

METRO JACKSONVILLE

## Project Atrium Brings Shinique Smith

March 3, 2016

Vibrant and materially inventive, Shinique Smith's signature bundles of tied clothing hang in the 40-foot-high Atrium Gallery against a backdrop of painted calligraphy and mirrored surface at the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, a cultural institute of the University of North Florida, March 19 through June 26.



As the cascading sculptures in her “Project Atrium” installation twirl and perform like dancers or shooting stars, the intersection of material, motion, and reflection creates a thought-provoking visualization about personal identity and individual style. Underneath its colorful surface, however, Smith also presents a three-dimensional outlook on our socio-cultural climate. The exhibition, entitled “Quickening,” undeniably alternates between overt message and subtext. Blossoming into the space, the site-specific installation radiates positive energy outward to the rest of the Museum.

“**Quickening**” is futuristic in nature, as it revisits and reinterprets ideas about speed and modernity in the present day. Its overall shattered appearance suggests a cosmic universe, where various materials and metallic elements coalesce and play. The alternating collaged panels and acrylic mirrors spawn out of a central focal point on the back wall. Light and airy, the use of tulle and sheen creates a glistening effect against washes of color and black calligraphic line. The suspended bundles, nearly fifty in total from hand-sized to large pumpkins, hover in the space and register as constellations or meteoroids exploding from its center. “Quickening” is an opportunity to time travel into the future as it evokes “utopian thoughts of a bright today (or tomorrow),” Smith told MOCA Jacksonville.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Smith now lives and works in upstate New York. Her work is inspired by the vast nature of “things” that we consume and discard, which resonate on a personal and social scale. The graffiti of her youth, Japanese calligraphy, and abstraction are influences from which she extracts “the graceful and spiritual qualities in written word and the everyday.” Smith’s work has been widely exhibited at prestigious venues such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art in Wisconsin, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans, the New Museum in New York, MOMA/PS1 in New York, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, among others. Smith earned her BFA (1992) and MFA (2003) from Maryland Institute College of Art, where she now serves on the Board of Trustees, and her master’s degree in teaching (2000) from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University, both in Massachusetts.

MOCA Jacksonville’s installation provides an occasion to further investigate Smith’s work to date and how she continues to “bundle” ideas into larger projects.

In 2014, “**Arcadian Clusters**” transformed a wing at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum into a pulsating environment of suspended bundles and calligraphic line, or perhaps a spiraling galaxy. Smith’s use of found garments comments on the way we consume and cast off clothing. One’s attire is a form of self-expression, personal identity, and myriad associations related to one’s gender, socioeconomic position, age, ethnicity, or even religion and occupation. Material possesses the ability to conjure memories or evoke emotion. It is also a way to craft a personal statement against unfair labor laws, global trade economies, and unjust textile manufacturers, all of which weigh on Smith’s mind.

Smith’s exposure to the world of fashion occurred at an early age. Her mother, who was a fashion designer and magazine editor, brought her daughter to fabric stores and fashion shows. Her grandmother “would mix brocades and floral patterns that didn’t seemingly belong together [in her home], but they would harmonize. ... I find magic in the relationships of objects and the people that surround me,” she told the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



***Open Word Lattice (White)***, 2014. Ink, acrylic, fabric and paper collage, and found objects on cut wood panel, 60 x 52 x 52 inches. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

From polka dots to stripes and even paisleys, Smith creates a sense of harmony by repurposing unrelated designs into new arrangements. “Things are transmuted into something else and given a new purpose or role, things that nobody wants or can’t wear anymore, so it’s a function shift,” the artist told MOCA Jacksonville. “It now starts to function as color and pattern, but maintains its identity of what it once was in the world. It carries a different history and meaning depending on who views it. How the clothing creates a reaction on multiple levels, as a material it already has embedded in it so many ways of looking at it.”

Smith continues to push her use of material beyond textiles. In 2003, she was first drawn to the formal

qualities of vintage hubcaps while in residence in Skowhegan, Maine. The shiny, chrome hubcaps were convex, providing a reflection of the room and any surrounding marks, such as calligraphic lines or brushstrokes applied directly on the walls. This early exploration led to an ongoing investigation of mirrored surfaces.

One hubcap takes center stage in the multi-dimensional painting, **“Forever Strong.”** Reminiscent of a mandala form, bold overlapping black strokes and braided colored ribbon radiate from its silver center. The room is reflected in the hubcap much like **“The Arnolfini Portrait”** (1434) by Netherlandish painter Jan van Eyck. Smith’s otherwise abstract image repositions itself as a portrait of its viewer, whose own presence and clothing become intertwined in the overall concept.

Inspired by earlier works, **“Quickening”** is a swirling exchange of ideas. As we move throughout this parallel universe, Smith binds us together with material, line, and reflection, and, most important, with the hope of a brighter future.



**Forever Strong** (detail), 2014. Acrylic, ink, fabric and ribbon collage, and vintage hubcap on canvas over wood panel, need dimensions. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

## Events

### **‘Quickening’ Installation**

March 14-18

See Shinique Smith install her “Project Atrium” work throughout the week.

**Free and open to the public**

### **Patrons and Members Party**

Friday, March 18 // 6-9 p.m.

MOCA Jacksonville patrons are invited at 6-7 p.m. and members at 7-9 p.m. to view “Project Atrium: Shinique Smith” and enjoy hors d’oeuvres, drinks, music, and mingling with the artist.

For MOCA patrons and members only

### **Art and Ideas: Shinique Smith**

Saturday, March 19 // 2-3 p.m.

Attend a discussion with “Project Atrium” artist Shinique Smith and learn about her previous work and the process behind the installation at MOCA Jacksonville.

Free and open to the public

**About MoCA Jacksonville**

Founded in 1924 as the Jacksonville Fine Arts Society, MOCA Jacksonville is a private nonprofit visual arts educational institution and a cultural resource of the University of North Florida located in the historic Western Union Telegraph building in the heart of downtown. MOCA Jacksonville serves the community and its visitors through its mission to promote the discovery, knowledge, and advancement of the art, artists, and ideas of our time. For more information, including hours of operation, admission prices, and upcoming exhibitions and programs, visit [mocajacksonville.unf.edu](http://mocajacksonville.unf.edu) or call 904-366-6911.