



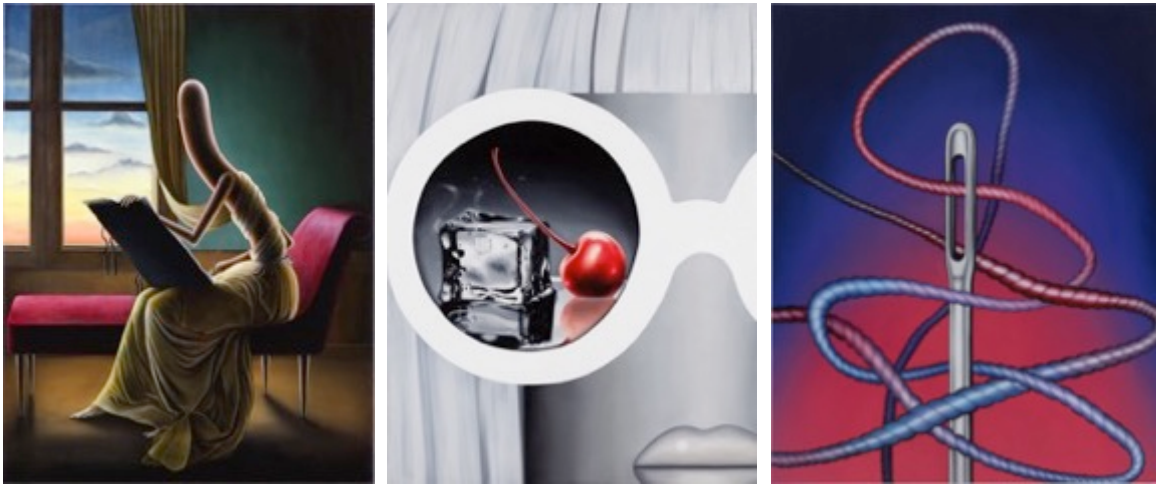
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART

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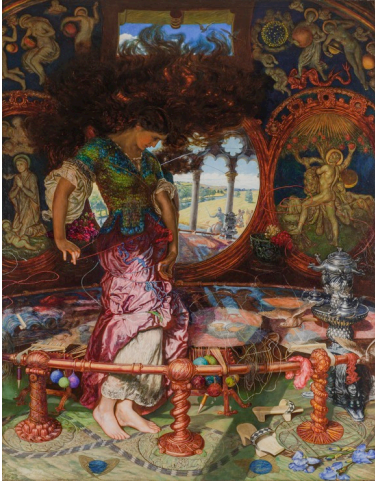
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**MATRIX 181 at the Wadsworth Atheneum Features the paintings of
Emily Mae Smith**

Hartford, Conn. (January 31, 2019) – MATRIX, the Wadsworth Atheneum’s groundbreaking contemporary exhibition series, has set some new goals. Upcoming projects will embrace experimental art, performance art, and explore new developments in painting. In looking at contemporary painting the Wadsworth found a unique vision in the work of Emily Mae Smith. The exhibition marks the first MATRIX show since 2013 to feature an artist who is solely a painter. For her MATRIX project, Smith engages with a masterpiece from the Wadsworth’s permanent collection: William Holman Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott* (c. 1888–1905). *Emily Mae Smith / MATRIX 181* will be on view February 7 through May 5, 2019.

Smith was chosen by *Artsy* as 1 of 20 female artists pushing figurative painting forward. With a nod to distinct painting movements from the history of art, such as Symbolism, Surrealism, and Pop art, Smith creates lively compositions that offer sly social and political commentary. Teeming with symbols, Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott* (below) is the catalyst for this project, in which Smith provides a feminist reimagining of the narrative. For *MATRIX 181*, her first solo museum exhibition in the United States, Smith has selected seven paintings, dated 2015 to 2018, that relate to *The Lady of Shalott*, and created three new paintings, dated 2019, directly inspired by Hunt’s masterwork.



In *The Lady of Shalott* Smith finds a familiar image, she's had a postcard of the painting since she was a teenager. It became the perfect source to address the outdated psychology of female oppression, male authority, and implied violence, still pertinent today.

There is an uncanny affinity between the coded iconography of Smith and Hunt. According to Patricia Hickson, the Wadsworth's Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art, "Emily Mae Smith offers a raucous and empowering retelling of *The Lady of Shalott*, leading with her eccentric broomstick avatar along with her usual toolbox of gendered symbols. She employs a refreshing, satirical approach to social commentary."

