

Exhibition Guide

Barbara T. Smith: Proof

10.7.2023–1.14.2024





Barbara T. Smith: Proof

Performance has been the central orientation of my life since the mid-sixties when I, by virtue of a divorce, stepped out of conventional life into this art reality. From that new stance, my entire milieu became my art and all the things I do and make as well.
–Barbara T. Smith

During the late 1960s, Barbara T. Smith (b. 1931, Pasadena, CA) began to make actions, ritual meals, and other kinds of live art. Though working at the margins of traditional art contexts, her work was central to the development of what came to be called, by the 1970s, performance art. Since then, she has made over 160 performances: radical, interdisciplinary actions that demonstrate her sustained investigation of the intersection of, as she has defined it, “real life and performance.” Through her work, Smith has explored such subjects as the body, societal norms, desire, gendered roles, food, ritual, technology, personal transformation, collaboration, abuse and healing, death and aging.

This exhibition features many of Smith’s most significant works, presented chronologically beginning in 1965 with early paintings, drawings, and assemblages. Her Black Glass Paintings are more mirror than monochrome, reflecting the viewer and the room, and in doing so, forecast the significance of the body in her art making. At the time, Smith was an emerging artist testing her ideas about art and the self. She was one of the first artists to use a Xerox machine, which she deployed as a tool to make art about her life, often using her own body as object, subject, concept, and medium. She would continue to employ new technologies to make art throughout her career including fiberglass resin, soundwaves, television, artificial intelligence, video-phone, and digital imaging.

While Smith is celebrated for her performance art, she has always been a maker of things and an archivist of her output. Her unswervingly bold experimentation flows from her earliest paintings, Xerox prints, drawings, and sculptures to the wide range of objects and ephemera made for, and often resulting from, her performance art works. Together, they offer proof of a life lived as art.

Barbara T. Smith: Proof is organized by ICA LA guest curator Jenelle Porter with support from Amanda Sroka, Senior Curator, and Caroline Ellen Liou, Curatorial Assistant.

Lead funding is provided by Metabolic Studio.

Major support for *Barbara T. Smith: Proof* is provided by The Ellsworth Kelly Award, made possible by The Ellsworth Kelly Foundation and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Vera R. Campbell Foundation, and Karen Hillenburg.

The exhibition is also generously funded by Jill and Peter Kraus, Dori Peterman-Mostov and Charles Mostov, the Michael Asher Foundation, the Pasadena Art Alliance, and The Jay DeFeo Foundation. Additional support provided by Visionary Women and Marla and Jeffrey Michaels.

ICA LA is supported by the Curator’s Council and Fieldwork Council.

Image: *Proof*, 1996–67

About the Artist

Since the 1960s, Barbara T. Smith's work has demonstrated an engagement with issues of spirituality, gender, and power, making vital contributions to both feminist discourse and performance art as it developed on the west coast. In 1953, Smith received her BA from Pomona College and in 1971, her MFA from the University of California, Irvine. Smith's work has been exhibited widely since the 1960s, and included in several historic survey exhibitions at institutions including *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007); *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia?*, Office for Contemporary Art, Oslo (2009); and *State of Mind: New California Art since 1970*, Orange County Museum, Costa Mesa and Bronx Museum, New York (2012). Smith is the recipient of several prestigious awards, such as the Foundation Fellowship for Visual Art, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, and Art Matters Inc., among others.

About the Curator

Jenelle Porter is a curator, writer and editor. Most recently she organized *Kay Sekimachi: Geometries* for the Berkeley Art Museum, *Less Is a Bore: Maximalist Art & Design* for the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, and *Mike Kelley: Timeless Painting* for the Mike Kelley Foundation at Hauser & Wirth, New York. She is currently co-editing *An Indigenous Present* with artist Jeffrey Gibson (fall 2023), and a monograph on Viola Frey (2024). From 2011–2015, Porter was Mannion Family Senior Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, where she organized acclaimed thematic exhibitions such as *Fiber: Sculpture 1960–present* and *Figuring Color: Kathy Butterly, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Roy McMakin, Sue Williams*; as well as monographic exhibitions of Arlene Shechet, Erin Shirreff, Mary Reid Kelley, Jeffrey Gibson, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Dianna Molzan, and Christina Ramberg. Prior to her years in Boston, Porter was curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2005–2010), where she organized the group exhibitions *Dance with Camera* and *Dirt on Delight: Impulses That Form Clay*, as well as the first surveys of Trisha Donnelly and Charline von Heyl. From 1998–2001 Porter was curator at Artists Space in New York. She began her career in curatorial positions at both the Walker Art Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Checklist

The artworks are listed chronologically and alphabetically and do not always follow the order of their appearance in the galleries



Untitled (Black Glass Painting), 1965

EARLY WORKS

Me, 1964–65

Collaged found objects, magazine page, and paint on mirror, 13 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Miniature Ruminations, ca. 1964–67

Various found objects, dimensions vary

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Untitled (Black Glass Painting), 1965

Casein on Masonite in glass frame, 60 x 48 in.

Gusford Collection

Untitled (Black Glass Painting), 1965

Casein on Masonite in glass frame, 60 x 48 in.

Private collection

Untitled (Black Glass Painting), 1965

Casein on Masonite in glass frame, 60 x 48 in.

Collection of Paul and Karen McCarthy

The Black Glass Paintings are a series of five-foot-tall matte black paintings framed under thick glass. “The clues clearly read as a painting, but the viewing experience was disarming, impossible to see into; all that was available was a black mirror,” Smith wrote. These multivalent works married abstract painting with conceptual art to produce objects that were not only a “mirror of life,” but forecast the significance of the body in Smith’s work to come.

Here Lies, 1966

Pencil on paper, 24 x 19 in.

