In fact,



Paul Anthony Smith  
Rat, 2013  
unique pictage and spray paint on pigment print, 29 x 24 in.  
Courtesy of ZieherSmith, Photograph by Joshua Ferdinand

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this positive element has been increasingly elaborated as an advantageous ability to see oneself and the world from two points of view. However, Du Bois stated clearly the negative effect of this “double-consciousness” as a psychological splitting that required merger for “a truer and better self.”

A half-century after *The Souls of Black Folk*, Fanon asserted that a fragmented psyche caused by racism might be healed by dramatic cultural and political black pride. Conjoining the ideas of both thinkers, Smith’s veiling in his pictages appears generated from the inside out, with the artist playing the role of a catalyst for a multifaceted self-awareness. They convey black-derived (rather than Fanon’s white-imposed) masks as second black skins—a purposeful layering of black identity—and disregard the historical black/white dichotomy. Equally, it is tempting to view the airport pictures and pictages within *Transience* as the literal echoing of a self-affirming double-consciousness in two visual modes—the latter impenetrable, beyond their exoticism, to outsiders.

At this early stage in his career, Smith has taken a number of bold risks in terms of his artistic and personal identity and thrown down the gauntlet for committed, identifiable themes based on real life. Judging from his first national display, he has accomplished the Surrealist aim of presenting interior and exterior reality as two elements struggling to become one.

Jody B. Cutler is an art historian based in New York.



Paul Anthony Smith  
Transience #4, 2013  
oil and spray paint on canvas,  
32 x 36 in.  
Courtesy of ZieherSmith  
Photograph by Joshua Ferdinand

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ZIEHERSMITH

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

## Black Artists: 30 Contemporary Art Makers Under 40 You Should Know

02/26/2013

As Black History Month comes to a close, we've picked 30 young black artists who are contributing to the ongoing conversation of race and representation in contemporary art. Whether through sculpture, photography, video or performance, each artist illuminates the complexity of the self with a unique and bold vision.

From Kalup Linzy's soap opera shorts to Kehinde Wiley's traditional portraits updated with black models, the following young artists show there is no single way to address race in contemporary culture. Playful or meditative, sarcastic or somber, the following artists tackle the subject with a ferocious curiosity, passion and vulnerability.

### Paul Anthony Smith

Born in 1988, Smith works in painting, collage, mixed media and ceramics to create portraits spanning different eras, races and artistic styles. Many of Smith's works obscure skin and faces until they resemble ceremonial masks, as in the image pictured.

*Untitled*, picotage measuring 10x8 inches  
Courtesy of Scott Zieher





KEITH MYERS / THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Paul Anthony Smith's Kansas City studio is filled with works inspired by Jamaican culture and history. Raised in Miami, the Jamaican-born artist is a 2010 graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute. He currently has a one-person show in New York.

**VISUAL ART |** Paul Anthony Smith

# JAMAICA CALLS TO A KC ARTIST



JOSHUA FERDINAND / NERMAN MUSEUM

The Nerman Museum at Johnson County Community College recently acquired this picotage-on-pigment print by Paul Anthony Smith from his exhibit in New York.

**His shimmering picotage effect has him on a roll with a show in New York and some national buzz.**

By ALICE THORSON  
The Kansas City Star

**T**hree years out of the Kansas City Art Institute with a bachelor of fine arts in ceramics, Paul Anthony Smith is enjoying a phenomenal run.

The 25-year-old artist landed a one-person show in New York, and in February, Smith was named one of the nation's top 30 black artists under 40 by the Huffington Post.

The article featured one of his

striking picotage portraits, made by picking at the surface of the image with a sharp tool. The effect is eerie and transformative.

But if you talk to Smith in his second-floor home/studio in the Crossroads Arts District, where he sleeps surrounded by works in progress, recognition is not the first thing on his mind.

Instead it's his yearning for the ocean.

Born in Jamaica and raised in Miami, Smith is still adjusting to life away from the water.

"I'm landlocked," he said. "I was around the ocean for 18 years. That changed drastically when I came to

the Midwest."

But he likes it here, and Kansas City has believed in him from the start.

"Every once in awhile I will meet a student that makes a strong impression on me," said Raechell Smith (no relation), director of the school's H&R Block Artspace.

"I saw (Paul) in a foundations studio at the Kansas City Art Institute his first year here, and I invited him to come and work with us at the Art-space. He quickly became an enthusiastic student of contemporary art."

