

Brooklyn Museum

Teacher Resource Packet

Kiki Smith: Sojourn

February 12–September 12, 2010



Kiki Smith: Sojourn



Kiki Smith. Photo © Chris Sanders

About the Artist

Kiki Smith (American, b. Germany 1954) is a feminist artist whose ongoing interests in sculpture, the female body, and women's history have been influenced by her Catholic upbringing and by the work of her father, the sculptor Tony Smith (1912–1980). Kiki Smith focuses on representations of the female body in her art as a way of reclaiming women's humanity and challenging women's subjugation.¹ In her most recent site-specific installations, which incorporate elements of printmaking, drawing, and sculpture, Smith examines the creativity of women.

About the Exhibition

Kiki Smith: Sojourn presents a unique, site-specific installation exploring ideas of creative inspiration and the cycle of life in relation to women artists. The installation draws on a variety of universal experiences, from the milestones of birth and death to common experiences such as the daily

chores of domestic life. An important eighteenth-century silk needlework by a young woman named Prudence Punderson, *The First, Second, and Last Scene of Mortality* (see illustration), provided the model for Smith's installation and is included in the exhibition. Punderson's stark depiction of a woman's journey from childhood to death (represented by a cradle and a coffin, respectively) in the years surrounding American independence intrigued Smith because its central figure is engaged in creative work and the life of the mind rather than in stereotypical rites of passage for women of the period revolving around marriage, family, and domestic life.

Sojourn presents a variety of works by the artist in a range of media, including sculpture, cast objects, collage, drawing, and photography. To extend her themes of domesticity, creativity, and women's lives, Smith expands her installation into two eighteenth-century period rooms in the Museum's nearby Decorative Arts galleries where women would have enacted their roles as wives, daughters, and mothers.



Prudence Punderson (American, 1758–1784). *The First, Second, and Last Scene of Mortality*, 1776–83. Untwisted silk thread on a plain woven silk ground. Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Gift of Newton C. Brainard



About the Artwork *Annunciation*

Kiki Smith draws upon her Catholic upbringing in the artwork *Annunciation*. In Christianity, the Annunciation is the revelation to Mary by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive a child, Jesus. In this installation, Smith uses the Annunciation as a metaphor for the moment of creative inspiration for female artists.

Description of the Artwork

A life-size human figure, void of details that indicate its gender, sits atop a wooden stool. The figure leans slightly to its left. Both feet hang down but do not touch the floor. The figure has a disproportionately large, bald head and a neutral facial expression. It is wearing a fitted collared shirt, t-shirt, and pants. The figure's left hand rests in its lap. Its right arm extends upward with the palm facing outward. The entire surface of the sculpture is a rich, silver color.

Questions for Viewing *Annunciation*

What do you notice about this sculpture?

Describe the figure.

What do you notice about the figure's clothing?

Describe the figure's facial expression and body language. What type of mood does the figure convey? What do you see to support your idea?

The title of this sculpture, *Annunciation*, refers to an excerpt from the Bible when the angel Gabriel reveals to Mary that she is going to have a baby. Do you notice any connections between this story and the artwork?

Smith uses the Annunciation as a way to explain how people can become inspired. She believes that inspiration enters the mind and body like a message. How does the sculpture *Annunciation* represent this experience of becoming inspired?

Cover (detail), pages 3 and 5: Kiki Smith (American, b. Germany 1954). *Annunciation*, 2008. Cast aluminum, 61 1/2 x 32 x 19 in. (156.2 x 81.3 x 48.3 cm). © Kiki Smith. Courtesy of the artist and PaceWildenstein. Photo by Joerg Lohse/Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York

Although the figure does not have hair or details that indicate a specific gender, the artist asserts that the figure represents a female body.² Why might it have been important for the artist to display a female figure experiencing inspiration?

For Smith, inspiration and creativity come at unexpected moments and from unpredictable sources. Do you agree or disagree? Consider moments when you have been inspired or creative.

Smith selected *Sojourn*, which literally means “a temporary stay,” as the title for her exhibition. Why do you think she chose this title?

1. Kiki Smith, interview by Catherine Morris, November 19, 2009, Women in the Arts 2009 ceremony, Brooklyn Museum.

2. Ibid.

Activities

Research Activity

Kiki Smith is often inspired by women who take unconventional journeys through life, such as the abolitionist and women's-rights activist Sojourner Truth (1797–1883). Truth is one of thirty-nine “guests of honor” represented by place settings at *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago (also on view at the Brooklyn Museum).

Go to http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/leascfa/dinner_party/home.php and choose the name of a woman represented at *The Dinner Party* that you do not recognize.

Create a list of questions you would like to ask this woman, such as “How did your actions meet or challenge the expectations society had for women during your lifetime?” or “Why do you think people consider you to be an inspirational woman?” Use this list of questions to guide your research about this woman's biography and the historical period in which she lived. Report your findings as an interview transcript, or prepare a dramatic presentation using the interview as a script to role-play.

Art Activity

The sculpture *Annunciation* is a metaphor for identifying the unknown and unexpected sources female artists draw upon for inspiration. Identify one activity, person, or place that/who inspires you to be creative. Make a list of things you might use to symbolize this creative force, and select one thing. Practice drawing this symbol from four different perspectives—front, back, left side, and right side—to begin planning what a three-dimensional representation might look like.

Front	Back	Left Side	Right Side

Using a clean surface, knead a small block of clay (about a 2-inch cube) until it is soft and easy to shape. Spend 5–10 minutes experimenting with different techniques for shaping the material. Share your discoveries with a partner. Use the same ball of clay to create the basic shapes of the symbol you designed. Refer to your sketches. Now add any details. Once the clay has dried, choose one color to paint the entire surface.

Resources

www.pbs.org/art21/artists/smith

The Web site for the PBS television series *Art:21* provides access to biographies, interviews, images of art, video clips, and links to Web resources for Kiki Smith, who is featured in Season 3.

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/burning_down_the_house/uploads/BDTH_Teacher_Packet.pdf

This PDF document provides information about Smith and her lithograph *Born* (2002). It includes a reproduction of the work, a description, questions for viewing, as well as activities and resources.

Seifermann, Ellen, ed. *Kiki Smith: Her Home*. Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Art, 2009.

This book includes images of Smith's 2008 solo exhibition in Krefeld, Germany, which was her earliest installation related to Prudence Punderson's *The First, Second, and Last Scene of Mortality*.

Hentschel, Martin, and Estrella de Diego. *Kiki Smith: Her Memory*. Catalan, English, and Spanish. Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 2009.

This book, published in conjunction with the installation created for the Fundació Joan Miró in 2009, provides images of the work, as well as articles by Martin Hentschel, director of the Kunstmuseen Krefeld, and Estrella de Diego.

Kiki Smith: Sojourn is organized by Catherine J. Morris, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum. This exhibition is made possible by the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation.

The Brooklyn Museum is the fourth venue in a long-term project by the artist that originated at Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, Germany, and traveled to Kunsthalle Nürnberg and Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.

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