



Unconscious Couplings

Artist Michael E. Smith's strangely affecting new exhibition.

By Katy Diamond Hamer - May 6, 2015



All images: Installation view, *Erika Verzutti: Swan with Stage*, SculptureCenter, 2015. Courtesy the artist, Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich. Photo: Jason Mandella

Underneath the main level of the **SculptureCenter** in Queens, New York, is a cellar gallery that is nearly raw, with exposed brick and a slight dampness to the air. It is a nontraditional space, perfect for an artist like **Michael E. Smith**, who makes work that doesn't always look like art.

His new exhibition, curated by **Ruba Katrib**, is his first solo in an American museum, and includes sculpture and a two-channel video. The only piece that has an actual title is "Mud Room," a sculpture that resembles a white shelving unit, suggesting a place where the viewer might leave their dirty boots. Of course, it won't actually serve such a purpose; it really just sets the tone for the exhibition, which is simply called "–", a reference to the idea of subtraction and absence. It leaves a lot of responsibility in the hands of the audience. Smith's work can be both subtle and jarring. He takes something playful like a Nintendo console and makes it threatening (attached to a dolly, it evokes an explosive device). All of the pieces seem to be unlikely pairings that present the viewer with a different understanding of a familiar object. "He's interested in the specific materials and histories of the objects he's using, as well as our cultural associations with them," Katrib says. "Objects we wouldn't normally pay attention to—a sleeping bag, a garbage disposal—can be viewed as radically different. How does he make something so mundane into something so strange?"

Michael E. Smith's "–" is on view through August 3 at New York's SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves St, Long Island City.