

Michael E. Smith at What Pipeline

runner

Ashley Cook

June 10, 2024



Michael E. Smith at What Pipeline

Somatic experiencing slows down time enough to grasp the actuality of the immediate surroundings, noticing the way the light travels across the wall, the textures of the surfaces, shadows, smells, sounds, etc. Consciousness falls down from the mind into the body and suddenly we are aware of the ground. Taking notes on the intricacies that make a moment what it is becomes an exploration of agency influenced by both objective and subjective truths. There is an almost scientific approach to object-making in Michael E. Smith's current exhibition at What Pipeline. This is routine for this artist though; his consistently careful use of material and space indicate a dedication to poetry while unpacking the vastness of language and perception.



Untitled, 2024, Tape, plastic, LEDs.

Untitled, 2024, Basketball, tape, rods.

Early surrealists who experimented with the frailty of the mundane realized that the slightest abstractions are usually the largest portals into the mental labyrinth. Momentary observations of the bizarre have the potential to mutate structures of expectation, and escort reality into a zone of dissociation and wonder. The minute oddities cause even the filing cabinet to feel magical. The work in the show sort of lassos the entire gallery into a strange suspension



Untitled, 2024, Tape, plastic, LEDs. *Untitled*, 2024 Chairs.

similar to a childhood memory summoned by a perfume. Of course, visitors cannot touch the art but Smith's use of familiar textures, forms, lighting and spacing can reactivate body memory in a very palpable way. It encourages an intimate approach to entering the work, proposing that the viewer take time for free association and the re-emergence of embodied knowledge.



Michael E. Smith at What Pipeline

Untitled, 2024, Rug.



Untitled, 2024, Cake box, foam.



Untitled, 2024, Present, starfish, steel rod.

Maroon velvet cubes with slightly worn edges are accompanied by spheres, columns, rectangles and a star in a ghostly use of minimalism. The denial of “perfection” actually feels pretty brutalist, showcasing raw materials and inner workings to investigate the conversations of the compounds. But the work at What Pipeline deviates from this post-war architectural movement that emphasized the woodness of the wood and the sandness of the sand as soon as the cakiness of the foam enters the picture. Object theater in the context of art is one way that Smith uses illusion to interrogate the line between objecthood and subjecthood. He finds magic in humble home objects the way an animist would correspond with a stone.



Untitled, 2024, Drums, tin foil, foam, beads.

These immaterial qualities of the show play with the concept of inframince, where the very last lastness of a thing is perceived just before its transformation into something else. Any kind of certainty here is as ephemeral as the warmth that remains on the chair after someone gets up, or the light cast on the wall from the window. There is a preciousness to this type of precarity that is rarely enjoyed these days, I think because it requires an act of fixation, and submission, that takes more time than we usually have to spend.

The exhibition by Michael E. Smith at What Pipeline opened on April 26th and closes on June 22nd, 2024.

All images are courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, and What Pipeline, Detroit.

Photos by Alivia Zivich

<https://whatpipeline.com/>

runner