Collection of the artist

OOOOO, 1966

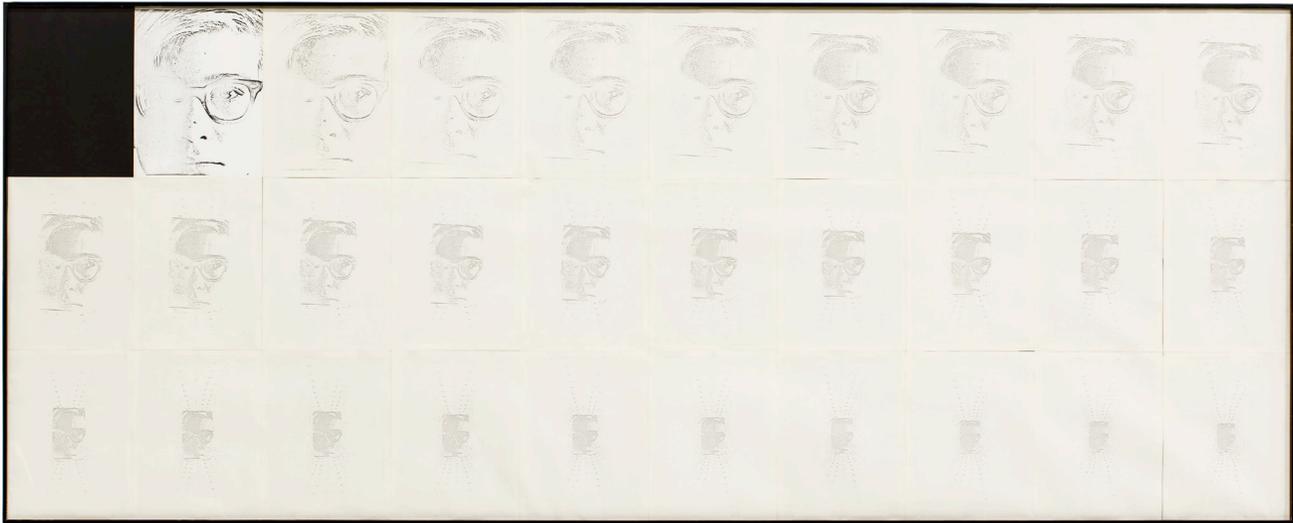
Ink on paper, 23 1/2 x 17 3/4 in.

Private collection

Upon the Completion of a Love Affair with a Machine, c. 1966

Wood puzzle piece, feather, and pencil on cardboard box, 14 x 11 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles



Minimalist Theory, 1966–67

XEROX

In 1966, Smith endeavored to make a lithograph with Gemini G.E.L., a recently established print workshop in Los Angeles. Because she was an unknown artist, they declined her proposal, and so Smith explored other methods: “I told myself that lithography was obsolete, a medium of the nineteenth century. This was the twentieth century and the print medium of our time was the business machine.” She leased a Xerox 914 photocopier and during the subsequent eight months produced about 50,000 copies that she used to make poetry publications, sculptures, framed collages, and bound books. She copied the stuff around her house (rugs, jewelry, flour, toys), photographs of her children and herself, and most notably, pressed her own body and face to the glass bed of the machine. Saying she experimented with the 914 Xerox is an understatement; she owned the machine, bending it to her will to create a remarkable body of work long before other artists adopted this technology to make art.

Atlas of Human Anatomy and the Fabric of Life, 1966–67
Xerox on paper mounted on cardboard, 48 pages; and
Xerox on plastic, 24 pages; and plexiglass, 7 x 20 1/4 x
13 1/2 in.

Collection of James Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach

Birth, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 13 3/4 x 8 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Clocks, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 2 sheets, 14 1/4 x 17 1/4 in. overall

Collection of James Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach

Comparison: Original and Copy 2, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 2 sheets; and color pencil, ink, and
crayon paper, 2 sheets, 11 1/4 x 35 in. overall

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Drowning, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 21 sheets and blue plexiglass, 40 1/4 x
60 1/4 in. overall

Collection of Therese Hayes

In Self Defense, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 11 sheets, each 14 x 8 1/2 in.

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

During a 1967 visit to New York, Smith showed her Xerox work to artist Robert Morris. Knowing his rumored propensity to borrow other artists’ ideas, and his keen interest in her techniques, Smith composed *The Letter* to assert her preeminent claim on the territory. The limited-edition mail art piece showcases her primary motifs and plays with visual puns.

Just Plain Facts, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 13 3/4 x 8 1/2 in.

Courtesy of Olivia Marciano

Memo Pad, 1966–67

Xerox on paper and plexiglass, 3 1/4 x 9 x 11 1/4 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

XEROX (CONT.)

Minimalist Theory, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 21 sheets mounted on board, 33 x 85 1/2 in. overall

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

“Rick reduced as in reductive science,” Smith wrote of this portrait of her son. She made this work using an 813 Xerox machine, which was capable of automatic reduction. The sequential format adheres to the serial strategies of Minimalism and Pop Art, both dominant art movements during the 1960s.

My Lipstick, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 4 sheets, 14 1/4 x 34 1/2 in. overall
Danniel Rangel Collection

Object of Faith, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 2 sheets, 14 1/4 x 17 1/4 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Orange, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 21 sheets and orange plexiglass, 60 x 38 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Pink, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 21 sheets and plexiglass, 60 x 40 1/4 in. overall
Danniel Rangel Collection

Poetry: Joy, Rebellion, Sorrow, The Mystery, Child Voice, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 5 sets (number of sheets varies per set), each 14 1/4 x 8 1/2 in.; paper folder each 14 3/8 x 9 in.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Proof, 1966–67

Color pencil and crayon on gelatin silver print, and Xerox on paper, 14 1/4 x 18 3/4 in. overall
Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody

Rice and Object, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 9 sheets, 12 x 78 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Soup Cans, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 4 sheets, 14 1/4 x 34 1/2 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

This Ball of Glowing Fire, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, ink on paper, collaged photographs, and watercolor, 14 1/4 x 34 1/4 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Thumbprint / Formal Logic, 1966–67

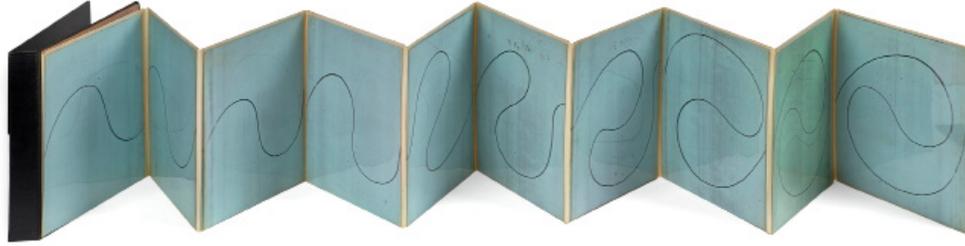
Xerox on paper and plexiglass, 2 x 9 1/2 x 12 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Untitled, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 2 sheets, each 11 x 8 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Untitled, 1966–67

Xerox on paper, 4 sheets, each 11 x 8 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York



Coffin: Hokusai's Wave, 1966-67

COFFINS

A series of about thirty books, the Coffins take many forms and explore many ideas, from a vibratory line that pays homage to Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanazawa* to erotic self-portraits to portrayals of Smith's children. Many use seriality and repetition to generate an immersive visual experience. The covers of the black hardbound books are embossed with a cross within a circle, a symbol that for Smith represented "the point in time and space when you reach an utter impasse, which has no options." For her, that point in time and space was one of emotional tumult; her marriage was ending and she was experiencing the end of her family life as she knew it.

