

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Barbara T. Smith

Words, Sentences & Signs

September 17 – October 29, 2016

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 17, 5-8pm

The Box is pleased to present the fourth exhibition of Barbara T. Smith, *Words, Sentences & Signs*. This show is the first to include works from the start of her career, with pieces spanning from the early 1960s to a new series of photographs, created in 2016. This exhibition explores the roots of Smith's art making: it is an odyssey of her processes and passions. Smith, who is primarily known as a performance artist, creates demanding work that explores and meticulously records her investigations to share with an audience.

As we started to gather work for this exhibition, we began to consider what language means in the context of Smith's practice. Letters function as means of expression, alongside images collaged into books, painted, or drawn with pencil, along with objects gathered together from actions and scenes created with the body. Throughout Smith's entire career, we realized, 'language' has continued to be a focus of her work all along. What we see in the show - in small poignant pieces - is Smith's exploration of how these forms communicate and depict our world. How can an artist use these forms not only to express their life but also to question these very forms themselves?

In this show, we see her world collaged into books such as *Cork* (1975/76) with found-images of the fishing industry in Japan alongside a snapshot of Smith after a performance with David Antin (both with bald heads), layered together with a delicate paper cut goddess, giving one a sense of Smith's interest in beautiful materials imbued with a 'rich juju'. Another piece titled *He Says, She Says* (1985), establishes a dialogue between male and female voices, framing the gender difference in language. This piece is a classic example of what Smith calls *sentences*: a sequence of small objects presented in a linear sequence, engaged in a new form of conversation.

As I worked on the most recent series of photographs, "The Westside, A Blessed Time", I discovered that over many years I had created a lineage of structures that had to do with language itself: words, sentences, and signs. What was I trying to say? I see now an elusive trail of meanings and forms that were not an attempt to communicate with others so much as to find a way to listen to myself, to plumb and record the emergent perceptions of my consciousness. This is revealed in my early paintings in which words and symbols are prominent; in small, peculiar collaged objects that record a playful incongruity, in drawings, artist books, and later, after my son's death, in artifacts that express grief where no words were possible. Some explore alternative modes of communication; and lastly there is a room of images and texts where reflection is key.

It is an odd show that might seem disjointed if not for the through-line of language, not explicit but implied, to be experienced on a level that is present if not obvious. It is a trail of exploration and meaning garnered out of esoteric energies by an "alien" making sentences with stones and shells. I have always been curious about life and have had the need to express myself. This collection is a portrayal of the life of a human/woman over a span of time.

- Barbara T. Smith, 2016

Barbara T. Smith has lived and worked in the Los Angeles area her whole life. She received her BA from Pomona College in 1953, and MFA in 1971 from University of California, Irvine where she was a founding member of F-Space with Chris Burden and Nancy Buchanan. She has been represented in historic survey exhibitions including *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia?* at Office for Contemporary Art, Oslo, Norway (09); *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (traveling exhibition 08'-09') and in several shows that were part of Pacific Standard Time, including the solo exhibition, *The Radicalization of a 50's Housewife* at UCI and *State of Mind* at OCMA and the Bronx Museum. In 2014 the Getty Research Institute acquired her archive. Also in 2014, Smith performed in MOCA, Los Angeles' *Step and Repeat*, exhibited in *A Machinery for Living* at Petzel Gallery in NY, and was a recipient of an artist residency at the Civitella Ranieri Visual Arts Fellowship in Umbria, Italy. In 2015 she had a solo exhibition, *The Smell of Almonds: Resin Works, 1968 – 1982* at Andrew Kreps Gallery in NY and was part of *MOMMY* at Yale Union in Portland. Most recently in 2016 Smith was included in *Still Life with Fish: Photography from the Collection* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

