

Emily Mae SMITH

Art of Choice,

Dive into the Latest Work of Emily Mae Smith at Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels

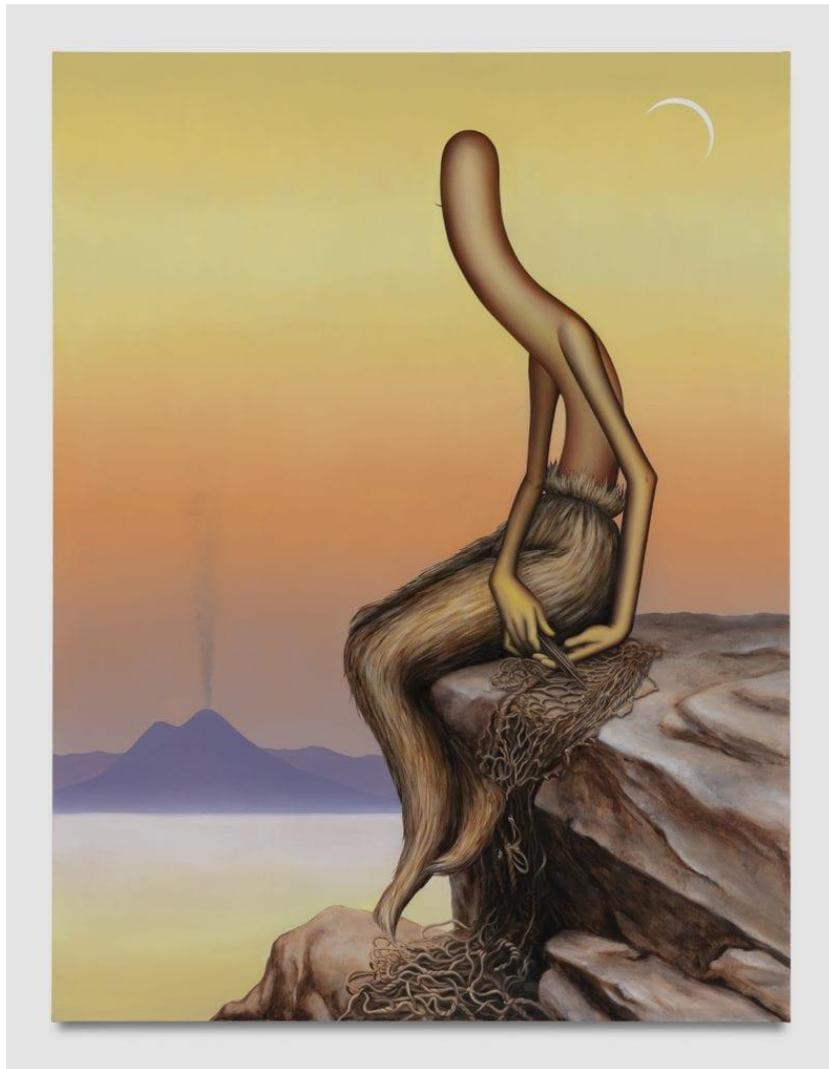
February 2021



DIVE INTO THE LATEST WORK OF EMILY MAE SMITH AT RODOLPHE JANSSEN,
BRUSSELS

FEBRUARY 28, 2021 | GALLERY | CRISTINA SAMPER

Throughout her artistic career, EMILY MAE SMITH has been known for her talent of bringing inanimate objects to life, an exploration to draw representational parallels between the broom and the subject. Based in New York, Smith has explored themes of “art historical femininity, the image and perception of women in art, as well as the role of female artists throughout history”. In her latest body of work, Smith has incorporated a new object, the paintbrush, as a channel of self-representation in her hyper figurative compositions. *Speculative Objects* will be on view through March 30, at RODOLPHE JANSSEN Gallery, Brussels.



