

Nasher Sculpture Center Announces Next Nasher Public Exhibition Artist, Nyugen E. Smith

Found object sculptural constructions and musical composition consider the universal human experiences of memory, trauma, and spirituality through the multifarious impacts of colonialism on the African diaspora

DALLAS, Texas (December 7, 2020)—The Nasher Sculpture Center announces the third installment of Nasher Public in the Nasher Store gallery, Nyugen E. Smith, on view December 10, 2020 – January 3, 2021.

The work of artist Nyugen E. Smith examines the universal human experiences of memory, trauma, and spirituality through the multifarious impacts of colonialism on the African diaspora. A first-generation Caribbean-American born in Jersey City, New Jersey, to Haitian and Trinidadian parents, and a Lecturer on Interdisciplinary Art at SMU in Dallas, Smith uses performance, found object sculpture, mixed media drawing, painting, video, photography, and writing to connect past upheavals with present political struggles. For Nasher Public, Smith presents fifteen Spirit Carriers, a series of found object constructions that the artist began in 2016. Suspended from the ceiling, the sculptures seem to float in the space, like eccentric, improvised air balloons. Their characteristic shape derives from the crowns of Yoruba chiefs, whose beaded headdresses featured veils to shield the monarch's visage from the public, thus also protecting viewers from the chief's power. Smith made the Spirit Carriers as vessels to carry and protect the spirits of unarmed people of color killed by the police, until, as the artist says, "the spirits can go where they need to go."

This body of work can be seen as a conceptual and formal outgrowth of a larger series the artist began in 2005 called Bundlehouses—multimedia drawings as well as small- and large-scale found object sculptures—that recall the temporary shelters built by migrants with whatever resources they have at hand (usually what they manage to bring with them or find where they camp). Both the Bundlehouses and Spirit Carriers speak powerfully and beautifully to the capricious circumstances and tenuousness and the fragility of life in the contemporary world.

Accompanying the installation is a musical composition that is part of ongoing, multi-part project called Masta My Language, involving poetry, mixed-media works on paper, mixed-media sculpture and installation, performance art, and experimental musical scores. The project grew out of the artist's desire to better know his Haitian heritage and learn Haitian Creole, the first language of his father, and his recognition of the often-uneasy relationship between language and knowledge. The musical composition is a translation, several steps removed from the original manifestation of this desire, a poem Smith wrote entitled "A Letter Home Hoping to Reach You Soon." The artist then created an object, cutting the lines of the poem from rubber in vertical strips. Then Smith used the remnants of rubber left after the lines were cut out (the negative space left by the letters) as the source of abstract forms in mixed media drawings that suggested unknown lexicons or musical notations, signifying the intricacies of acquiring a new language, how it is shared and translated, "and what is gained and lost in the process of transfer." Working with musician William Reese, Smith is developing a musical notation system derived from the drawings. The performance of these compositions, Smith notes, "[reflects] a pedagogical exercise where teacher and student both work through the compositions together to gain deeper connections and knowledge of the text." A recording of *Masta My Language no. 4*, derived from the drawing of the same title, accompanies Smith's Nasher Public installation of the Spirit Carriers. "Loss, and the regenerative potential of loss," Smith writes, "are inherent aspects of this body of

work [Masta My Language], so I wanted to place this composition with the Spirit Carriers to see what becomes of this combination.”

More information on the Masta My Language project, including images of the drawings and musical notations, can be found on the artist's [website](#).

About Nyugen E. Smith

Smith holds a BA in Fine Art from Seton Hall University and an MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work has been presented at numerous museums including the Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; the Museum of Cultural History and the Nordic Black Theater, both in Oslo, Norway; the Newark Museum; and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. Smith is also the recipient of distinguished awards from the Leonore Annenberg Performing and Visual Arts Fund, Franklin Furnace Fund, Dr. Doris Derby Award, and Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. In addition to his vibrant, interdisciplinary artistic practice, Smith is a Lecturer of Interdisciplinary Art in the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University.

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About the Nasher Sculpture Center:

Located in the heart of the Dallas Arts District, the Nasher Sculpture Center is home to the Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, one of the finest collections of modern and contemporary sculpture in the world, featuring more than 300 masterpieces by Calder, de Kooning, di Suvero, Giacometti, Gormley, Hepworth, Kelly, Matisse, Miró, Moore, Picasso, Rodin, Serra, and Shapiro, among others. The Nasher Sculpture Center is open Thursday and Friday 11 a.m to 8 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$7 for seniors, \$5 for students, and free for children 12 and under and members, and includes access to special exhibitions. Visitors must book a timed ticket in advance. For more information, visit www.NasherSculptureCenter.org.