Through the school, Paul Smith was awarded a Kenneth R. Ferguson

SEE SMITH | D3

## VISUAL ART

## SMITH: Adjusting to life away from the ocean

FROM DI scholarship in 2008 and a Copaken scholarship to the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, Colo. in 2009. After graduating he landed an Urban Culture Project studio residency from the Charlotte Street Foundation.

Despite a major shout-out from the Jamaica Observer for his Huffington Post appearance, Smith has no plans to move back to the land of his birth.

"I want experience through the world," he said.

Yet his ties to Jamaica, rekindled during a fall 2011 trip to visit relatives, are obvious in his work.

Noting that "my parents are from the working class," he often paints and sculpts the tarmac workers who labor at Jamaica's airport.

"I realized they're an essential part of the tourism industry," Smith said, standing before a large canvas in his studio. "You see them in a group conversing, but you don't know what they're talking about."

In contrast to his other paintings of Jamaicans, whom he portrays as "comfortable" and "laid back," the tarmac figures are painted in poses of authority.

"They have jobs," Smith said. "Not everyone in Jamaica is employed. I look at them as an essential part of the infrastructure for the airports. The tourist economy depends on them."

The tarmac paintings, like Smith's other works, are based on photographs, which he manipulates and simplifies, often adding flat colored backgrounds that heighten the contrast with the workers' dark skin.

Another painting in progress portrays a trash collector. Smith encountered him cleaning the streets at 7 a.m. with a shovel and rake. "I took out the background," he said. Sometimes he paints out entire figures.

Smith edits to emphasize what he considers to be important.

"Icilda" (2011) is a portrait of his grandmother, one of many based on family photos dating to the 1970s, '80s and '90s. "I took the nose out and made the glasses glitter," he said.

It was the smile that lights up her face that he wanted to emphasize. Family and family history are never far from Smith's thoughts. "My first two sketchbooks came from my mother," he said. "I drew on every page."

"My grandfather on my mother's side was from Cuba. I never met him; he passed away two years before I was born. His parents worked in sugarcane fields in Cuba. My grandfather and his sister were brought to Jamaica as servants and ran away."

Smith's mother now lives in England; his father is in Miami. Smith has many aunts, uncles and cousins in Jamaica.

This summer, he is headed to Ghent, N.Y., for an Art Omi International Artists Residency through the Charlotte Street Foundation.

Smith's last residency, a spring 2012 sojourn at Colorado's Anderson Ranch, proved fruitful. It was a ceramics residency, and he produced a series of pedestal-scale ceramic figures of the tarmac workers portrayed in his paintings.

While he was in Colorado, he also developed his particular technique of picotage, using a ceramics tool to tear up the top layer of scanned photographic images, giving them a glimmering, confetti-like aspect.



As seen in "Funeral #1" (2013), Smith's picotage alterations endow his figures with a magical otherworldly presence and imbue their common activities with an aura of ritual.

"I started thinking of tattoos and scarification," he said, "which is a big part of coming of age."

The wood-handled potter's needle used in ceramics to score and trim clay "looks like a prison tool," he said. Smith also acknowledges a certain sinister dimension that results from the masks and face-hiding balaclavas he creates with the picotage technique.

But his alterations also endow his figures with a magical otherworldly presence and imbue their common activities with an aura of ritual.

In "Non Tourist Location" (2012), casually clad locals sit side by side on a curb, their skin and faces shimmering as if encrusted with diamonds from Smith's application of picotage. He gives the same treatment to funeralgoers, anonymous men and women, generals, politicians and a queen.

Jamaican culture and history are recurrent touchstones of Smith's picotage works.

Colonized by the Spanish and then the British, the country achieved independence in 1962 after a long struggle in which Norman Washington Manley, a barrister who established the country's first political party in 1938, played a prominent role.

Manley helped negotiate Jamaica's independence from Britain, serving as the country's chief minister and then premier from 1959 to 1962. Smith portrays him in "Norman Manley's Cabinet" (2012), acknowledging the group's activist orientation by endowing each of the men in the group photograph with a shimmering picotage balaclava.

Smith also created a picotage portrait of Queen Elizabeth. "They are some of the root individuals," he said. "Queen Elizabeth was there when Jamaica received independence."

Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia and a leader of Africa's anticolonialist struggle, is another favorite subject. Among Jamaica's Rastafarians, whose name comes from Selassie's birth name, Ras Tafari, he is revered as an incarnation of Christ. In "Systems of Hierarchy: Emperor Haile Selassie I" (2012), Smith conveys his sacred presence by covering his uniformed figure with picotage.