Smith's lexicon of signs and symbols begins with her avatar, inspired by the broomstick figure from Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). Simultaneously referring to a painter's brush, a domestic tool associated with women's work, and the phallus, the figure continually transforms across Smith's body of work. "The first broom I put in a painting was... a way for me to paint an object, figure, female, and phallus all at the same time. I thought it was funny and an ideal vehicle," said Smith. "The ideas for my broom figure have changed and expanded since then; it has been molded to my painting needs. You can say more difficult things with a character." Smith's depiction of the female body is all visual wit and dark humor. By adopting a variety of guises, the broom and other symbols speak to contemporary subjects, including gender, sexuality, capitalism, and violence.

Artist Biography

Emily Mae Smith was born in 1979 in Austin Texas. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received her M.F.A. in Visual Art from Columbia University, New York in 2006 and her B. F. A. in Studio Art from the University of Texas at Austin. Recent solo and dual exhibitions include: *Emily Mae Smith*, Le Consortium, Lyon, France (2018-19); *A Strange Relative*, Perrotin, New York, NY (2018); *The Sphinx or The Caress*, Simone Subal Gallery, New York, NY (2017); *Tesla Girls*, Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels, Belgium (2016); *Honest Espionage*, Mary Mary, Glasgow, Scotland, UK (2016); *Medusa*, Laurel Gitlen, New York, NY (2015). Select group exhibitions include *Summer*, curated by Ugo Rondinone, Peter Freeman Inc., New York, NY (2018); *Pine Barrens*, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY (2018); *Pharmacy for Idiots*, Rob Tufnell and Tanya Leighton, Köln, Germany (2017); *Women to the Front*, Works from the Miller Meigs Collection, Lumber Room, Portland, OR (2017); *Le Quatrième Sexe*, curated by Marie Maertens, Le Coeur, Paris, France (2017); *Scarlet Street*, Lucien Terras, New York, NY (2016); *Me, Myself, I*, China Art Objects Galleries, Los Angeles, CA (2016); *Surreal*, König Galerie (St. Agnes), Berlin, Germany (2016); *Untitled Body Parts*, Simone Subal Gallery, New York, NY (2016).

Related Programs

February 7, Art After Dark: Color My World, 5-8pm

Celebrate the opening of *Emily Mae Smith / MATRIX 181*. The evening includes an artist talk by Emily Mae Smith at 6pm, live music, free food, beer tasting, cash bar, watercolor workshop, and film. \$10; \$5 members.

March 9, Encounters: Emily Mae Smith and #MeToo, 10am

Join a dialogue that explores artistic responses to gender, sexuality, capitalism, and violence in the work of MATRIX artist Emily Mae Smith alongside the powerful, contemporary #MeToo movement, which brings to light sexual harassment and sexual assault. Free, but RSVP to faculty@wadsworthatheneum.org to reserve a seat and lunch.

March 21, Gallery Talk: Emily Mae Smith / MATRIX 181, Noon

Curator Patricia Hickson leads a tour of MATRIX 181 discussing painter Emily Mae Smith's flat, graphic imagery that visualizes issues like gender inequality, capitalism, and violence. Free with museum admission.

About MATRIX

Inaugurated in 1975, MATRIX is the Wadsworth's groundbreaking contemporary art exhibition series featuring works by artists from around the world. From its inception, MATRIX has been a forum for art that is challenging, current, and sometimes controversial. Through clear explanation and thoughtful engagement with the viewer, MATRIX exhibitions call into question preconceptions about art and increase understanding of its possibilities. Many MATRIX artists, such as Christo, Sol LeWitt, Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, and Carrie Mae Weems are now considered seminal figures in contemporary art.

Exhibition and Program Support

The MATRIX program is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum's Contemporary Coalition. Public programs at the Wadsworth Atheneum are supported by the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation Fund. Sustaining support for the Wadsworth Atheneum provided by Newman's Own Foundation and the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continuously operating public art museum in the United States. The museum's nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The Wadsworth Atheneum's five connected buildings—representing architectural styles from Gothic Revival to modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday–Friday: 11am–5pm; Saturday and Sunday: 10am–5pm Admission: \$5–15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free admission for Hartford residents with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Free “happy hour” admission 4–5pm. (860) 278-2670. thewadsworth.org.

Images:

Emily Mae Smith images courtesy of the artist and Simone Subal Gallery, New York.
Left: Emily Mae Smith, *The Drawing Room*, 2018, Oil on linen. Private collection. Photo by Dario Lasagni. Center: Emily Mae Smith, *Still Life*, 2015, Oil on linen. Private collection. Photo by Charles Benton. Right: Emily Mae Smith, *Unruly Thread*, 2019, Oil on linen. Photo by Charles Benton.

William Holman Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott*, c. 1888-1905. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund. 1961.470

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