

MODERN ART OXFORD

EXHIBITION NOTES



**Kiki Smith:
I am a Wanderer**

**"I do see a path of subject matter in my work
- I went from the microscopic organs to systems
to bodies to the religious body to cosmologies [...]
But that's only in retrospect. At the time it's more
that certain materials interest you, and you go in
that direction."
- Kiki Smith, 1997**

This exhibition's selection of works was generated in close collaboration with the artist, and in dialogue with the city of Oxford, its medieval heritage, historic museum collections and strong tradition of fantastical literature, exemplified by C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and Lewis Carroll. The city is the perfect host for an exhibition so rich in storytelling and mythology, in which Kiki Smith unfurls an entire world populated by beings of different cultures in time and space, foreign as well as familiar ones: female figures in particular, hybrid creatures, animals of all kinds, plants and heavenly bodies in a variety of forms and materials.

The interdisciplinary and collaborative spirit of Smith's work across a rich variety of media, printmaking in particular, creates an interesting parallel with the arts and science context of Oxford's renowned research culture. The political urgency of the artist's work is equally expressed through a visual and material solidarity with marginalised beings and the natural environment. Smith continually portrays the connection between animals



Kiki Smith, *Crashed Bat*, 1998. Courtesy Pace Gallery.
Photograph by Tom Barratt, courtesy the Artist and Pace Gallery.

and humans in new configurations, emphasising friendship, survival, and protection. Her modern 'bestiary' (a medieval compendium of beasts) comes to life, to convey a sincere and timely message. Smith says: 'We are interdependent with the natural world... our identity is completely attached to our relationship with our habitat and animals. I make things from images that catch my attention.' In the manner of a subtle, poetic environmentalist, Smith communicates through art and beauty to remind us that it is mutual respect between humanity and nature that will secure the survival of both, and the planet as a whole.

Kiki Smith, *Untitled (Daughter)*, 1999.
Courtesy the Artist and Pace Gallery.



Kiki Smith's childhood in New Jersey was shaped by the intellectual and artistic milieu of her parents, opera singer Jane Lawrence and architect, painter, and sculptor Tony Smith, an important figure of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. Instead of the Minimal emphasis on the reduction of forms, the asceticism of the materials, and the banishment of emotion, historical context, and pathos, in Kiki Smith's art feelings come to the fore: emotional states such as fear, dissonance and trauma.

Her inspiration has always derived from daily life and everyday experiences. As the artist explains: 'I moved to the Lower East Side of New York City in 1976. The late 1970s and 80s was a moment of romantic enthrallment with sex, drugs and rock and roll, but also the time of the United States' covert and overt military aggression in Central America. I began using images of bodies in an effort to find a language for my own discomfort and anxiety.'

Smith's early artworks were influenced by the incredible political, social and cultural changes of this time, as shaped by the AIDS crisis, discourse on sexual identity and social gender, and feminist activism. She focuses on

**"The first works are based on the facets of the body, then I become more overt about languages of craft and decorative arts."
– Kiki Smith, 1997**

content and meaning, on existential questions and answers in direct response to the world. The artist investigates the human body without fear of taboos, humiliation, or the constraints of shame, engaging with the human condition. Her works tackle the subjects of age, dying and death, pain and healing, reanimation, wholeness and fragmentation, birth, sexuality, gender, identity and memory, as well as the ecological crisis of the planet. In the early 1990s, Smith began to incorporate history, mythology, legends and fairy tales into her work as well as elements of religion.

Her first sculptures were dedicated to parts of the body such as disembodied arms and fingers. By the mid-1980s, the artist seemed to dissect the entire human anatomy (using knowledge from training as an Emergency Medical Technician alongside her sister Beatrice in 1985), first drawing individual organs and then casting sculptures of them in bronze. She later returns to a focus on the body's outer appearance, initially through soft materials such as gampi paper in 1987, and finally reproduces the human figure in its entirety in a life-size sculpture made of beeswax in 1991. Some of these full-scale wax sculptures from the 1990s are captured by Smith's photography in her studio. Their perspectives and extreme close-ups render the sculptures' status as objects or people uncertain. The blurry depths of field and other snapshot-like visual markers indicate Smith's investigative use of photography to interrogate the afterlives of her sculptural practice.