Coffin: Broken Heart, 1966-67

Xerox on paper in case binding, 122 sheets, 11 x 8 3/4 in.
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Die Cut, Barbara Hard-Bound, 1966-67

Die-cut Xerox on paper, spiral bound, 11 1/4 x 9 x 3/4 in.
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Hokusai's Wave, 1966-67

Xerox on paper in case binding, 10 sheets, 11 3/4 x 9
1/2 x 4 1/2 in. (closed); 11 3/4 x 101 1/2 in. (open)
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Oh! Those Leopard Skin Bikinis, 1966-67

Xerox on paper in case binding, 12 sheets, 9 1/4 x 14
3/4 x 1 1/2 in. (closed); 108 1/4 x 14 3/4 in. (open)
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Time Piece, Pink Rose, 1966

Xerox on paper in case binding, 17 sheets, 14 1/4 x 9
1/2 x 1/2 in. (closed); 14 1/4 x 18 1/2 in. (open)
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Time Piece, Yellow Rose, 1966

Xerox on paper in case binding, 12 sheets, 14 1/4 x 9
1/4 x 1/2 in. (closed); 14 1/4 x 63 in. (open)
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Important / First Class (Julie), 1966-67

Xerox on paper, spiral bound, 13 sheets, 11 1/4 x 9 1/8
x 1/2 in.
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Coffin: Mellon National Bank and Trust (Rick), 1966-67

Xerox on paper, spiral bound, 16 sheets, 11 1/4 x 9 x
5/8 in.
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

"My use of the naked self was merely based on the curiosity of wondering about what it would look like, how it would feel—the humor of it. Pushing beyond the boundaries of normality came from my isolation and a desire to be seen, heard, and valued. The work was inherently personal, but soon women came to see that isolation was not only a personal or class issue, but that of an entire gender as well."
—BTS

Smith described this series of books—all of which use business envelopes as a ground for images of her children—as a narrative in which "The Mother makes small attempts at seduction to entice, at some future time, not necessarily now, my children out of the corporate world of their Father and into a life of joy, imagination, nature, play, and beauty."



The Celebration of the Holy Squash, 1971

THE CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY SQUASH, 1971

In 1969, Smith enrolled in the inaugural MFA program at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). There, with fellow artists Chris Burden and Nancy Buchanan, she founded the now legendary F-Space gallery. Smith made many significant performances and created a new “religion” in the form of *The Celebration of the Holy Squash* (1971). The week-long performance/passion play was Smith’s graduation exhibition.

“A huge Hubbard squash was the centerpiece of a communal dinner party. The remaining jade green husk was so beautiful, I had to save it. This was a sacred relic of a holy squash and I decided to sanctify it. One day, it would emanate its radical value to the whole world. In the gallery, daily, we went through the steps necessary. We built a mold around it. Next, we hung it by a strong filament from a ladder, then we poured hot liquid resin into the mold. It cured all night. On the following days we broke the mold open, baptized the huge amethyst object in holy water, celebrated mass with cooked squash in lime, made a reliquary out of the mold, and created a shrine with photographs, flowers, and ancillary niches. As a serious parody, we experienced miracles, betrayals, persecutions, and conversions.”
 –BTS

The Holy Squash and plastic casting of flower offering, reliquary, miscellaneous items from production, fiberglass hand with staff, altar fiberglass drawing and cast test tubes, foam, and plastic, dimensions vary
 Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Exhibition poster, University Art Gallery, UCI
 Silkscreen on paper, 19 x 17 in.
 Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

“Sequence” and “Miracles”
 Ink on paper, 2 sheets, each 12 x 3 1/4 in.
 Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Letter to Lohman & Berkeley
 Typewritten letter and magazine clipping, each 11 x 8 1/2 in.
 Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Receipt for declaration of authenticity published in the
Los Angeles Daily Journal, 1971
 Carbon copy, 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 in.
 Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The Celebration of the Holy Squash, 1971
 Video, 4:03 min.
 Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, Performances 1969–1999*
 (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2002)
 Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles



Boris Sojka, *Nude Filming Event*

FIELD PIECE, 1969–71

Field Piece was included in *Twenty-One Artists: Visible-Invisible*, a 1972 group exhibition of women artists at Long Beach Museum of Art curated by Dextra Frankel and Judy Chicago. Smith, over six months and at her own considerable expense, waterproofed the blades, wires, and electronic consoles for the outdoor installation. The work was vandalized; unable to afford repairs and storage fees, Smith decided to “unmake” *Field Piece* by selling individual blades as *Dispersal*. With few buyers, she dismantled and sold the components, and through “a series of secret giveaway actions” called *Guerrilla Capers*, she planted the blades at various sites.

Field Piece Model 1 (light)

Cast resin, 6 3/4 x 15 1/2 x 19 in.

Collection of James Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach

Schematic 3

Pencil on paper with resin, 22 x 30 1/2 in.

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Purchased through the Board of Advisors Acquisition Fund

Schematic 1

Adhesive stickers and ink on paper on board and resin, 30 x 30 in.

Collection of Jill and Peter Kraus

Schematic 7

Pencil on paper and resin, 46 x 20 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Schematic 8

Pencil and collage on paper, 36 x 24 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Single Blade

Pencil, ink, and photograph on paper, 17 x 11 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Single Blade (Sky Piece)

Pencil and ink on paper, 17 x 13 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Single Blade (Zen Garden Piece)

Pencil and ink on paper, 17 x 13 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Field Piece, 1969–71

Video, 2:47 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, Time/Space: 47 Performances in 7 Themes* (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2012)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

FIELD PIECE (CONT.)

