

Shinique Smith: *And it feels like love*, 2009, mixed mediums on canvas over wood, 2 panels, 96 by 144 inches overall; at Yvon Lambert.



SHINIQUE SMITH

YVON LAMBERT

Shinique Smith, a young artist with an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, burst onto the New York scene in the early 2000s with an unusual sculptural medium—secondhand clothes. The garments were tied together into cubes, called “Bale Variants,” which constitute three-dimensional versions of Smith’s early fabric collages. From the start, the artist has had an affinity for Minimalist forms, though she eschews the pared-down purity of color and surface favored by that mode’s classic practitioners. Instead, her bales, which evoke poverty through the derelict quality of their materials, frequently echo the tormented look and texture of Action paintings.

In her recent show, titled “Ten Times Myself,” Smith again revealed a yin-yang disposition, alternating between preconception and improvisation, seriousness and humor, privacy and candor in works (both two- and three-dimensional) that mix high and low sources. Color, for example, may well be a personal code in *Bale Variant No. 0017* (2009), a large cube with white fabric at the top, pure black at the base and a subtle layering of grays and blues in between. (Smith is part American Indian and has blood ties to the Fiji Islands, Africa and Germany.)

Untitled (Whistler’s Mother), 2009, a floor piece composed of clothing, fabric swaths and an old wooden chair, parodies Whistler’s painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black* (1871). Here the “mother” is not a white older woman sitting proud in black clothing and lace bonnet but a spineless, fluffy, semi-abstract doll roped to the seat in a pose of exhaustion and despair, with a train of voile and lace sweeping to the floor.

Several of the show’s five large paintings use quotations directly or indirectly. The title *And it feels like love* (2009), for example, comes from the lyrics of a popular song that the artist, once a graffitist, inscribed in flowing cursive strokes of black ink on bare canvas and then partially covered over with acrylic, watercolor, gouache, fabric, glitter and found objects. The word “love” and a portion of the artist’s name can still be deciphered in the painting—a memory, a graphic souvenir.

– Michèle C. Cone