"Queen Elizabeth was there when Jamaica received independence," says Smith, who reworked her image in his unique picotage on pigment print "Queen" (2013).

The technique is intrinsically edgy, combing defacement with the trappings of respect. When Smith showed an earlier piece of Selassie endowed with a picotage ski mask to his father, "he got offended," he said. "He is a former Rastafarian and felt it was rude."

It was also at Anderson Ranch that Smith developed a long-simmering interest in African masks, initially stimulated by an encounter during his student days with a Songye female mask in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

"I began playing around with masks in 2010," he said. Two years later, at Anderson, he began drawing on the scanned photographs he uses as a base, using markers and colored pencils to cover his subjects' faces with African masks that he then enhanced with picotage.

The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art bought one from his current show at the Zieher-

Smith gallery, in New York's Chelsea district, for its Oppenheimer Collection, funded by Tony and Marti Oppenheimer. Titled "Ras," it's a depiction of Haile Selassie's father, Ras Makonnen Woldemichael.

"Ras means prince, king, some male of the throne," Smith said.

Bruce Hartman, Nerman Museum director, said he and the Oppenheimers had been watching Smith's work since his KCAI degree show in 2010, and they decided to buy one from his New York exhibit after seeing his new picotage pieces in December at the Art Basel Miami Fair. The New York show of paintings and works on paper runs through April 20.

"We were immediately captivated by the mystery and jewel-like quality of Ras," Hartman said. "This work depicts a traditional Kuba mask, meticulously rendered by picking away at the photograph's surface, overlaying a portrait. It obscures the sitter's face while simultaneously heightening our curiosity regarding the negated image."

The Dolphin Gallery has just put

a new one on view. "Woman #2" (2013) wears an ornate mask in a geometric design bordered with cowrie shells.

Smith's adjustments often impart a slightly threatening cast to his portrayals. In the case of the tarmac workers, he is well aware that their airport setting immediately provokes associations with terrorism. The masks, he says, "are intimidating when you see them. The ambiance is magical, like seeing a prehistoric figure."

He has been spending a lot of time lately researching Songye and Kuba masks and is struck by how different they feel from the masks he has encountered at craft markets in Jamaica. "They're made for tourists, rather than for use in rituals," he said. "They have a different feel from African masks."

These days Smith is looking around for additional residencies and is working as an associate preparator at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. He is helping to digitize the museum's Hallmark Photographic Collection.

Smith's reputation is increasingly tied to his photography-based works, following his emergence as a ceramicist.

In a 2010 exhibit at Block Art-space celebrating the Art Institute's 125th anniversary, Smith showed "World Histories: Ancestral Transience," a sculpture depicting the head and shoulders of a black man emerging from the top of an oil drum. An earlier body of work, shown at the Belger Arts Center at the end of 2010, keyed off the 2008 presidential election.

Smith used porcelain stoneware to create a series of relief portraits, merging his face with those of American presidents and candidates. The format for "Paul Lincoln," "Paul Obama" and "Paul McCain" was inspired by the terracotta roundels of an Italian Renaissance sculptor, Luca della Robbia, and framed by flourishes borrowed from the dollar bill.

"You got to be born in America to be president," said Smith, who became an American citizen in 2006.

Along with his curiosity and work ethic, Smith's interest in current events made a deep impression on Smith at Block Art-space.

"As a student he did some work about the Iraq war and was really looking at a lot of imagery coming out of Haiti after the storm. He was interested in how the media portrays certain events," she recalled. "Right now I think he's exploring and learning how to use and manipulate materials, and he continues to find his own voice in terms of creating a narrative."

"He's a consummate ceramics artist, and I love his collages and works on paper," she added. "I think he is interested in deeper issues of cultural identity and how those things are imaged."

Smith exhibited in the Kansas City Flatfile exhibit at Block Art-space in 2010 and 2012, and it was there, Smith said, that New York gallery owner Andrea Zieher first saw the artist's work.

"They had an email exchange for a couple of months," Smith said, "and she invited him to do a show."

On Thursday, Smith learned that he is the recipient of a \$10,000 visual artists fellowship from the Charlotte Street Foundation.

"I'm going to go to Jamaica," he said, "and to England to visit my mom."

To reach Alice Thorson, art critic, call 816-223-4763 or send email to athorson@kcstar.com