Invitation, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles
Computer print on sprocketed gate-folded paper, 15 x 11 in.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Invitation, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, nude filming event and opening
2 computer punch cards, each 3 1/4 x 7 3/8 in.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Invitation, F-Space, Santa Ana
Offset print on vellum, 11 x 8 in.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Relics: Polaroids, gelatin silver prints, circuit boards, driver card schematic blueprint for cards #1–3, 11–13
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Related Works

Trunk Piece, 1969–72
Resin, trunk, carpet, metal, plastic, ceramic, fishing lures, and miscellaneous found objects, 84 x 150 x 72 overall (installed)
Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody

The “relics” gathered for *Trunk Piece* were cast from the excess catalyzed resin used to make *Field Piece*. As such, they are a record, or index, of its fabrication.

Dispersal / Disappearance, 1972
Acrylic or watercolor on Xerox, each 11 x 8 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Guerilla Capers, 1972
Gelatin silver prints, each 10 x 8 in.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Field Piece is a metaphor for an infinitely extendable giant field of grass [through] which one could wander. It consisted of 180 translucent, 9-1/2-foot-tall, semiflexible fiberglass blades. The participant activated their own path through the blades via foot pressure, which would trigger an audio drone and lights under each blade. Thus, the physicality of the viewer was responsible for the experience of the art. The concept of physical emergence into the experience of artmaking and perceiving as exemplified in the Black [Glass] Paintings and Field Piece also threw me back on myself as the vehicle for art and destroyed the subject/object split. In my life I saw no obvious pathway ahead of me, and the idea of an infinite field of grass was beautiful to contemplate.
-BTS



Kiss a Spot Forbidden, 1975

PERFORMANCE ART AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

I think performance art and my art, additionally, has contributed to the validation of the body as the location of where the art happens.

—BTS

After the multiyear, savings-draining *Field Piece*, Smith returned to performance. In 1973, she made *Feed Me*. Its provocations about personal agency, sexuality, femininity, and nourishment remain as topical as ever. As performance art began to cohere as a recognized and prominent art movement, Smith considered her work in dialogue with artists who used their body as a medium and subject, including Vito Acconci, Nancy Buchanan, Chris Burden, Valie Export, Suzanne Lacy, Ana Mendieta, Linda Montano, Gina Pane, and Carolee Schneemann, among many others. The three performances presented here—*Feed Me*, *Full Jar*, *Empty Jar*, and *Kiss a Spot Forbidden*—were particularly potent in the ways Smith utilized autobiographical motifs, such as family (and its fracturing), food, spiritual transformation, desire, and the body.

FEED ME

MUSEUM OF CONCEPTUAL ART, SAN FRANCISCO, 1973

Smith was invited by artist Tom Marioni to make a work for the group exhibition *All Night Sculpture*.

I went into this room at dusk. There were nice things in the room for lovers, for making friends, tea and wine, bread and fruit, cheeses, massage oils, and books to read, some marijuana and shawls and beads. There was music to play. I sat naked on the bed. A tape of my voice kept saying over and over, "Feed me." People thought I was there to make love to every man who came in, like a power trip. Au contraire! I was there to interact and discover. One at a time they entered my room. I made them figure out what to do. Some offered me wine, others a massage. One or two asked to make love. If it pleased me, I said yes. It went on all night.

-BTS

Feed Me, 1973

Drawing of performance room, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco

Ink on paper, 12 x 14 1/4 in.

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Feed Me journal

Hardcover book, 7 7/8 x 5 1/4 x 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Smith preparing for *Feed Me*, photo by Dick Kilgroe

Gelatin silver print, 16 x 12 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

FULL JAR, EMPTY JAR

MANDEVILLE GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO, NOVEMBER 21, 1974

Smith sought spiritual nourishment through gestalt and biofeedback therapies, the study of Zen Buddhism, and meditation. Her pursuits informed and influenced her work, initially in *Full Jar, Empty Jar*, which Smith made on the occasion of her first major solo exhibition.

I entered the room in a black suit and hat with long witch-like hair. The altar held fluorescing wine, bread, and fruit, which I ate with my bloody hands. It was an odd Christian setting. A guide explained my actions as he poured grain from one jar to another and invited the people into the next room. There I was entirely in white, entirely bald, prepared to answer the one question that each person asked of me. I sat utterly still and detached from any ego involvement so my answers could come out of the nature of the questions themselves. I was learning to let my children go.

-BTS

Full Jar, Empty Jar, 1974

Performance sequence and movement

Ink on paper, 19 x 25 1/4 in.

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Photographs of performance

Gelatin silver prints, two: each 15 1/2 x 19 1/2 in.;

and two: each 5 1/2 x 7 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Relics: hair, driver's licenses (before and after shaved head), and audience questions from performance

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

KISS A SPOT FORBIDDEN

PRIVATE HOME AND ADJACENT DESERT,
LAS VEGAS, MARCH 3, 1975

In 1971, I went swimming in the cove where I grew up and knew very well. I was suddenly taken by surprise by the shock that my body would not swim, nor did I want to live. This is the real ocean. Nothing to hold on to, nothing to grasp. I relived the drowning in therapy. To my surprise, fear became desire; desire not to die, but to rest. It was only the recall of my children and an extreme act of will that saved my life. I re-created the experience in a Las Vegas swimming pool. It was a play on Xs. The first X was forbidden: I was forbidden to die. Instead, I was called into the desert and the crowd followed. Harpies taunted me about my sanity and what was real. I searched for an oasis, a spot, an X on the sand. At the oasis, water was now salvation. After sharing the water with everyone, a man came over the hill and gave me a kiss. Thus, it completed the three Xs: a kiss, a spot, and forbidden.

–BTS

Feed Me, 1973

Full Jar, Empty Jar, 1974

Kiss A Spot Forbidden, 1975

Video, 5:18 min.

Excerpts from *Barbara T. Smith, Performances 1969–1999*
(with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2002)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Kiss a Spot Forbidden, 1975

List of phrases for flotsam (used in performance)

Ink on paper, 8 1/2 x 11 in.

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Map

Photocopy, 8 1/2 x 11 in.

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Photographs of performance

Gelatin silver prints, two: each 8 x 10 in.; one: 11 x 14 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Relics: Wood flotsam with marker, matchbox including
paper printed with “Kiss a Spot Forbidden”

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles



Scan I, 1974

CHANCE, HUMOR, LOVE, AND FEMINISM

Smith was especially prolific in the 1970s, experimenting with performance forms in such works as *Scan I*, *A Week in the Life of . . .*, *Outside Chance*, and *The Cover Up*. As well, her advocacy, writing, curating, and teaching were central to the development of both local and national performance art milieus. She took part in the nascent women artists' movement, was a founding member of Grandview (a women artists' cooperative gallery at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles), and participated in the emerging video art scene. Her conceptual range astounds, from articulations of trauma to the harnessing of satire, parody, and pranks, which she used to critique mainstream media and the commodification of art, to counter isolation, and to expose the absurdities of life and art.

