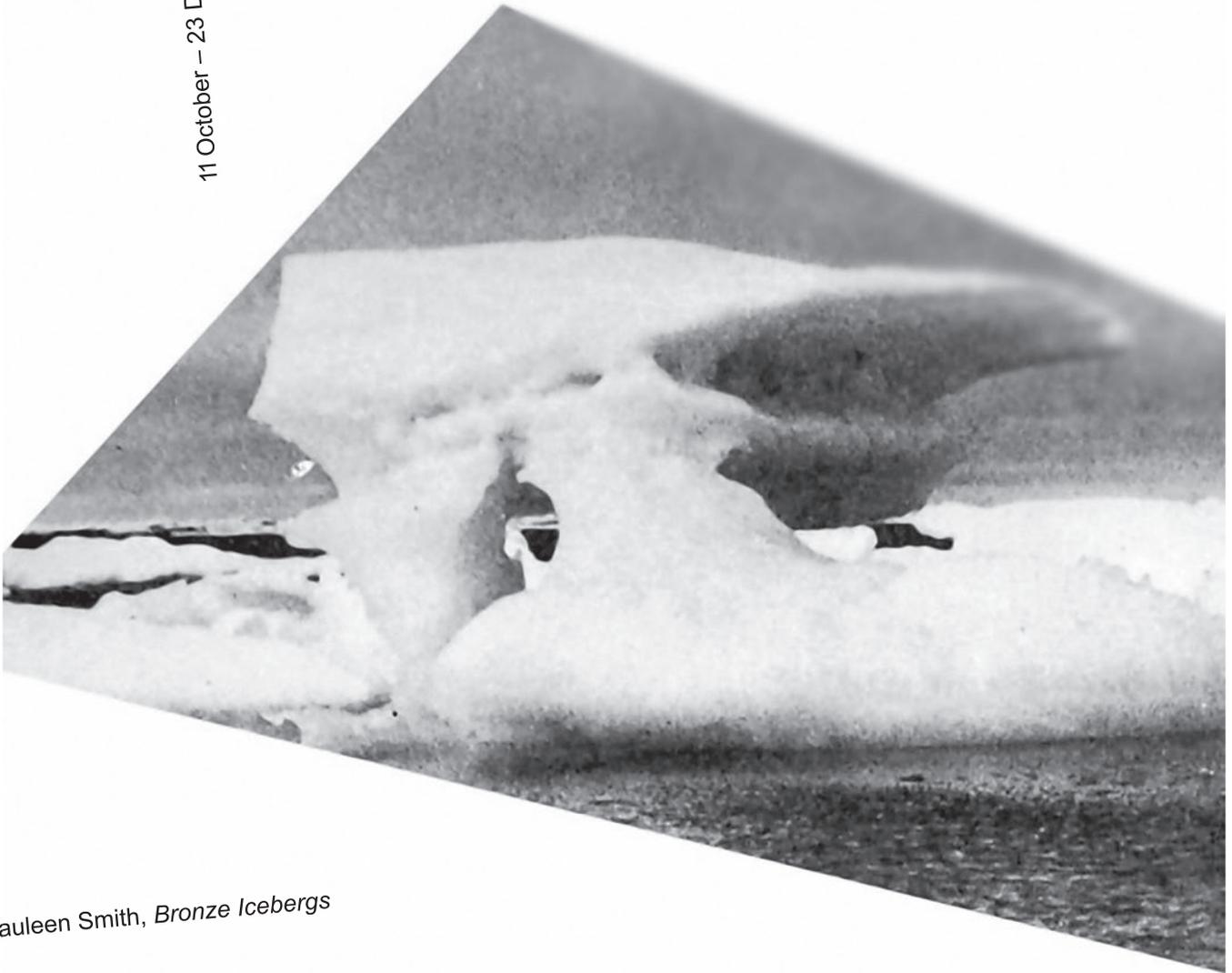


Kunstverein

11 October – 23 December 2020



Cauleen Smith, *Bronze Icebergs*

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Bronze Icebergs
marks the first
institutional solo show
in the Netherlands by the Los
Angeles-based multidisciplinary artist
Cauleen Smith. The project brings together
a new series of drawings in the front space, a
film in the adjoining room and a newly designed flag
affixed to Kunstverein's facade. It also presents a multipart film
program organised in collaboration with EYE Filmmuseum, which will
start to unfold on Kunstverein's website as of October 31.

