

Experiences
with
Printmaking:
Kiki Smith
Expands
the
Tradition

by Wendy Weitman

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Kiki Smith is best known as a sculptor, whose mediums have ranged over the years from glass, plaster, and ceramic to bronze, but she has also worked in paint and embroidery on muslin—materials derived more from the craft tradition than from that of fine art. Printmaking became an integral part of her work in the mid-1980s. From her first ventures into the field, she has pursued printmaking for its own sake, fascinated by the qualities inherent in and unique to it. Prints for Smith have been a parallel exploration to sculpture, the two moving sometimes in tandem, sometimes quite independently of each other. Moreover, she has been an innovative, indeed utterly unconventional printmaker whose works have enormously expanded the scope of the medium.

Smith's earliest exhibited work addressed the human body, simultaneously so frail and so enduring. Representing the fragmented body both inside and out, in stark yet poignant depictions, was her way of learning about it, gaining control over it, and showcasing its importance. By the late 1980s Smith's sculpture included a series of ethereal yet disquieting paper works investigating the body's skin, and by the early 1990s she had turned to life-size sculptures most often depicting generic women in confrontational poses. No artist, male or female, has ever treated the female form with such honesty or vulnerability.

As increasing numbers of artists began addressing themes of the body, Smith moved on to concerns outside it, turning her attention to images from nature—birds, animals, and the cosmos. Her renderings of birds allude to subjects ranging from the fragility of the environment to the realm of the Holy Spirit, one of many references to spirituality in general and Catholicism in particular that permeate Smith's art. Her most recent work shows a nostalgia for her childhood as she elaborates and reinvents myths and fairy tales from a feminine perspective.

A voracious student of art history, Smith draws inspiration for her work from visual culture across the centuries and around the world, from Mogul tapestries and early Renaissance German painting, from Assyrian reliefs and Victorian children's books. The work of artists of the generation prior to her own has also provided fodder for her creative exploration, whether it be Eva

Hesse and Nancy Spero or Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns. As Smith's imagery has evolved, her work has consistently transcended the individual artistic statement to address collective themes of death, decay, and mortality, as well as life-affirming ideas of birth and regeneration. Her strong Catholic roots have deeply colored these issues for her, and have also suggested powerful feminine role models in characters ranging from the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene to the lives of the saints.

Smith thrives on collaboration and the experiences of making art. Her creativity and humanism blossom when she is surrounded by nurturing colleagues. Smith has never had a studio; her passion for communal environments has driven her to create much of her work in collaborative settings, in universities, foundries, and print workshops around the country, in Mexico, and in Europe. She speaks of the pleasure she takes from working with people who know more than she does: "Even though I like to stay in control of my work I often find the chance element in collaborations very interesting because other people come up with ideas I would have never thought of myself."¹ Sculpture and printmaking share this collaborative attribute, each often requiring specialized artisans to achieve the finished object. Not surprisingly, Smith excels at both.

With a print, I get to have an experience making it. It takes time and it's a struggle and at some point I get the rewards when I say it's finished.

—Kiki Smith, 2002

Printmaking has played a role in Smith's work since her earliest days as an artist, in the late 1970s, when she made monotypes on friends' etching presses. Much of her effort in the 1980s was devoted to screenprinting, on fabric as well as on paper. Since 1990, printmaking has acquired an even stronger presence in her art, becoming an equal partner with her sculpture. Universal Limited Art Editions launched its collaborations with her that year, and numerous other workshops followed suit; today Smith may make prints with three or four shops simultaneously. She has often said, "I could just make prints and be satisfied."²

Few contemporary artists have embraced the complexity of printed art, in its concepts, techniques, formats, and functions, as completely as Smith. In the course of her prolific career she has experimented with a dazzling array of techniques, even inventing a few along the way. Nothing has escaped her constantly experimenting, constantly active hands: she has sought out both the most mundane procedures, such as rubber stamp, photocopy, and temporary tattoo, and the most elaborate, including etching and lithography, and she attaches no hierarchy to her choices, merely selecting the medium that best expresses her potent messages both formally and contextually. Smith's experience as a sculptor often suggests unconventional approaches to printmaking, whether it be lying on a copper plate to have her body traced or photocopying her breasts to be transferred to a lithography plate. She follows in a tradition of exciting and innovative art by sculptors: Donald Judd, for example, inked some of his plywood wall structures and impressed them on paper to create editions. Inventive and physical, Smith's methods reflect her facility with volumetric composition, in contrast to a painter's more linear approach, and distinguish her career as a printmaker.

