

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

## Shinique Smith Crafts A Celestial Universe From Ink, Textiles And Other 'Bright Matter'

By Katherine Brooks  
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Shinique Smith is a Renaissance woman. She studied ballet when she was just four years old. She trained at the Baltimore School for the arts, honing her life drawing skills at just 12. She spent a chunk of high school tagging buildings with a local graffiti crew. Then she dove into the tradition of Japanese calligraphy in graduate school at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Top top if off, Smith's mother Vkara Phifer-Smith -- the sole parent who raised her -- is a former fashion editor who introduced her daughter to the more unconventional aspirations of fashion. Perhaps that's why Smith is just as keen to incorporate swooping text and neon nests of color, as she is found objects and bunched-up patterned fabric.



Given her history, Smith's layered installations and chaotic paintings appear like the vibrant, carefully collected debris of her life and career. Any given piece can combine the dynamism of dance, the dripping aesthetic of street art, the textural complexity of forgotten clothing and the subtle brushwork of calligraphy, all in one frame.

Like psychedelic versions of Rauschenberg's multimedia canvases, or beautifully curated artifacts from a hoarder's sanctuary, Smith seeks to tell human stories through her abstract creations. She's conjured the spirit of the civil rights movement, the memories of an ex-boyfriend and the scribbles of an anonymous child, often without the faintest glimpse of a human form. Accumulation and consumption are themes that pierce through her work.

"I think my work is very American, and the way we consume and cast off is unique to us," she explained to The New York Times last year.

Smith's tantalizing imagery is currently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, in a show appropriately dubbed "Bright Matter." The title leaves enough wiggle room for Smith to present pieces like "When Shadows Fall," a mixture of ghostly paint strokes and celestial designs, alongside "Bale Variant No. 0021," a hay bale-esque tower of clothes. The entire exhibition will showcase 30 works from the last decade, spanning paintings, sculptures, full-room installations, video, and performance.

Smith is also harkening back to her graffiti roots by designing a 70 by 76-foot mural on the Rose F. Kennedy Greenway at Boston's Dewey Square. Set to be completed on Tuesday, September 23, "Seven Moon Junction" "draws inspiration from various sources such as alchemy, astrology, music and the mythology and art of indigenous cultures." While we wait for the mammoth mural to be unveiled, check out a preview of "Bright Matter" below.



*Through Native Streets, 2011*





*Splendid, 2014*



*Seven Moons, 2013*



*Bale Variant No. 0021 (Christmas), 2011*





*No Key, No Question, 2013*



*There Were Sunday Mornings, 2008*





*Shinique Smith with Especially in the Afternoon (detail), 2008*

*"Shinique Smith: Bright Matter" will be on view in the Henry and Lois Foster Gallery of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston until March 1, 2015. All Images courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.*