In the Middle Galleries we encounter a Wunderkammer, 'a cabinet of curiosities' containing a myriad of forms and materials, both human and animal. The artist began making these multiples (limited series of identical objects, often cast) around 1980. Compelling evocations of the body – often dissected or disembodied – can be seen in this abundance of Kiki Smith's material experimentation, from bronze, plaster, glass and porcelain to papier mâché, resin, cast silver and gold leaf – demonstrating her constant curiosity. A collection of hybrid creatures and natural phenomena are also displayed including a glass frog, a porcelain dead cat, a silver shooting star and a bat cast in bronze with piercing ruby eyes.

'I am a wanderer,' Kiki Smith says. And indeed, she is a wanderer through time and space, making 'contact' on a decades-long imaginary journey that takes her through foreign cultures. With the *wanderlust* of a cultural anthropologist she roams through lands and historical epochs, collecting and preserving the heritage of our collective memory. The artist herself speaks of the possibilities of 'resurrection' and 'regeneration', creating visions of beauty, reconciliation and hope in a dystopian world, communicating both poetic sensibility and appeal for action.

This exhibition is curated by Petra Giloy-Hirtz.

Upper Gallery Tapestries

During the intensive four-year process of making this body of woven works, it was important to Smith that the tapestries were made on the same scale as her original printed and collaged compositions (the cartoons), to retain the intimacy and textures of the work as initially conceived. As she explains: 'It's important that each scale has its own integrity.' Some of the same imagery from her 12 tapestries has also been used to make works in stained glass and ceramic tiles.

Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery and Timothy Taylor, London/New York

1. *Sojourn*, 2015
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
2. *Visitor*, 2015
Cotton Jacquard tapestry with gold leaf
3. *Fortune*, 2014
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
4. *Earth*, 2012
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
5. *Cathedral*, 2012
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
6. *Parliament*, 2016
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
7. *Sky*, 2012
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
8. *Guide*, 2012
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
9. *Congregation*, 2014
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
10. *Spinners*, 2014
Cotton Jacquard tapestry, hand-painting and gold leaf
11. *Underground*, 2012
Cotton Jacquard tapestry
12. *Harbour*, 2015
Cotton Jacquard tapestry

Sculptures

13. *Spiral Nebula (Large)*, 2017
Aluminium
14. *Skull*, 1985
Concrete and steel
15. *Woman and Sheep*, 2004
Cast iron
16. *Annunciation (small)*, 2007
Cast bronze
17. *The Seasons Go Away*, 2014
Fine silver
18. *Io (Seated)*, 2005
Porcelain figure with jewellery
19. *Shooting Star*, 2015
Fine silver
20. *Me in a Corner*, 2005
Porcelain

