

**Exhibition:** *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It*

**On View:** April 1–October 31, 2021

**Location:** BCAM, Level 1



Image caption on page 3

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It*, featuring the interdisciplinary artist who creates films, installations, objects, and performances that ruminate on the everyday possibilities of imagination. In this presentation of her recent work, Smith foregrounds Southern California artists and visionaries who engaged in creating and sustaining place and community. As is frequent in Smith's oeuvre, the artistic, musical, and textual references she draws from celebrate the experimental and radical practices of Black expression.

The title of the exhibition, *Give It or Leave It*, challenges the colloquial “take it or leave it,” and reflects the role of generosity and creation in the spiritual and artistic output of the historical figures that inhabit the exhibition. Smith proposes a new rule for a better world: creating something, offering it, and gifting it—regardless of whether the gesture is accepted or rejected.

Prior to the presentation at LACMA, the exhibition was on view at The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, (February 16–May 5, 2019); Frye Art Museum (June 1–September 1, 2019); and The Institute of Contemporary Art Pennsylvania (September 14–December 23, 2018). *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It* is curated by Anthony Elms, Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia and is organized at LACMA by Rita Gonzalez, Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a concurrent companion show, *Cauleen Smith: Stars in My Pocket and the Rent Is Due* (July 10–September 25, 2021) at LACMA's gallery at Charles White Elementary. From the end of 2020 into 2021, Smith conducted virtual visits with classes at Charles White Elementary School. In these meetings, the artist invited students to make short videos and dioramas depicting a world they want to live in. Inspired by the students' resilience and imagination during a pandemic, Smith has incorporated elements from student-made videos into a new installation, and has created a set of embellished banners that reference astronomy, migration, and movement.

### **About the Exhibition**

*Give It or Leave It* features 5 videos and 9 installations that reflect Smith's interest in utopian thinkers, especially artists and musicians who have created new languages through open and improvisational approaches. As Smith has expressed, "if I am interested in a person or a place, I don't have to make a factual travelogue documentary or biopic: I can use the things that person made to make new things that connect us to our pasts and speculate about possible futures—about who we want to be, and even what we want to leave behind."

The exhibition coalesces separate and unrelated histories of spirituality, creativity, and utopianism into a unified emotional cosmos. In video works *Pilgrim* (2017) and *Sojourner* (2018), musician Alice Coltrane and her ashram, a 1966 shoot by photojournalist Bill Ray at Watts Towers, artist Noah Purifoy and his desert assemblages, and black spiritualist Rebecca Cox Jackson provide sources of inspiration.

Other exhibition highlights include recent installation works *Space Station: Two Rebeccas* (2018), in which footage projected onto an assemblage of disco balls fractures across an spread of shag carpet and artist-designed wallpaper; and *Epistrophy* (2018), recently added to LACMA's permanent collection through the museum's support group AHAN: Studio Forum, in which multi-channel projections of dreamlike landscapes are generated by closed-circuit cameras trained on an elaborate table-top tableau.

### **About Cauleen Smith**

Cauleen Smith was born in Riverside, California, in 1967 and grew up in Sacramento. She earned a BA from San Francisco State University and an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Theater, Film and Television. Her films, objects, and installations have been featured in group exhibitions at the Studio Museum of Harlem, New York; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; the New Museum, New York; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. She has had solo shows for her films and installations at The Kitchen, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; and DuSable Museum, Chicago; and had a project at the ICA Philadelphia in Fall 2018. She is the recipient of multiple

awards and fellowships including the prestigious inaugural Ellsworth Kelly Award of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts and the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts. She has received a Creative Capital grant, a Rauschenberg Residency; Black Metropolis Research Consortium Research Fellowship; and the Director's Grant at the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts. Smith recently relocated from Chicago to Los Angeles where she teaches at CalArts.

### **Charles White Elementary School Gallery**

2401 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90057

Open to the public on Saturday afternoons, 1–4 pm; free admission

Learn more about visitation requirements and enhanced health and safety measures at Charles White Elementary School Gallery at [lacma.org](https://lacma.org).

### **Credit**

This exhibition is organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania.

Support is provided by the Pasadena Art Alliance.

Major annual support is provided by Kitzia and Richard Goodman, Meredith and David Kaplan, and Jeffrey Saikhon, with generous annual funding from Terry and Lionel Bell, the Judy and Bernard Briskin Family Foundation, Kevin J. Chen, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Emily and Teddy Greenspan, Earl and Shirley Greif Foundation, Marilyn B. and Calvin B. Gross, Mary and Daniel James, David Lloyd and Kimberly Steward, Kelsey Lee Offield, David Schwartz Foundation, Inc., Mr. and Mrs. Anthony and Lee Shaw, Lenore and Richard Wayne, Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto, and The Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

### **About LACMA**

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 142,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036. [lacma.org](https://lacma.org)

**Image caption:** Installation photograph, *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, April 1–October 31, 2021, © Cauleen Smith, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

### **Press Contact**

Erin Yokomizo | Senior Associate, Communications | [eyokomizo@lacma.org](mailto:eyokomizo@lacma.org) | 323 932-5825

### **Connect with LACMA**



@lacma