

XEROX: 1965-1966 Barbara T. Smith at The Box

Posted by [Marilyn Nix](#) on February 19, 2013

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Barbara T. Smith at her exhibition now up at The Box downtown.

In 1965 Barbara T. Smith approached Gemini GEL in Los Angeles to propose a lithography project and was rejected by them (they were busy with famous New York artists at the time), so she decided to take printmaking technology, as it was available at the time, into her own hands.



It was a stroke of pure genius when Barbara T. Smith realized that the dining room in her elegant Pasadena home that she kept with her then-husband and small children could become a artist's studio simply by installing a new XEROX 914 machine. She proceeded with experimentation in duplication and art-making. (Little known to her at the time, Smith also created the ephemera of her early life in art, which would expand into her developing work as one of California's most well-known performance artists.)

She later returned to the University of California at Irvine to earn her MFA in 1971, joining an art department celebrated as much for its students as for its distinguished faculty in contemporary art. Classmates included Nancy Buchanan, Chris Burden, Charles Christopher Hill, Bruce Richards and Alexis Smith; faculty included Vija Celmins, Ed Moses, Craig Kauffman and Tony DeLap.

For two years in the mid-1960s Smith focused her creativity on the machine, making pictures of objects arranged to copy, color images to black and white, black and white to hand color, colored paper pictures, narrative stories, body-part pictures and more. She was empowered to make a new kind of art, and this early work predicts her development as a performance artist and a feminist. According to The Box, where Smith's show *XEROX 1965-1966* runs through March 23:

One such example in the exhibition is Katie, which is a framed set of six 8.5 x 11" sheets of paper of six copies of one photograph of her daughter Katie. Each page has different texture, tone and shadow according to how the machine was adjusted and the result is a stunning portrait of her daughter. This piece is an example of how Smith began to use the new medium of Xerox to consider her personal relationship with her daughter.

In an important response to art and the machine, Smith started using her own body as media. Several books are exhibited in the show at The Box, including works from her *Coffins* series, for which Smith experimented with placing her body on the machine's glass plate. There are pieces that are quite provocative, in which Smith fully exposed her body on the machine.

Although these are obviously focused on process, Smith created the kinds of provocative works that she has been known for throughout her career.

The BOX

XEROX: BARBARA T. SMITH 1965 – 1966

16 February 2013 – 23 March 2013

805 Traction Avenue Los Angeles, CA 90013

213.625.1747





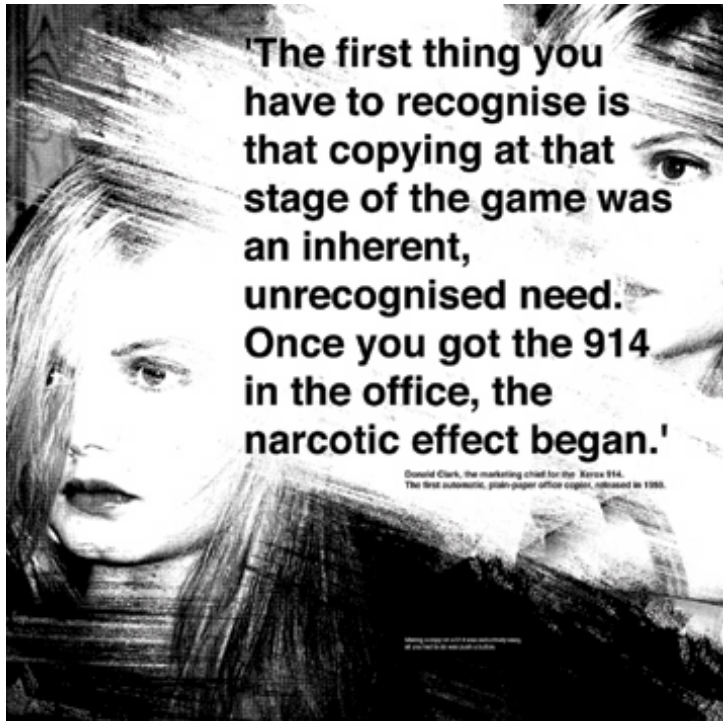
The XEROX 914, named for its ability to use 9" x 14" white copy paper.



A copy-machine drawing by Barbara T. Smith.



Proof, a xerox drawing, 1965-66, by Barbara Smith.



An anonymous testimonial advertisement for the XEROX 914 machine, 1959.