



Beneath Tongues
Architecture and Design Series: 6th Edition
Curated by Sable Elyse Smith
January 21—April 17, 2022

Including works by Cudelice Brazelton IV, Abigail DeVille, Nikita Gale, Lauren Halsey, E. Jane, Steffani Jemison, Jennie C. Jones, Freddie June, Christine Sun Kim, Carolyn Lazard, Lydia Ourahmane, Sondra Perry, Patricia Satterwhite, Jessica Vaughn, Carrie Mae Weems

“Language is a circular shape around us,” writes New York-based artist and educator Sable Elyse Smith. “It has legs and sounds and blows and silence. Do you know this? It is a brick pulling out another brick and toppling down on top of itself only to be built back up again. Do you know this?”¹ Such propositions form the premise of *Beneath Tongues*, an exhibition curated by Smith that brings together fifteen artists, seven writers and an ensemble of musicians to reveal the elemental role of language, sound and noisemaking in establishing new realities within an antagonistic present.

Words are worlds for Smith, whose own artwork integrates language mined from personal experience and culled from currents of culture. The use and understanding of sounds, noise and words is both self-determined and subject to systemic conditioning, thus creating tension between agency over language and surrender to it. In *Beneath Tongues*, Smith joins together her peers, collaborators and forebearers in chorus to explore the potential of these ambiguities to make and unmake knowledge. By forging such links, Smith suggests that verbal and sonic expressions may constitute their own immaterial architectures: scaffolding on which to build or frameworks to demolish. The exhibition is conceived in three parts consisting of an installation of artworks, a publication of new writing and a musical score.

Spilling onto the sidewalk, a newly commissioned video by E. Jane features the artist orally annotating a segment from a 1998 episode of *The Rosie O’Donnell Show* in which Whitney Houston is surveilled by the show’s production team. Voices continue to circulate in the gallery in registers both human and synthetic. In a video by Carolyn Lazard, a protagonist recounts a disquieting memory, while a desktop monitor in Sondra Perry’s *Title TK 5* regurgitates legalese. The cumulative power of mark-making can be felt in contributions by Steffani Jemison, Patricia Satterwhite and Lauren Halsey, orienting archival impulses towards possible futures. A small sculpture by Cudelice Brazelton IV emits the ambient sounds of a river and construction site set thousands of miles apart, while, nearby, three sculptures by Lydia Ourahmane absorb and transmit the sounds of the gallery. Laid on the floor and situated in a corner, respective works by Jessica Vaughn and Jennie C. Jones invite considerations of silence, using surfaces and peripheries to acknowledge voids. Photographs by Carrie Mae Weems and drawings by Christine Sun Kim reveal the chasms left by acts of translation and question what might grow in these gaps. Industrial frameworks are integrated into sculptures by Abigail DeVille and Nikita Gale; within them, materials weave, hang and envelop, illustrating sound as a means of circumvention. In response to the installation, Smith has produced *Duets*, a booklet containing seven newly commissioned texts by Sampada Aranke, Atheel Elmalik, Amarie Gipson, Hanna Girma, Yelena Keller, Keli Safia Maksud and Rachell Morillo, as well as an introduction by Smith.

The second floor of SI is a room for listening and a venue for monthly live performances of the exhibition’s score. Conceived by Smith, composer Tariq Al-Sabir, and vocalist and artist Freddie June, the triadic composition functions as another text, a B-side to the exhibition’s forthcoming catalogue, that draws from principles of improvisation and looping to create capaciousness. Its three segments, “The Storm,” “The Belly,” and “The Reemergence,” consist of a freedom song written by Freddie June that is continuously stretched and reshaped. The score looks to the essence of wailing, shouting, screaming, inhaling and exhaling, “those things we do with the breath,” writes Smith, that make the unspeakable corporeal, that make life rather than noise. Playlists and recordings made by artists in the exhibition are embedded in risers, and a record player prepared for two listeners plays host to a collection of vinyl selected by Smith. Saturated in sound, the exhibition itself becomes an architecture in which noises bleed and stories are told.

