

BARBARA T. SMITH: Proof



Barbara T. Smith. *Proof*, 1965-66. Xerox and drawing, 14 x 19 inches. Image courtesy the artist.



What do the different techniques used in this double self-portrait tell us about the artist?

Barbara T. Smith: *Proof*

Barbara T. Smith is noteworthy for her experimentation with new technologies, such as her early adoption of the photocopier machine as an art tool. By drawing over images of herself, Smith critiques an “ideal” mid-century American domestic life.

Ask your students:

What do the different techniques used in this double self-portrait tell us about the artist?

K-2

INQUIRY

- Explore *Proof*. Describe the colors, lines, textures, and expressions in the artwork.
- What tools did the artist use? What moods does the work suggest?

PROJECT

- Print large B&W photos of children’s faces on pastel copy paper.
- Supply markers or crayons. Ask students to create a mood for their portraits by adding lines and shapes inspired by Smith’s colored markings.

3-5

INQUIRY

- *Proof* depicts two self-portraits. Describe the two different versions of the artist that you see in front of you.
- Compare how elements like color, line, shadow, and pattern impact what each portrait communicates.

PROJECT

- With small mirrors, pencils, and drawing paper, invite students to draw self-portraits.
- Using colored pencils, students can create a background filled with words, patterns, shapes, and lines expressing personal qualities.

6-8

INQUIRY

- Identify which aspects of *Proof* are mechanically reproduced and which are made by hand.

- Discuss each technique and what happens when they are combined.

PROJECT

- Investigate Xerox artwork made by Barbara T. Smith in the 1960s as well as other artists who incorporate this tool into their work.
- For Smith, access to printing was freeing. Analyze ways in which digital image-making can be a liberating means of artistic expression.

9-12

INQUIRY

- Investigate Barbara T. Smith’s art through a feminist lens.
- Discuss ways in which her work demonstrates that the personal is political.

PROJECT

- Research and select a contemporary artist whose work uses technology to comment on gender roles.
- Analyze and compare an artwork by your selected artist with an artwork by Smith.



Proof, 1965–66. Xerox and drawing. Image courtesy the artist. (detail)

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Barbara T. Smith has made vital contributions to both feminism and the history of performance art as it developed on the west coast. In 1953, Smith received her BA from Pomona College and her MFA from the University of California, Irvine (UCI) in 1971. Smith’s work has been exhibited widely since the 1960s and has been featured in several historic survey exhibitions at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007), Office for Contemporary Art, Oslo (2009), Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa (2012), and Bronx Museum, New York (2012). Smith is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Foundation Fellowship for Visual Art, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, Art Matters Inc., and others.

Barbara T. Smith: Proof is a comprehensive survey of Los Angeles artist Barbara T. Smith (b. 1931, Pasadena, US). A pioneer of the performance art movement of the late 1960s, Smith has long produced work that explores the self, sexuality, gender roles, physical and spiritual sustenance, love, life, and death. Assembling an expansive range of artwork and performance-related ephemera, the exhibition surveys Smith’s bold experimentation. While her groundbreaking performances have received critical attention, the objects Smith has made over nearly sixty years—many for, or as a result of, performances—are less known. This includes the artist’s radical Xerox works, mixed media assemblages, sculptures, artist’s books, drawings, paintings, photographs, and videos. Organized by ICA LA guest curator Jenelle Porter, this survey celebrates Smith’s incomparable contributions to contemporary art, feminism, performance, and technology.

ARTransmissions

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