

Shinique Smith, Bale Variant, 2017.105

TRANSITION: Trends in fashion usually start in big, metropolitan centers and spread slowly to flyover land. Today, stores like H&M or Zara bring fast fashion to flyover land. But cheap, disposable fashion has a cost.

Bale Variant No. 0024 (Everything), 2017

Shinique Smith

Clothing and other fabric, ribbon, rope, acrylic mirror, acrylic, fabric dye, wood, metal, pigments, 2017.105

Shinique Smith's textile sculptures are self-referential and frequently incorporate clothing from her own closet, or repurposed items gathered from friends, family members, even the street. This sculpture speaks to the global significance of textiles as it showcases several different dyeing, weaving, and printing processes drawn from the textile traditions of India, West Africa, Indonesia, China, Korea, and the US. In crafting the sculpture, Smith contemplated how international textile motifs and techniques such as paisley, plaid, kente, dashiki, tie dye - even the ubiquitous denim jean - connect us globally.

Shinique Smith is inspired by the vast vocabulary of things that we consume and discard. Examining the ways in which such objects can resonate on a personal and social scale, Smith pursues the graceful and spiritual qualities in the written word and the everyday.

In works made from the class of objects we call 'belongings,' Smith collides the intractable hard geometry and hard thinking that defines urban existence—what Paul D. Miller called “cubes of consciousness” in a 2010 catalogue essay—with the softening, emotionally steeped influence of the worn-down, nostalgic or forgotten. She describes a way of living and looking that is fueled by a flow of relationships between opposites: discrete displaced parts are transformed, becoming one, when grouped or bound together by her hand through a ritual of process. The resulting configurations often straddle the line between chaos and restraint.

Ascribing equal value to both cherished and discarded objects, Smith reinterprets the connections on which we build our personal myths and examines the relationships that contemporary societies establish with the inanimate and the intimate. What is valuable to an individual, culture or society, and why is it valuable? Through her efforts, a new spirit emerges.

Her paintings evoke a kinetic, explosive style that evolved from her early years as a graffiti writer; her fabric bundles reflect a more contemplative process, one that Smith describes as “ritualistic.”

In one corner of CAAM's exhibition space, a mural featuring calligraphic strokes of pastel pink, yellow, and blue hues stretches across two walls. Its softness is interrupted by a strong black abstract script that flows into a series of tied fabric bales made from clothing and pillows in shades of indigo, grey, purple, and black. The bundles form a large figure resembling a large Buddha that rests upon three foam beds and a colorful woven rug.

The title of this piece, Mitumba Deity, uses the Swahili word for bundle in reference to the similarly named global second-hand clothing trade that's prevalent in East Africa. With exports of roughly \$550 billion dollars, the U.S. is the largest exporter of mitumba and the primary supplier in a cottage industry that is fueled by Western charity organizations that export bales of used, donated clothing for sale. Critics of this used-clothing trade claim that mitumba hampers local textile production and perpetuates economic instability, while proponents argue that the trade supports financial independence by empowering local communities. Smith's

altar-like installation can thus be seen as a space of meditation on the politics and power dynamics of consumption and charity.

Shinique Smith, *Mitumba Deity II* (2018) in “Shinique Smith: Refuge” at the California African American Museum. Photo courtesy Colony Little.

question: Does anything here look familiar to you?

question: Do you think the artist has a message? What is the artist trying to say?

question: Do you know anyone who shops/wears for vintage or second hand clothes