¹ Sable Elyse Smith, *FEAR TOUCH POLICE* landing page, published October 2020, www.ftp.life.

This exhibition marks the conclusion of a three-part collaboration with Smith that commenced in September 2020 with the installation of her sculpture, *BACKBEND*, on SI's roof terrace as part of SI ONSITE. From October 2020 to January 2022, SI presented Smith's multimedia publishing initiative *FEAR TOUCH POLICE*, accessible at ftp.life.

Swiss Institute is grateful to the lenders to this exhibition: Jonathan Childs; Paul & Shue Her-Sturm; Miyoung Lee; Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles; Bridget Donahue, New York; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles and New York; Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, New York; Alexander Gray Associates, New York; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York; Sans titre (2016), Paris; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and the artists. Sable Elyse Smith wishes to thank: Every single artist, writer and collaborator on this project. Deep gratitude to Tariq Al-Sabir and Shala Miller. And to the text of: Renee Gladman, Daphne A Brooks, Christina Sharpe, Fred Moten, Toni Morrison, Simone White, Dionne Brand, Steffani Jemison. And thanks to the music, to countless hours spent listening to the blues, trap, gangsta rap, jazz, fuck, R&B; and to the gospel singers—Lord, the gospel singers.

Beneath Tongues is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. SI gratefully acknowledges additional support from Carlos/Ishikawa and the SI Architecture & Design Council.

This exhibition is organized by Daniel Merritt, Curator and Head of Residencies.

About Sable Elyse Smith

Sable Elyse Smith (b. 1986, Los Angeles, California) points to the carceral, the personal, the political and the quotidian to speak about a violence that is largely unseen, and potentially imperceptible. Sable Elyse Smith was included in *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* at MoMA PS1, New York, NY; *Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America* at the New Museum, New York, NY; and *Climate Changing* at the Wexner Center of the Arts in Columbus, OH. Most recently, her work was on view at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, MA as part of *Colored People Time*, which traveled from the ICA Philadelphia. Her work was included in *Great Force* at the ICA at Virginia Commonwealth University, and solo shows include the Queens Museum in New York, NY and the Haggerty Museum in Milwaukee, WI. Smith was a 2018/2019 artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem which culminated in an exhibition at MoMA PS1. Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including the High Line, New York, NY, for which she also curated an event at The Kitchen, New York, NY; the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, TX; SITE Santa Fe, NM; Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY; the New Museum, New York, NY; the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY; and El Museo Del Barrio, New York, NY.

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About Swiss Institute

Founded in 1986, SI is an independent non-profit contemporary art institution dedicated to promoting forward-thinking and experimental art making through innovative exhibitions and programs. Committed to the highest standards of curatorial and educational excellence, SI serves as a platform for emerging artists, catalyzes new contexts for celebrated work, and fosters appreciation for under-recognized positions. Open to the public free-of-charge, SI seeks to explore how a national perspective can foster international conversations in the fields of visual and performing arts, design and architecture.

SI Programming is made possible in part with public funds from Pro Helvetia, Swiss Arts Council; the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature; and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Main sponsors include LUMA Foundation, Friends of SI and the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation. Exhibitions are made possible in part by the SI Annual Exhibition Fund with leadership support provided by the LUMA Foundation, Michael Ringier, Olivier Audemars, Philippe Bertherat, Max and Monique Burger, the Garcia Family Foundation, Florian Gutzwiller, Dominique Lévy, Susanne von Meiss, Iwan Wirth, Ghislaine Brenninkmeijer, the Kevin Wendle Foundation, and the Freedman Family Foundation. SI gratefully acknowledges Swiss Re as SI ONSITE Partner, Vitra as Design Partner, Crozier Fine Arts as Preferred Shipping Art Logistics Partner, and SWISS as Travel Partner.

Critical operating support has been provided to SI in 2020-21 as part of a collective fundraising effort. We thank the following supporters: The David Teiger Foundation, The Destina Foundation, The Willem de Kooning Foundation, The Cy Twombly Foundation, The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, The Stavros Niarchos Foundation, The Henry Luce Foundation, Sotheby's, The Arison Arts Foundation, and The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation.

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