

PRESSBOOK

Emily Mae SMITH

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The Five Rising Artists You Must Know in 2016



Emily Mae Smith's Medusa, 2015; the artist, in her studio; Big Gulp, 2016.
Courtesy of The Artist/Mary Mary, Glasgow; Smith: Alex Antitch

Emily Mae Smith

In 2014, a debut solo show of stylized paintings at the tiny New York gallery Junior Projects catapulted Emily Mae Smith into the art world. Those Pop art–like works—one featured a broom lifted from Disney’s *Fantasia* and imbued with womanly attributes—possessed a graphic sensibility and provided sly feminist commentary. Stunningly self-assured, they exuded, as *The New York Times* put it, a “satirical ingenuity.” But their ultraflat finish belied a decade of messy trial and error. Smith, 37, who arrived in New York in 2004 from her native Texas, lost her longtime studio space three years ago—which threw her for a loop. “I was going through a really tough period,” she says. She turned the spare room in the apartment she shared with her artist boyfriend into a joint studio. In the cramped space, Smith worked faster and smaller, spreading out her ideas over several paintings, rather than cramming them all onto one canvas. “It was a revelation,” she says now. “It’s like when you cook something down until it’s really concentrated.” Since then, Smith has gone on to elaborate on her main themes—gender and eroticism—while making her broom (which has even acquired a chic bob and oversize sunglasses, like some impassive *It* girl) an avatar for the female painter. “That broom is so available for psychological projections: It’s a paintbrush! It’s a magic wand! It’s a phallus!” she says. “Oh, what would Freud say?” — [Fan Zhong](#)