



▲ *Black Cluster*, 2015
Clothing, ribbon, rope, bean bag chair, and car fresheners
28 x 24 x 24 inches

Works in the Exhibition

All works collection of the artist
Courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai
Except where noted

Firebird, 2015
Ink, acrylic, and collage on canvas over wood panel
78 x 60 x 2 inches

Bush, 2015
Ink, acrylic, and collage on canvas over wood panel
Diptych, each panel 78 x 60 x 2 inches
Overall 78 x 120 inches

Forgiving Strands, 2015
Clothing, fabric, ribbon, and found objects
Three strands, variable dimensions draped
Overall dimensions approximately 19 feet x 35 feet x 18 inches

Black Cluster, 2015
Clothing, ribbon, rope, beanbag chair, and car fresheners
28 x 24 x 24 inches

Pendant, 2015
Clothing, fabric, ribbon, rope, acrylic, and wood
60 x 15 x 12 inches

Shield Maiden, 2014
Ink, acrylic, fabric, and collage
60 x 48 x 9 inches

Granny Square, 2013
Acrylic, fabric, and collage on wood panel
48 x 48 x 2 ¼ inches

Gnosis, 2013
Acrylic, ink, and fabric on wood panel
48 x 48 x 5 inches

Within a Detail, 2013
Acrylic on wood panel
48 x 48 x 2 inches

Phifferling, 2004
Clothing and fabric over wood panel
26 x 26 x 4 inches

All images © Shinique Smith

THREADED

Three concurrent one-person exhibitions

The Shinique Smith exhibition is part of a suite of three one-person exhibitions presented by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech focusing on artists who work with threaded material as their medium.

Stay connected

The following events are free.

Artist Talk: *Shinique Smith*

Wednesday, March 4, 2015, 5:30 PM
Ruth C. Horton Gallery

My Take Talk

Wednesday, April 1, 2015, 6:50 PM
Ruth C. Horton Gallery
Peggy Quesenberry, trainer/instructor, Department of Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management, Virginia Tech.

This series invites people from all walks of life to share their “take” on the art in the center’s galleries. Join in an exchange of ideas—sparked by the galleries’ art—in a relaxed, social atmosphere.

Check www.artscenter.vt.edu for more details.

Concurrent Exhibitions

Angelo Filomeno
February 12–April 12, 2015
Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception Gallery

Polly Apfelbaum
February 12–April 12, 2015
Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery

Also on View

Lalla Essaydi
Presented in conjunction with the Islamic Worlds Festival
February 12–April 12, 2015
Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor

Odili Donald Odita: *Bridge*
Grand Lobby

Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Friday, 10 AM–6 PM
Saturday and Sunday, 10 AM–4 PM

Shinique Smith

Ruth C. Horton Gallery
Moss Arts Center
February 12–April 12, 2015
Presented by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech
Curated by Margo Ann Crutchfield, curator at large



THREADED

A suite of three one-person exhibitions focusing on artists who work with thread and fabric in their art

SHINIQUE SMITH

Ruth C. Horton Gallery
February 12–April 12, 2015



For more information about this and future exhibitions, visit www.artscenter.vt.edu.



End Notes

¹ Among the many acclaimed artists working with this medium today are Brazilian artists Ernesto Neto (crocheted hanging net-like structures created with synthetic cord), Maria Nepomuceno (sculptures out of rope, straw, and beads), Egyptian-born Ghada Amer (canvases with sewn imagery), German artist Rosemarie Trockel (knitted paintings), and U.S. artist Ann Wilson (thread and lace).

² Smith quoted in *Frequency*, the Studio Museum of Harlem’s 2005 exhibition catalogue.

³ Smith re-quoted on artist’s page at James Cohan Gallery. www.jamescohan.com.

⁴ Smith quoted in conversation with the exhibition curator, Dec. 12, 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Smith quoted in a 2011 video interview at the Brand New Gallery, Milan, www.brandnew-gallery.com.

⁷ Pinder, Kimberly, N. “Unbaled: An Interview with Shinique Smith.” *Art Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 2, Summer 2008. p. 7.

⁸ Ibid.

T H R E A D E D

Featuring the art of Shinique Smith, this exhibition is one of three concurrent one-person exhibitions presented by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech focusing on artists who work with or incorporate thread, rope, and fabric in their art, mining its symbolic significance in visually compelling and surprising forms. Belonging to a generation of acclaimed artists who use threaded material as their medium, Shinique Smith, Angelo Filomeno, and Polly Apfelbaum are engaging examples of how a significant number of artists today continue to re-invent and fuse disciplines, merging painting, sculpture, art, design, and craft while presenting some of the most inventive uses of thread and fabric in the art of our times.¹

Shinique Smith is acclaimed for her exuberant paintings and sculptures made with ink, paint, fabric, cord, used clothing, and found objects. Her works draw on a diversity of influences, from the history of art, to fashion and the decorative arts, as well as a variety of cultural traditions ranging from Tibetan to urban street cultures. Smith composes her sculptures with used clothes, fragments of fabric, and found objects, tying and binding them together into bundles suspended from the ceiling or bales standing tall on the floor. Her paintings, bold but simultaneously lyrical, are collaged works that brim with vibrant color, a joyful, spontaneous spirit, and dynamic energy. Gestural strokes, wisps of ink and paint that seem to dash through, encircle, dance, or slash across her canvases, bring into play associations with graffiti (she was part of a tag team as a teenager), fencing (which she studied and practiced), and Japanese calligraphy, a sacred art form in Japanese culture. In most of her paintings a sense of vigorous energy and movement, at times incipient, combustible, or potentially transformative seems to emanate from a central core and expand outwards. All her works are richly layered and polyvalent.