We're living through a watershed moment that includes a pandemic, an economic crisis, relentless anti-Black violence and police brutality and irreversible environmental damage, all of which have spurred us to reckon with our colonial pasts and the existing conditions of inequity in our societies. At Kunstverein, Smith's work poetically addresses the ongoing acts of resistance that we are simultaneously experiencing. She continues her reflection on the loss and erasure of Black people and histories due to state-sanctioned violence in America, while drawing on Black thought to instigate temporal and spatial ruptures that open up possibilities for unexpected associations and empathies. Smith's oeuvre – which brings together science fiction and Afrofuturism, Black feminism and histories, improvisational music and processional forms – is grounded in the imaginary possibilities of the moving image to propose alternate futures. Her speculative experiments point to new political possibilities that privilege radical ways of listening to one another and of being together. These approaches expose and resist state power and its oppressions, and insist on the urgency to centre an ethics of care and community.

In the
forty-six drawings
on display, Smith takes up
a 2020 US presidential executive order
that condemns the destruction of monuments
and calls for the building of a national garden that
will feature the statues of 'Our American Heroes'.
By marking, filling in, repeating and revising language
from the document, Smith manipulates the official
announcement and inserts the names of significant
Black female activists, cultural figures and moments
of insurgent uprisings that are commonly written
out of history.* These additions are paired with
images and drawings that depict and name various
geological time periods and monumental landforms,
ecosystems and bodies of waters – mountains,
icebergs, prairies and rivers – that have been
violently mined for profit over time. Prompting
connections between looming ecological
catastrophes, exploitative economies and
Feminist and Black resistance, Smith
points to the transformative potential of
rewriting collective memory through the
work of revolutionary thinkers and
events – ones that have changed
our political realities yet have been
unjustifiably overlooked. In doing
so, the project asks: How can
such interventionist acts
slowly undo the destructive
heroisation of figures
who have been too
quickly cast in bronze,
and contribute to
reimagining our
relationship to
a threatened
environment?

Smith's short film from 2016, *Lessons in Semaphore*, complements this thought. The work captures artist and choreographer taisha paggett in a vacant lot in Chicago communicating through scored movements and flags adorned with the semaphore alphabet – an encounter that reveals the potential for change through ephemeral moments of human contact. Also, brushing up against the surrounding architecture which is permeated with violent histories of trade, colonisation and injustice towards marginalised communities, the flag Smith exhibits on the exterior of the space similarly emphasises the potency of connection. Its composition portrays molecules ordered in a crystal diamond formation, referencing the unseeable and the minuscule. At the same time, it further invites us to not only think about the many voiceless people who built this city, but to also rethink how we, as a society, can reformulate our fragile relationship to nature and one another beyond the extractive and towards the recuperative.

Bronze Icebergs was made in conversation with Kunstverein's associate curator Suzy Halajian.

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The exhibition will be open Thursday to Saturday
1–6 pm or by appointment.

*Individuals
include activists
Ida B. Wells, Assata
Shaker, Angela Davis
and Sojourner Truth;
cultural figures such as
comedian Wanda Sykes and
writers Zora Neale Hurston,
Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde;
and uprisings like Nat Turner's
Rebellion (1831), Gabriel's Rebellion
(1800) and the Stono Rebellion (1739),
among others. These are just some of the
key moments and figures of American history
that were not included in Trump's executive order.