

Floats

WORKS BY BRUNO SMITH

March 23 – April 20, 2019



This body of sculptures arises from a borderland of Smith's mind. At a long distance, *Floats* seems miragelike as a discarded remnant. Perhaps next it is a beloved treasure. A closer perspective renders it unclassifiable. The work shapeshifts, therefore disordering the categorizing tendencies of the mind.

Smith's contemplation of his Mexican-American background heavily steeps the work and the symbols that lace it. Recognizable elements of prepackaged consumer culture—tie-dye, Disney characters, logos of Mexican products— catch the eye just as the detailed craftsmanship of stitching and brushwork becomes apparent. This tension between handmade and manufactured introduces the question of an individual's relationship to symbols and signifiers in the twenty-first century. Identity is neither seared to branding nor subsumed by it, but we cannot regard ourselves without it.

One of the exhibition's highlights, Coatlicue, whose name is derived from the Aztec serpent goddess, is composed of stuffed and sewn Realtree-print shirts. They are stacked atop one another with appendages extended. Despite what associations might be drawn from the hunting garments, the form of the work conjures stone sculptures interpreted by colonizers after the Spanish Conquest. When these disparate times and places come into contact, they strike at once pain, wistfulness, and wonder. These emotions are discordant. But they are, perhaps more importantly, inextricable. A yearning to understand one's feelings becomes, rather, a dawning of recalibration.

Octavio Paz' extended essay *The Labyrinth of Solitude* imagines the abstract space inhabited by Mexican people in the United States, particularly Los Angeles. The feeling that language cannot precisely describe what is seen is central to experiencing Bruno Smith's work. Writes Paz, "It floats, without offering opposition... it floats, never quite existing, never quite vanishing."