

Project Space: Shinique Smith

Nuit Banai
Mar 5 2009



Like It Like that Photograph: Courtesy Of The Artist, Photography By Adam Reich

Shinique Smith's site-specific intervention is unapologetically fast and loose. As part of the second offering of the museum's Project Space program (following Odili Donald Odita), Smith's graffiti-like wall drawing seems to have been created in a moment of

unbridled spontaneity: The work is so fresh that the paint appears to still dribble down the walls.

Yet this impulsive flow is interrupted here and there with collaged papers, photographic images, song lyrics, handwritten notes and bits of fabrics from Smith's personal archive. Smith complements her public identity—asserted boldly through a gigantic “tag”—with an invitation to glimpse her private world. Yet this self-styled “double exposure” begs the question of how much we really learn about the artist. Isn't this, after all, a carefully crafted image?

Indeed, in keeping with much of Smith's previous work, the theme seems to be the expressive potential of material. Like the minimalist bales of clothing for which she is best known (included in the New Museum's inaugural exhibition, “Unmonumental”), Smith revels in updating the found object or image—in this case, by combining the mythical cred of street art with the gestural purity of AbEx, exploiting both as props in her performative tool kit. What's both supremely interesting and problematic with Smith's cannibalism is how completely natural she makes it seem. A little more self-awareness about the complexity of appropriation would go a long way in lending her work the gravity it needs.