***Brush with Flame*, 2021, oil on linen, 170.2 x 129.5 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery**

There is much to be said about the symbolic, stylistic and chromatic approach to Smith's work. Looking first and foremost at the broom. The old caricature styled broom seen often in early animation productions, suggests an understanding of the historical figuration and representation of the object. Reminiscent specifically to the *Fantasia 2000* rendition of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, a 1797 poem by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe. In the story, the apprentice underestimates the power of the sorcerer's hat, and brings inanimate objects (including the broom) as an attempt to lighten his own workload. The mannerisms of these brooms once they come to life, the way they seem to produce already-existing arms that somehow hide from view once the object is no longer animate, as well as the sensitivity through the depiction of individual straws that make up the brush, all contribute to attributing the object to a symbolic representation of humans.



The Field, The Gleaner and Me, 2021, Watercolor and ink on paper 14.6 x 20.3 cm, Courtesy of the Artist, and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery

The fascinating personification of objects brings the viewer to look beyond the subject as an identifiable individual, and rather as a presence that interacts with its surroundings. The viewer is presented in these fabricated realities where the evident subject is a personified wooden rod, often folded in humanoid manners, as it contemplates over a hillside cliff (*Brush With Flame*, seen above). Regarding the subject, what captivates the viewer in dialoguing with these paintings is the artist's ability to give life to the broom through two essential components: the posture, and the hands. Extremities fall effortlessly on the subject's side, and the smooth, delicate hands provide an additional layering of personality and subjecthood to the animated object. Its lack of gender identity suggests larger themes of equality and fluidity in identity, something our post-Contemporary society still struggles to fully embrace. It seems as though the artist is comfortable bringing all these elements to engage in the composition of the canvas.



Taste Test, 2021, oil on linen, 25.4 x 20.3 cm

Aside from the socio-historical symbolism revolving the broom and its correlation throughout history to the female role in a domestic environment, there is a wide range of detailed elements in Smith's compositions, where it seems as if each item was carefully thought out and placed there with a purpose and meaning— all in the effort of finding additional clues to the entirety of representation. When she steps away from the broom specifically, we see how the artist's interests go way beyond those of Contemporary adaptations to Old Master painting. Swimming in the realm of figuration, Smith uses bright colors and a mix of dramatic curves and light and shadow to create the more eccentric pieces. *Taste Test*, seen above, is a clear example of the endless boundaries of the artist's imagination. She incorporates her signature style,

yet removes any signs of Art Historical references, and rather indulges in a deliciously visual array of color and movement.



The Brush and The Flame, 2021, Watercolor and ink on paper, 10.2 x 15.2 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery

However the groundbreaking component to Smith's latest solo show is best described through this small watercolor titled *The Brush and the Flame*, seen above. The artist has taken on a new approach in her work, where through her limitless symbolism, has incorporated herself as subject through the paintbrush. The beautiful and delicate balance of the small-scaled work is present through every angle in its representation. Starting with the parallel lines that the burning candle and paintbrush generate along the vertical axis, the dual dynamic takes hold. Only strengthened by the parallels in shape between the flame and the brush. The items themselves, both inanimate and yet clearly emblematic of life-enhancing tools. The artist is introducing herself and her confident presence in the rest of the body of work.