SCAN I

THE WOMAN'S BUILDING, LOS ANGELES, APRIL 26, 1974

This was a piece about how pervasive media hypnotizes viewers. Forty-five white-hooded performers, their faces shielded by handheld fans, sat on bleachers watching commercials on a television set. They responded in rows, like the scanlines of video technology, to secretly embedded cues that prompted them to expose their brightly colored mouths or tongues, or to blow cigarette smoke, bubble gum, or party favors. This was much like a football cheering section. The audience watched this nonsense from the courtyard and balcony above and later sat in the bleachers themselves to try to decode the clues in the commercials while licking the all-day suckers we had given them.

-BTS

Mouth Diagrams (Set 1)

Marker on vellum, 2 sheets, each 8 ¼ × 13 ½ in.

Mouth Diagrams (Set 3)

Marker on vellum, 1 sheet, 13 ½ × 16 ½ in.

Photographs of the performance

19 gelatin silver prints, dimensions vary

Performance and interviews with performers

Video transfer to DVD (black-and-white, sound), 7:14 min.

TV commercials used in performance

Video transfer to DVD (black-and-white, sound), 8:36 min.

Relics: 30 cue cards in notebook, 30 fabric masks

All works courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF...

THE WOMAN'S BUILDING, LOS ANGELES, APRIL 26, 1974

In order to solve the inherent studio artist's problem of feeling isolated, I concocted an auction performance in which people could buy time with me. There were thirty-four different proposals offered. The main event was that I would live in the house of the buyer for a week, hence the title of the piece, *A Week in the Life of . . . whomever*. It took place at the Pasadena Artists' Concern, a co-op gallery, with [which] I would share half of the profit as a benefit for them. During the following year, I met the various buyers to fulfill their personal pieces, and we each recorded our experiences in journals. The time spent in these meetings were the actual performances.

-BTS

Relics: Photographs, signed auction item descriptions with documents from performed items, auction invitation, white cloth glove, auction sign-up cards, rabbit's foot, auction item placards, and auctioneer's introduction

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

A Week in the Life Of..., 1975

Video, 5:14 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, Time/Space: 47*

Performances in 7 Themes (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2012)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

OUTSIDE CHANCE

UNION PLAZA HOTEL, LAS VEGAS, MARCH 7, 1975

Las Vegas deserved some humor and this piece was in the nature of a prank. Richard Rubinstein, my computer science collaborator, created three thousand computer-generated unique snowflake printouts. Dressed like a high roller in a wig and heels, and carrying a valise, I went to the top floor of the Union Plaza Hotel, and from the tiny balcony tossed the prints, which fluttered to the ground below, like snow. This apparent magic inspired a "street prophet" to preach, and that night's TV news reported a miracle of snow in Las Vegas.

-BTS

Outside Chance, 1975

Photographs of performance

Gelatin silver prints, 14 photos, each 8 x 10 in.

Film transfer to DVD (color, silent), 3:36 min.

"Snowflakes"

PDP10 computer print on white sprocketed gate-folded paper, 7 sheets, each 10 3/4 x 9 1/4 in.

All works courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

THE COVER UP

BILTMORE HOTEL, LOS ANGELES, AUGUST 8-11, 1976

I was fed up with a certain brand of male arrogance and insensitivity. I took a room at the Biltmore Hotel and replicated a scene of complete despair and insanity. It was a travesty of erotic disjuncture and noncommunication in which the woman went slightly mad. She placed crazy notes on walls and mirrors trying to tell "him" what he would not hear. In life, the only "audience" for such scenes would be the hotel maid who must cover them up. The room then was left as an installation, and the interview I did with the maid about what she encountered in her work was played on a loop. Women wept with recognition, and the men did not know what to do.

-BTS

The Cover Up drawings, 1976

Colored pencil on Edinburgh hotel stationery, 5 sheets, each 8 1/4 x 6 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Drawings

Marker and pen on Biltmore Hotel stationery, 5 sheets, each 10 1/2 x 7 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Photographs of the "set up"

23 gelatin silver prints, each 8 x 10 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Photographs of the "aftermath"

6 gelatin silver prints, each 8 x 10 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Program of events, American Theater Arts Convention, Biltmore Hotel, August 8-11, 1976

Fascimile of mimeograph, 8 1/2 x 11 in.

Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Relics: Invitations, paper signs (15 sheets), Biltmore Hotel postcard, Polaroid, color photographs

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The Cover Up, 1976

Video, 2:12 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, The Inner Landscape: Performances 1969-2001* (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2004)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

JUST PASSING

CHANNEL 26 UHF TV AND SAN FRANCISCO
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, OCTOBER 1, 1979

Single-channel video (color, sound), 15:00 min.
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Invited to broadcast a work on live television, Smith used the TV screen frame as a metaphor for life. The narration of images details a woman's awareness of her own sexual desire, from girlhood to womanhood.

THE PERPETUAL NAPKIN, 1980

Looking for connection in a geographically disconnected Los Angeles, Smith made a two-part performance in which, in part one, she invited friends to various locales set with a table and a red napkin. They were asked to sit in solo contemplation and then share their experience as an audio recording. Part two took place later that evening, with Smith including their recorded stories in her "performance of mystery." She recalled, "In the piece my consciousness leapt from that of mundane life into the added dimensions of the tarot (chalice, sword, staff, and pentacles). It was a display of a new realization that art is more than play, or discovery, or virtuosity, or message. It is in effect a direct transmission of energy through the body of the artist."