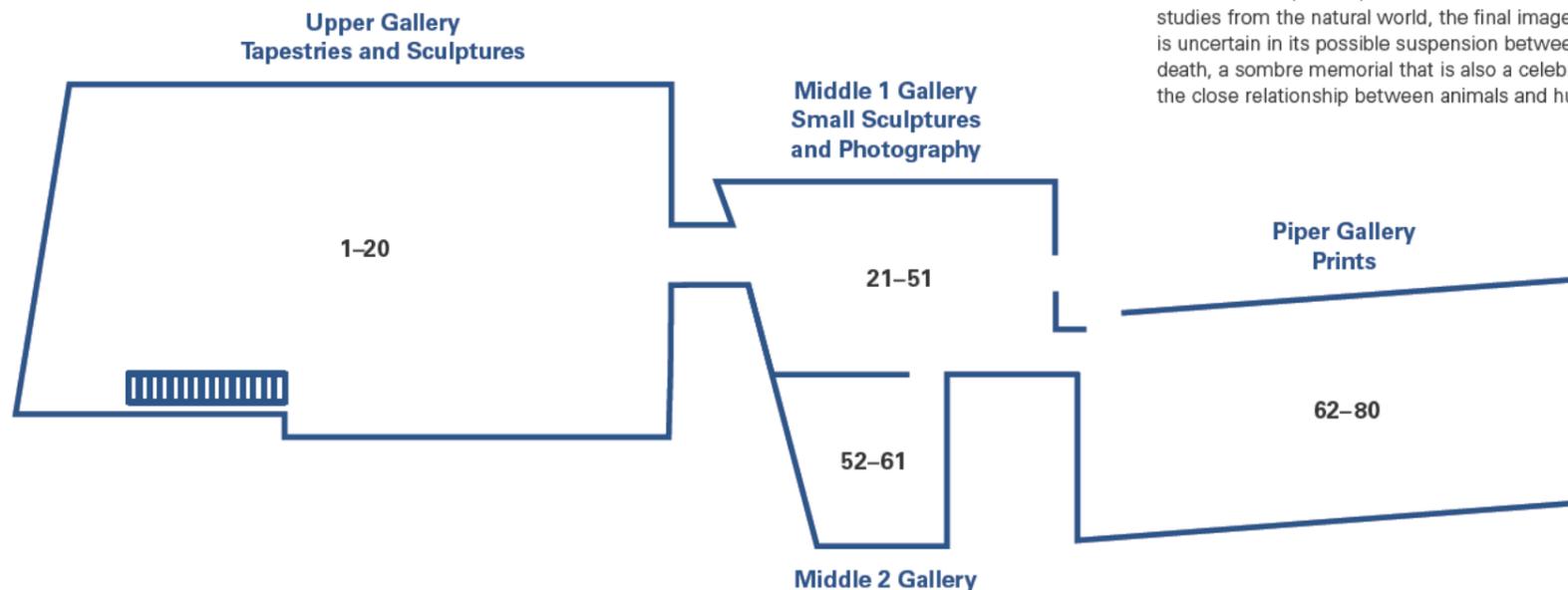
Middle 1 Gallery Small Sculptures

As an artist Kiki Smith embraces collaboration with skilled craftspeople and utilises many artisan techniques in her multiple-edition small sculptures, including glassblowing, casting, and working with delicate and complicated materials including porcelain, bronze, silver and papier-mâché. Smith makes many of her three-dimensional works initially on this intimate scale. They are then scanned – thanks to recent developments in technology – to produce larger cast sculptures, often intended for outdoor settings.

Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery

21. *Egg*, 2000
Glass
22. *Untitled (baby)*, 1987
Gold-painted papier-mâché

23. *Untitled (porcelain dead cat half upper body)*, 1998
Porcelain
24. *Untitled (cast bronze bird's nest)*, date unknown
Bronze
25. *Crashed Bat*, 1998
Bronze and ruby
26. *Light Catcher*, 2011
Porcelain
27. *Sanpaku*, 1997
Glass
28. *Untitled (rose resin bird)*, 1999
Plastic resin
29. *Shell*, 1995
24 carat gold
30. *Frog*, 1999
Glass
31. *Untitled (dead ½ cat, upper torso)*, 1998
Bronze
32. *Yolk*, 1999
Solid worked glass
33. *Star with Tail*, 1997
Sterling silver
34. *Tail*, 1997
Kiln cast lead crystal



35. *Octopussy*, 1998
Bronze
36. *Answer*, 1996
Porcelain and wire
37. *Untitled*, date unknown
Glass
38. *Untitled*, date unknown
Brass
39. *Head Dish 1*, date unknown
Bronze
40. *Bird and Egg*, 1996
Plaster and string

Middle 1 and 2 galleries Photographs

In some instances, Smith's photographs document a work in progress to help the artist gain a sense of a work's final emotional impact. In others, she records and interrogates different perspectives on a sculpture long after its

completion. Some of these photographs give an insight into the making of Smith's major installations from the mid-1990s, including the multiple bronze casts of dead birds in *Jersey Crows*, 1995. She will often photograph a detail – such as a pair of severed crow's feet – so that it takes on the treasured status of a religious relic; a fragment standing in for the whole. There is frequently a degree of abstraction and alienation at work in her photography: for example, the life-size wax cast of a body in the foetal position is captured from the back at an angle, creating an entirely new experience of the sculpture.

Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery

41. *Untitled (Blood Pool)*, 1995
Chromogenic colour print mounted to 2-ply board
42. *Untitled (Ice Man)*, 1995
Chromogenic colour print
43. *Untitled (Ice Man)*, 1995
Chromogenic colour print mounted to 2-ply board
44. *Untitled*, 1993
Chromogenic colour print
45. *Untitled (Rapture)*, 2001
Chromogenic colour print mounted to board
46. *Untitled (Hand of Red Moon on Crutches)*, 2002
Chromogenic colour print
47. *Untitled (Mary Magdalene)*, 1995
Chromogenic colour print mounted to 2-ply board

48. *Untitled (Harpies)*, 2000
Chromogenic colour print mounted to 2-ply board
49. *Untitled (Daughter)*, 1999
Chromogenic colour print mounted to board
50. *Untitled (Daughter)*, 1999
Chromogenic colour print
51. *Untitled (Daughter)*, 1999
Chromogenic colour print
52. *Sky*, 2015
Photopolymer print
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
53. *Sea*, 2015
Photopolymer print
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
54. *Earth*, 2015
Photopolymer print
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
55. *Untitled (Worms)*, 1996
Chromogenic colour print

56. *Untitled (Flower Bed)*, 1995
Chromogenic colour print mounted to 2-ply board
57. *Untitled (Crow Feet)*, 1995
Chromogenic colour print
58. *Untitled (Bird Chain)*, 1993
Chromogenic colour print
59. *Untitled (Autumn)*, 2000
Chromogenic colour print mounted to 2-ply board
60. *Untitled (Eggs and Yolks)*, 1996
Chromogenic colour print
61. *Untitled (Geneviève and the May Wolf)*, 2000
Chromogenic colour print

Piper Gallery Prints

Kiki Smith says of printmaking that 'it has a technical aspect to it, and also endless amounts of freedom.' She is equally interested by the mechanical properties of prints and the collaboration it takes to produce them: 'I like that your mark is distanced, it gives you something that your own hand can't, even though it comes from your hand.'

In the late 1990s, Smith discovered that etching was particularly well suited to capturing the feel and texture of fur, hair, feathers and other complex surfaces that cover both animal and human bodies. To make her prints of animals, Smith has drawn directly from her own pets, such as her cat, Ginzer, after his death. Like many of her studies from the natural world, the final image of Ginzer is uncertain in its possible suspension between life and death, a sombre memorial that is also a celebration of the close relationship between animals and humans.

62. *Jewel*, 2004
Aquatint and etching on Hahnemühle bright white paper
Printed and published by Harlan & Weaver, NY
63. *Homecoming*, 2008
Etching with handcolouring on Saunders Watercolour HP paper
Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions
64. *Goat Moth*, 2015
Etching on Hahnemühle paper
Master Printer: Nathan Catlin. Publisher: LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies, Columbia University
65. *Europa*, 2000–2006
Dimensional 4-colour photogravure with lithograph text
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
66. *Moment*, 2006
Hand coloured monotype with lithography on Crisbrook paper
Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions

67. *Touch*, 2006
Aquatint, etching and drypoint Hahnemühle bright white paper
Portfolio of six prints with a poem by Henri Cole © Kiki Smith. Courtesy of Timothy Taylor, London/New York.
68. *Two*, 2002
Etching on Hahnemühle bright white paper
The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Purchased (Christopher Vaughan Bequest Fund), 2002.
69. *Pool of Tears II*, 2000
Intaglio with hand watercolouring on En Tout Cas paper
Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions
70. *Ginzer*, 2000
Aquatint, etching, and drypoint on Hahnemühle bright white paper
Printed and published by Harlan & Weaver, NY
71. *Seven Seas*, 2012
Etching and aquatint with watercolour on Hahnemühle copperplate bright white paper
© Kiki Smith. Courtesy of Timothy Taylor, London/New York.
72. *Me and the Ear*, 1997
Linoleum cut
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
73. *Esperanza*, 2015
Etching and collage on Hahnemühle paper
Master Printer: Nathan Catlin. Publisher: LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies, Columbia University
74. *My Blue Lake*, 1995
Photogravure and lithograph in 3 colours on En Tout Cas paper
Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions
75. *Sorcery (1st – 9th Hour)*, 2019
Etching on Hahnemühle paper, set of 9
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
76. *Sueño*, 1992
Intaglio in 2 colours on Echizen Kouzo
Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions
77. *Untitled (Hair)*, 1990
2-colour lithograph
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery
78. *Puppetry*, 2012
5 photopolymer prints on Hahnemühle paper
Private Collection, London
79. *Breath*, 2012
Seven-colour lithograph on Zerkal Book smooth white
Private Collection, London
80. *Girl*, 2012
Lithograph (four-colour) on Zerkall Book smooth white
Courtesy of the Artist and Pace Gallery

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