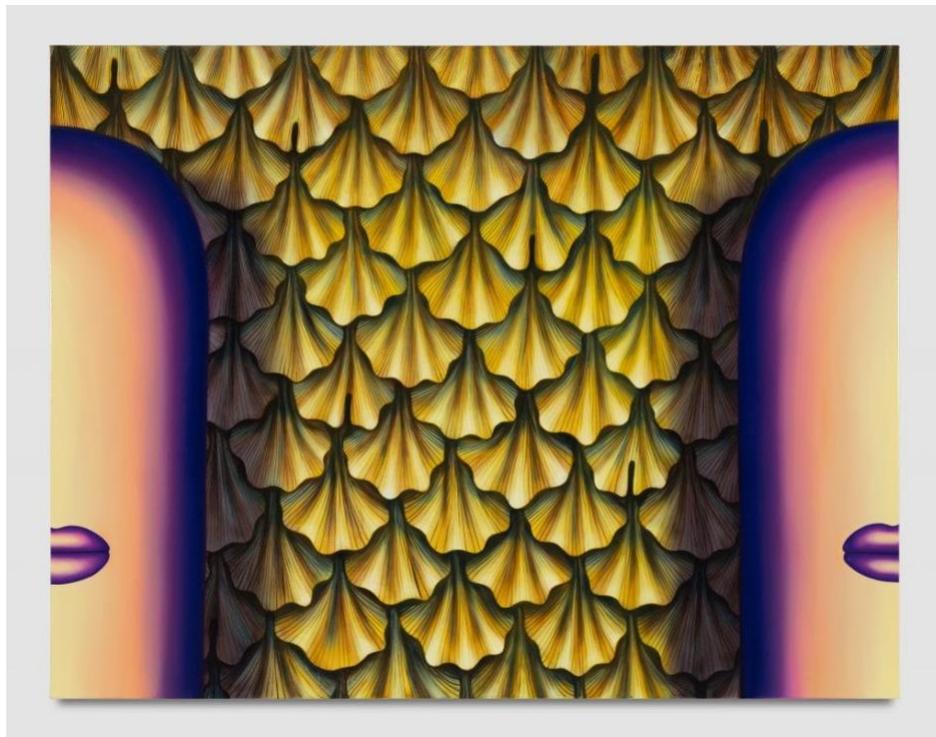


Painter, 2020, watercolor and ink on paper, 15.2 x 10.2 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery

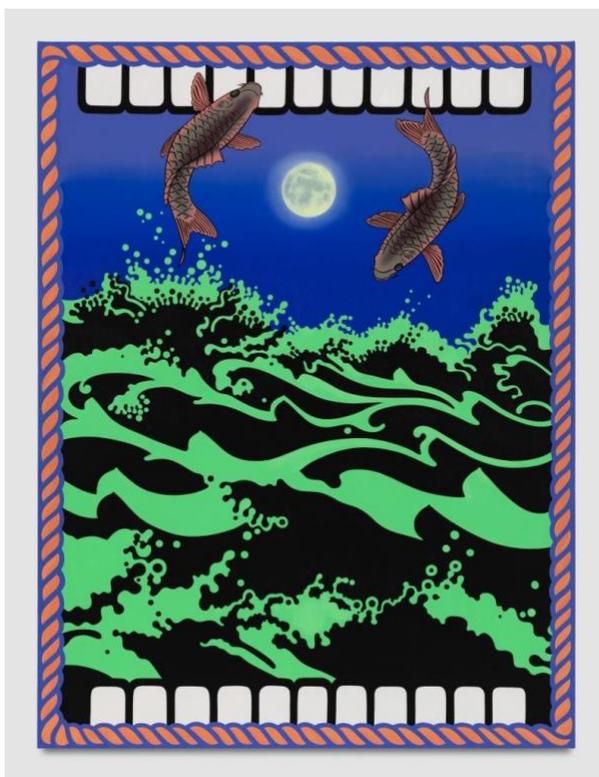
As we've been following Smith's recent artistic path, it is truly refreshing to have such a myriad of work, all gathered in one space. The works lined up on the gallery wall, converse with the viewer and among each other, constantly expanding in interpretation through representation. Through that dialogue, the artist is personified much as her brooms, and so she is immortalized within the exhibition. If you are able, make sure to contact the gallery prior to your visit. Continue scrolling to discover more selected works from *Speculative Objects*.



Installation View, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery



***Biloba*, 2021, watercolor and ink on paper, 10.2 x 15.2 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery**



***Sentient Sea*, 2021 oil on linen, 170.2 x 129.5 cm, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery**



Installation view, Courtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery



Ginkgo, 2021, watercolor and ink on paper 15.2 x 10.2 cm, COurtesy of the Artist and Rodolphe Janssen Gallery