The Perpetual Napkin, 1980

Photographs of performance

5 gelatin silver prints, each 8 x 10 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The Perpetual Napkin, 1980

6 framed diptychs: gelatin silver print and color photostat, each 32 x 16 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The Perpetual Napkin, 1980

Acrylic on paper, 13 1/2 x 16 3/4 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Relics: Red cloth napkins, announcement postcard and poster, map, laminated placemat, handwritten notes, color photograph (framed)

The Perpetual Napkin, 1980

Video, 2:10 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, The Inner Landscape: Performances 1969–2001* (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2004)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles



Birthdaze, 1981

BIRTHDAYS, COMMUNITIES, & ODYSSEYS

By the 1980s, Smith's engagement with Eastern religions and philosophies and New Age energy practices increasingly inspired and rooted her art. She found that performance art "revealed itself to be a healing practice where structure and content enabled my psyche, physical body, and community to cohere." Many of the ideas Smith had developed and refined through previous performances culminated in *Birthdaze*, after which she progressed deeper into realms of spirituality and selfhood, community and ecofeminism. We see this in the community outreach component for a residency at Capp Street Project in San Francisco, and her two-year durational performance, *The 21st Century Odyssey*.

BIRTHDAZE, 1981

Coincident with Smith's fiftieth birthday, *Birthdaze* was a three-part performance that adapted the stages of life that feature prominently in many Eastern spiritual traditions: student, householder, renunciate. She corresponded these three stages to her relationships with men, both personal and professional. In part one, she embodied the roles she was raised to play, those of the conventional daughter, wife, and mother. In her 1950s housewife dress and hat, she was harassed by Paul McCarthy and Kim Jones, who inhabited their signature performance alter egos. In part two, Smith addressed past lovers Dick Kilgroe and Allan Kaprow. Kilgroe represented bodily passion; Kaprow cerebral union. In the background played a soundtrack of men relaying their experiences in Vietnam, a war that shaped many of Smith's friends, lovers, and artistic cohort. In part three, Smith and fellow performance artist Vic Henderson communed in an inner room of the gallery where they engaged in a Tantric sexual ceremony.

Birthdaze: American Haunted and Vaunted Decades

Embroidered patch, 2 Polaroids, gelatin silver print and paper in resin, approximately 16 × 16 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Birthdaze: Get Well Soon

Collage, ink on paper, greeting card, glitter and bullet casings, in resin, approximately 19 × 19 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Birthdaze: Man Holds Gun

Ink on paper vellum, 16 drawings, each 11 × 8 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Birthdaze: Sacrifice

Paper, photograph, and glitter in resin, 2 panels, each approximately 17 × 5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Birthdaze: St. Barbara Triptych

Photocopy in resin, 3 panels, each approximately 13 × 9 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Birthdaze: This Note is All Debt

Photocopy, dollar bill, Polaroid, ink on notecard, in resin, 13 × 10 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Birthdaze, 1981

Video, 2:04 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, Performances 1980–2001* (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2002)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

CAPP STREET PROJECT, 1984

In 1984 Smith was invited to be a resident artist at the San Francisco nonprofit art gallery Capp Street Project. There, she made a three-part work—titled *Tree*, *Council*, and *Template*—based on the tree and its rings. The components included an environmental installation that extended into the city, a community conversation and meal, and a series of extended meditations based on different chakras.

Capp Street Project (Tree, Council, and Template), 1984

Photographs of performances and events

5 gelatin silver prints, each 8 x 10 in.

Template, 1984

Handmade paper “templates” on foam core, 3 templates, each 72 × 48 × 2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Relics: Photograph, directional signs, maps, remnants of glitter-covered tree, map, flyers, invitation, notebooks, collage, Council of Neighbors poster

Capp Street Project (Tree, Council, and Template), 1984

Video, 8:47 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, Time/Space: 47*

Performances in 7 Themes (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2012)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Pronunciation: Mirror Voice, That, Words on Glass, 1986

Oil pastel on paper, 3 sheets, each 13 × 19 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

St. Marten: Poem, 1989–90

Shells and coral on wood, 6 3/4 × 8 3/4 × 2 in.

Collection of Mary Weatherford

St. Marten: Paragraph, 1990

Shells and stone on wood, 20 1/4 × 29 3/4 × 5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles



The 21st Century Odyssey, 1991–93

THE 21ST CENTURY ODYSSEY, 1991–93

The 21st Century Odyssey was a collaboration between Smith and her partner Dr. Roy L. Walford. It arose from practical considerations: how the two could remain connected while Walford took part in an experiment in sustaining life on other planets. He would be sequestered for two years along with seven other “Biospherians” at Biosphere 2 outside Tucson, Arizona. Drawing allusions to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Smith embarked on an international journey modeling herself as Odysseus to Walford’s Penelope. Smith traveled and made performances in each of the countries she visited, documenting her odyssey with video and various objects. The performances were relayed live to Biosphere 2 with cutting-edge telecommunication technologies facilitated and archived by Electronic Café International, Santa Monica.

Dream Sequence: Dagger into the Earth

Pencil on paper, 15 1/4 × 22 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Transmission

Pencil on paper, 30 × 30 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The R&B Show: Possession Shaman’s Coat

Blazer, dried roses, pencil, and paint on foam core on plywood, 45 1/2 × 40 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The Shroud

Acrylic, mud, ink, image transfers, and text on fabric, 162 x 100 in.

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Tiresias’ Blind Date, Double Exposures, 1993

13 color photographs, five: 18 7/8 x 12 7/8 in.; four: 12 7/8 x 18 7/8 in.; two: 11 7/8 x 14 7/8 in.; one: 10 7/8 x 8 7/8 in.; one: 10 1/8 x 14 7/8

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

The 21st Century Odyssey: Interpenetrating Worlds, 1991–93

Video, 9:22 min.

Conceived by Barbara T. Smith and co-created with Roy L. Walford in collaboration with Electronic Café International, Kit Galloway, and Sherrie Rabnowitz, Directors

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Preparation and Farewell

Love and Other Pressing Issues, Ocean Park Beach and ECI, Santa Monica, February 17, 1992

A departure ceremony with several groups of supporters during which gifts and flowers were given to the sea.

Preparation: page from Banana Republic mail order catalogue; sketch of traveling outfits; Biosphere 2 “Anniversary Issue” newsletter; Biosphere “closure” memorabilia; rubber stamp; squash seeds; flyers; itinerary; passport; international driving license; letter to Rick Smith; list of recording and transmission equipment; newspapers; photographer’s vest; letters; video transmission prints, videophone and manual
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Farewell: flyers; *Love and Other Pressing Issues* performance relics (protective offerings)
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

India

This Is It, Dharamsala, March 22, 1992

While in India, Smith created a colorful meditation site with a large painted target on white Indian fabric. She invited the guesthouse owner’s family to sit with her in meditation on the phrase “This is it,” a reference to Shah Jahan’s famous inscription on his palace, referring to paradise.