Smith employs used clothing and fabric in her art for their visual appeal in terms of pattern and color and as potent signifiers. "I am most inspired by bringing together bits and pieces of

fabric, new items and those with a history of use, so there is a cross section of time, place, and meaning—conceptually and visually."² She chooses and incorporates material in her work for the histories, memories, and narratives that they embody—for the way in which fabric and used clothing reflect upon the identity, social mores, and values of those who used them. Woven into the hanging sculptures in this exhibition are worn shirts, old sweaters, flannel pants, a glittering party dress, even a garter belt, with all the narratives these materials might embody or suggest. Many of Smith's paintings are also embedded with and embellished with fragments of material, paisleys, chiffon, cottons, or in one case, a remnant of cloth from Afghanistan. In working such materials into her compositions, Smith brings together and packs into her work a diversity of associations and issues, some personal, others with wider implications.

"I am inspired by the vast vocabulary of what we consume and discard," Smith says.³ In this regard, her use of discarded clothing becomes a statement about our culture of consumption and waste, a broad cultural critique, engaging ideas related to materialism, excess, and sustainability. Using fabric in her compositions also points to more universal,



◀ *Firebird*, 2015
Ink, acrylic, and collage on canvas over wood panel
78 x 60 x 2 inches

philosophical notions. In some cases Smith uses fabric because of its rich history, "being so old . . . with traditions and patterns that have existed for a long time—across millennia and cultures."⁴ Another example is the pattern of the crocheted quilt fragment in the central panel of *Granny Square* (2013). For Smith, this evokes ancient, universal patterns of sacred geometry, as well as fractals, both complex concepts that explore recurrent patterns in nature and the laws of physics.⁵

References to such metaphysical concepts are more evident in the titles of a number of works in the exhibition. *Phifferling*, 2004, is the name of a butterfly, a universal symbol of metamorphosis. *Gnosis*, 2013, a fiery red and black painting is titled after the ancient Greek word for knowledge; and in traditions of Christian, Islamic, and Jewish mysticism, gnosis refers to religious or spiritual knowledge. *Firebird*, 2015, a magnificent painting with burnished swaths of golden oranges and yellows spiraling gracefully upwards, invokes the phoenix with its rich metaphor of transformation and transcendence. With such cross sections of allusions and ideas throughout the work, Smith's paintings and sculptures become hybrid amalgams. "It's all woven together with these gestural marks that start as writing . . . so words, calligraphy, ribbon, twine, rope, bind it all together . . . in a kind of formal moment where all these different things converge."⁶

Three sculptures in the exhibitions build on ideas that revolve around stretching, tethering, binding, and opening. *Forgiving Strands*, 2015, three braided, tied, and twisted strands of fabric, ribbon, and used clothing sweep in an arc across the wall in giant sways, traversing an expanse 19 feet high and 35 feet wide. Suspended from the ceiling, another sculpture, *Black Cluster*, 2015, a bulging form, is roped, bound, and constrained, with short tethers spewing outwards yet fastened to its central mass. A third sculpture, *Pendant*, 2015, an elongated, bundled and tied form, hangs from the ceiling at eye height. In these works, the act of braiding, tying, roping, and all that connotes, are powerful signifiers. Rich cultural implications of braiding as a practice dating back thousands of years in African cultures; the sense of community and connectedness that braiding generates among friends and family; and the act of tying and untying itself with innuendos of aggression/oppression, captivity/freedom, and/or stretching and opening, all inform the work. Additionally for Smith, braiding, tying, and bundling have to do with connecting, with bringing objects and ideas together, with implications that are also philosophical. "I've found many connections to various cultures that use bundling and tying for spiritual reasons, such as tying things together to create fetish objects."⁷ Smith also speaks about frenetic or obsessive tethering, "I use the act of writing as a form of frenetic meditation, which is centering . . . the act of writing can be very ritualistic . . . like the act of binding . . . these lines string everything together like "superstrings" . . ."⁸ In *Bush*, 2015, a large, black-and-white diptych, calligraphic line and effusive energy seem to coalesce into a visual manifestation of this idea.

In weaving together this range of allusions into the paintings and sculptural works in this exhibition, Smith seems to be in search of systems or forces, intangible and unseen, which thread together and connect aspects of the material and spiritual world. Be it patterns in fabrics that span thousands of years, braiding and tying rituals that connect generations, references to some universal cosmic design, or inferences to quantum fields or string theory . . . what is clear is that Smith's art engages a complexity of universal concepts. Her work also seems personal and introspective, referencing interior journeys of personal and spiritual growth. In drawing us into this rich, multi-layered world, Smith invites us to consider aspects of reality that transcend the ordinary



▲ *Pendant*, 2015
Clothing, fabric, ribbon, rope, acrylic, and wood
60 x 15 x 12 inches



▲ *Bush*, 2015
Ink, acrylic, and collage on canvas over wood panel
Diptych, each panel 78 x 60 x 2 inches
Overall 78 x 120 inches

Margo Ann Crutchfield
Curator at Large

Front cover:

Firebird, 2015 (detail)

Ink, acrylic, and collage on canvas over wood panel

78 x 60 x 2 inches

About the Artist

Born 1971 in Baltimore, Maryland. Lives and works in Upstate New York.

BFA and MFA, The Maryland Institute College of Art MAT, Tufts University and The School of the Museum of Fine Arts

Shinique Smith's art has been shown extensively in solo and group exhibitions, and is currently featured in a major solo exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (through February 2015). One-person exhibitions of Smith's work include those at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California; Savannah College of Art and Design,

Savannah, Georgia; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, Wisconsin; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, Florida; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, among others.

Smith's works are in numerous permanent collections, a selection of which includes The Brooklyn Museum of Art; The Denver Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Whitney Museum of American Art; Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland; and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.