India: candle holder; rock; sea mail package; newsletters; *This Is It* performance relics (banner, small plastic box with flowers and wax)
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Australia

This Is My Calling, This Is Me Calling (with Biosphere 2), University of New South Wales, Sydney, June 19, 1993
Smith established a medicine wheel on a promontory for a collaborative performance with university students. One student reported experiencing relief from his PTSD, a result of his imprisonment and torture in Argentina.

Australia: flyers, newspapers, branch with wool yarn, painting; *This Is My Calling, This Is Me Calling* performance relics: drawing, ink on paper, pouch with shells and feathers
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Nepal

Pouring My Heart Out, Vajra Hotel, Kathmandu, April 16, 1992

Smith danced to traditional raga music for over an hour, a duration that, she learned, shocked and surprised her hosts who had never seen such an “old” woman dance for so long.

Nepal: flyers; mica from Nagarkot; postage stamps
Burning Ghats; transfer on cotton cloth; *Pouring My Heart Out* performance relics (candles, wax remnants)
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Norway

Tiresias’ Blind Date, Grønland Grenhus, Oslo, March 1993

The blind Tiresias (a Greek mythic prophet) guided Smith (as Odysseus) to sites around Oslo, including old temples, burial mounds, and a cemetery. She was tied to the mythic tree “Yggdrasil,” where she was forced to endure the metaphorical loss of control of the performance, while others (including several distant family members) enacted the Norse god Odin’s ordeals.

Norway: contact sheet, *This Is My Calling, This Is Me Calling* performance relics: cardboard runes, drawing, ink on paper
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Other items

Ritual Cleansing of the Airwaves, Seattle, Biosphere 2 and ECI, February 2, 1993

Three female musicians in Seattle (harp, cello, flute) and three at ECI (Indian drum, didgeridoo, Chinese gong) improvised with three players at Biosphere 2 (saxophone, voice, keyboard) to cleanse the airwaves of negativity.

Seattle: flyers
Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles



Blue Shards, 1997–99

FRAGMENTS, SIGNIFIERS, AND MEDITATIONS

Each performance is the equivalent of doing a new series of paintings in one fell swoop, because it's all, right then, a new idea. It comes out of your inner being, your soul You can't fix it. It either happens well or it doesn't, but it happens, and then it's over, and then it's gone.
 –BTS

For Smith, performance art is a medium, a tool, with which to ask questions and consider answers, to explore the depths of her psyche, to cope with grief and loss, and to consider—often with humor—aging. The works in this gallery are about time, memory, the premature death of her eldest child, and the body. Fifty years after she used the Xerox machine, Smith made a series of editioned prints with another type of flatbed imaging device: a scanner. As an echo of that groundbreaking body of work—and even including an early Xerox as a background apparition—these images elegantly summarize the circularity and interconnectedness of Smith's life and art, of life in art, of life as art.

Blue Shards, 1997–99

Fragments on wood, knitted objects, gauze masks, and artist book, dimensions vary
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
 Purchase with funds provided by the Drawings and Photography Committee

Blue Shards is dedicated to Smith's son, Richard "Rick" Smith, who died of AIDS in 1997. It includes performance props and relics from two performances Smith made about Rick's life and death and her own mourning and grief. In *The Audience*, Smith knit a long white stole while she spoke to the audience. It is presented here alongside masks of Smith's face, crying. The collages were made with shells and other objects gathered during a final vacation with Rick and his friends. The book includes a text titled "Déjà vu" and photos from a walk mother and son took together around 1975.

Blue Shards at MOCA

My son, Richard Allen Smith (Rick), became HIV positive in 1986. However, he did not tell me until 1991, when I was about to go out of the country for 5 months. It was not until 1996 that Rick began to exhibit the dreaded afflictions of AIDS, when his t-cell count went below 200.

At the time, AZT was the only medication used to treat AIDS. It was effective for only a short time. One of the common infections that people with AIDS got was CMV, the Cytomegalovirus, which attacks the central nervous system, often first in the eyes. Rick soon became effectively blind and in reality it was his death sentence.

Doctors tried an experimental protocol hopefully to stimulate Rick's t-cells. They tested our blood to find the family member with blood factors closest to his. His sister, Julie's blood, was identical.

We gathered in Spokane, in a clinic where they had the apheresis machine needed to remove Julie's T-cells to donate to Rick. Julie was famously terrified of needles. Still, she volunteered without a second thought. Needles were inserted into her arms sending her blood from one side, through the apheresis machine where her t-cells were collected, and then her blood returned to her. This had never been done here before and it took hours. Julie had to wear diapers and we fed her, keeping up her spirits the whole time.

In the end, we received a small bag of maybe a cup's worth of milky white fluid and drove directly to another hospital where they gave it to Rick; taking maybe 6 minutes. Rick's t-cells did go up, reflecting Julie's contribution. And then down. So once a month, Rick now effectively blind, flew from San Francisco to Spokane to receive Julie's blood. It was wearing Julie out. We needed someone else, either Katie or me, who had only one half the factors needed. Just as I was planning to do this, he fell desperately ill. I arrived as they were carrying him down the stairs en route to the hospital.

His family and friends gathered, even his father showed up. In the ICU, it was discovered that the virus had travelled into the mastoid process of his skull and even though near death and unconscious, they performed a mastoidectomy. So strange, because as an infant who had many serious ear infections, I had to have the same surgery to save my life.

He survived and turned 43 in the hospital. We were allowed to take him home after he had become rational. But 2 months later, he was back again. I was told he could live up to 3 months, so I packed accordingly. Suddenly I was called. He was actively dying. In the plane, I was in a daze and utterly helpless. By the time I arrived, he had passed away. Here was this beautiful man, not wasted yet by AIDS as so many were, but still in his full vigor. He swam two miles nearly every day, how could he be gone? The finite door was closed. His life had been a total blessing.

The discovery of the "cocktails" that prevented replication of the AIDS virus had just been invented. Too late.

Rick was an extraordinary son. It was he who helped start Project Open Hand to deliver food to housebound AIDS victims. Even as a child he tried to give away his favorite toys to our neighborhood kids. He helped found the AIDS Memorial Park in Golden Gate Park, where his name is engraved on the stones. He was very funny and very intelligent, known to walk everywhere reading a book. He was generous to a fault and politically liberal. He understood, participated in and supported my work. We were best friends.

BLUE SHARDS

I went to Crissey Fields to walk. Rick and I used to go there often. It's beautiful and ends underneath the Golden Gate Bridge. Along the way, I found a small triangle-shaped piece of blue Chinese pottery in the sand, likely very old. I mused on the thought that a good archeologist is able to reconstruct the original bowl entirely, just from tiny shards like this.

Later that day, Sue picked me up at Rick's. First she delivered me to Marsha's place in Mill Valley. Marsha had offered for me to stay a day or two with her. While there, we went on a walk in the forest and there again I found a tiny triangular shaped piece of blue Chinese pottery in the mulch. Of all things! I felt like it was some sort of message or magic putting me in touch with Rick.

When Sue picked me up again, she took me to her family retreat at Leonard Lake north of Ukiah where, because it was Easter, many family members had gathered. With great sensitivity, they simply let me be, thus allowing me to experience my profound grief alone, joining them for meals as I wished. En route home we stayed overnight at Sue's Zen-like cabin high above the beach in Santa Barbara. Walking on the sand the next morning, once again I found a small blue shard of Chinese pottery!

At home I mounted each shard on a board along with other small stones found at each site. The original board has just three small bits: a coin, a piece of clay, and a small ring of some sort. The second, from the forest, has a bone, two rocks and a dagger shaped stick. The third one from Santa Barbara, has a purple-hinged pecten shell, two shell fragments and a small piece of weathered wood. These all seemed to be words, small sentences connecting me to Rick.

A final shard, this time yellow, came from a bowl I accidentally broke at my home and stands alone on its little wood block.

OUT OF ACTIONS: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979

Paul Schimmel mounted *Out of Actions* at the Temporary Contemporary (Geffen MOCA), focused on action art. But this show had no live performances. So, Denise Spampinato and Gary Todd secured the Barnsdall Theater and invited the artists to create a live event. My piece, *The Audience*, became a celebration and memorial for Rick.

The Audience: Wearing white and knitting a long white runner, I interact with the audience as they enter. Soon, I start talking about CATS. That, amazingly, cats do not 'speak' to each other, they only talk to us! Soon audience members are telling me their stories.

Meanwhile, we are viewing glorious scenes from nature projected to the back of the stage. A very soft drone is getting louder and louder, and I am becoming very anxious. Suddenly, I see a huge image of Rick, very ill, in the ICU with tubes in his nose and down his throat.

I am stricken and go to the stage where one by one, four large peculiar blue objects come down from the "sky": a bolt of blue satin fabric which puzzles me and I flare it to the ground, a blue bucket of water which I pour onto the floor. Then, a glittering blue broom appears and finally a large blue wooden disk. I am fundamentally confused and begin to run in circles round and round the space until I can run no more, and I fall to the ground.

A huge Chinese gong has begun roaring to life and Hirokaszu Kosaka, a Buddhist monk in ritual garb, meets me as I rise up. He commences the ritual of Zen archery, bowing, stepping back, slowly, shooting an arrow directly at me just to the right of my head. There is an explosion of tiny pieces of white paper and I fall again to the ground, my “warrior” of control defeated.

All the while, my altered voice can be heard reciting tales of famous warriors: Odysseus from the *Odyssey*, Arjuna from the *Bagavad Gita*, and then the mad prophet, Merlin. Finally we hear the Zen koan: “If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him”.

As these tales of war end, I rise with blood at my heart and go to the edge of the green fabric circle where I discover a large and lowly squash. The audio now goes on to describe how Rick, though near death was allowed to come home. He was very weak but coherent. As his friends were pulling his wheelchair backwards

up his steep front steps, he suddenly waved his arm in a grand gesture and began to sing loudly to his entire neighborhood: “Don’t Cry For Me Argentina....” They nearly dropped him. It was so grand and so funny.

Now I smash the squash to the ground. Then, I gather a pile of my Mother’s afghans from my chair and as Madonna sings that song, I walk directly into the audience saying: “In the end the only thing I can do is to comfort my friends with the robes my Mother has knit,” putting them over the shoulders of my friends in the audience.

THE LIVING ROOM

Simultaneously, I had a show in Santa Monica at a gallery called *The Living Room*, which included some of the items from the performance and are now part of the *Blue Shards* at MOCA.

The blue shards were shown at the gallery along with the long trail of knitting from *The Audience*. There are two mindless pieces of knitting, the sort of thing one does when one’s life has been struck by tragedy. There is a book I made that honors the role Rick played in my life as a sort of ‘spirit guide’. It tells of a walk we took in the foothills above Mentone, California to scout a great ritual site on those hilltops. And there are two masks and a small urn holding a dried flower.

The masks seemed to find their way into my studio exactly for this reason. Each is hung, white faced with her mouth open, a dark empty void. One has tiny gem-like stones coming down the face as tears and a “sentence” of those same tears on a small board beneath her. The other head hangs down, wearing a long dark grey wig, strings of dried rose petals hanging from her face.

A MEDITATION ON TIME, 2005–09

I respond to images that erupt in my psyche, and then I embody them in real time. An archetypal image of an older woman, all in white, knitting a long white thing that grew and grew over time emerged in my mind's eye. Most of my pieces I performed only once; however, I performed this piece several times, which is appropriate as it's about the evidence of the relentless passage of time. As I knit, I don't speak, but there is a book next to me. People can choose to approach me and if they have a question or comments, they can write them in the book, and I answer them by writing back so that my inner silence isn't broken.

People seem to respond to me in this piece in ways that differ from that of my everyday experience. Perhaps the image stands for something: the peace of silence, the nobility of age, and the strength of women. I'm hoping that my presence conveys a feeling of stability, humility, and wisdom. This is a piece that is never-ending. It always has a potential future.

–BTS

Relics: Knitted yarn (40 feet long), paper tags, knitting needles, carved-gourd bowl, and notebooks used in performances from September 17, 2005–November 27, 2009; and on December 26, 2009

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

A Meditation on Time, 2005–09

Video, 3:38 min.

Excerpt from *Barbara T. Smith, Time/Space: 47 Performances in 7 Themes* (with Kate Johnson, EZTV, 2012)

Courtesy of the artist and The Box, Los Angeles

Signifier 1

Signifier 2

Signifier 3

Signifier 4

All works 2016, archival inkjet prints, edition of 35,
41 5/8 × 30 1/2 in.

Courtesy of Cirrus Gallery & Cirrus Editions Ltd.