Smith has developed a keen sensitivity for paper, even using it for some years as a primary material of her sculpture. Her skill in manipulating Asian papers has further inspired her approach to printmaking, as when she layers sheets or collages paper fragments in unusual ways. She also takes full advantage of the flexibility of the print medium, recycling and reusing plates and stones in new orientations and new contexts at will. She has made several three-dimensional prints and has added printed elements to sculptures. Most of her unique works on paper, furthermore, are printed—transferred from a Mylar or metal matrix—rather than drawn, blurring the boundaries between drawing and printmaking.

Printed art forms and their inherent characteristics, including transference, repetition, and public accessibility, resonate conceptually with themes important to Smith. The process of transferring an image onto paper reinforces the contrast between the craft tendencies in her work, on the one hand, and the coolness and

detachment she favors, on the other: "What I like . . . probably the most [about printmaking] is the distance of it . . . that it is removed. That it gets away from the earnestness of things."³ The even line that prints can achieve contributes to these distancing effects, as does the ability to reuse elements of one work in another. Smith is instinctively drawn to the concept of repetition, which is so intimately interwoven with printmaking: "It's about repetition versus uniqueness. My interest in printmaking is that prints mimic what we are as humans: we are all the same and yet everyone is different."⁴ Smith has spoken of a spiritual power in repetition. She suspects that its appeal to her may stem from her childhood, when she and her sisters made countless small paper elements for her father, the sculptor Tony Smith, constructing the same geometric shape over and over again for his models.

Smith's roots as an artist grow out of her love of craft and of populist art forms, such as puppetry. She often cites the influence of Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater—its collaborative methods, social messages, and crude large-edition woodcuts—and as a teenager she collected its prints and books. "The group of artists that I come out of," she has said, "are populist artists. From that feeling of not having access in the society, it seemed important to make things accessible and to demystify."⁵ Smith is keenly interested in the social histories of the materials she uses. The humble status of paper, for example, and its rarity as a material of sculpture, appealed to her in the late 1980s when she began creating figures out of paper. Her fascination with the social history and function of prints is evident in her references to its role as a medium for disseminating information to a wide audience: "I like the fact that people are empowered through printmaking."⁶ Her library includes a beautifully illustrated book on *lubki*, the colorful Russian folk prints popular from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, a source she has acknowledged.⁷ The engravings of José Guadalupe Posada, published in mass editions and depicting scenes of social injustice in Posada's native Mexico, were also significant to her developing interest in the medium.

The formats of Smith's prints have encompassed not only wall-sized multipanel lithographs and monumental floor pieces of

1. A. More Store window display, Broome Street, New York, 1980

layered etchings but notepads and postcards, dresses and scarves, accordion books, wallpaper, and foldout mementos. This opened approach reflects her interest in the diverse social roles that prints have played since their emergence as an art form in medieval Europe:

Prints actually function in many, many different ways. . . even things like greeting cards and scarves, all this historical commemorative stuff, flags. There are so many different things one can print on and so many different forms a print can take. . . . There are endless things to think about—all the different ways you can make prints and the ways prints function culturally, even in letterheads or business cards, visiting cards or calendars. You get to play in those forms—get to play in their history.⁸

Smith has championed the richness of printed art in interview after interview. Most important, her unabashedly provocative, inventive, and austere beautiful printed works illustrate both the medium's fundamental role in her art as a whole and its relevance within contemporary art at large.

Early Screenprints

Kiki Smith was brought up in a large Victorian house in South Orange, New Jersey, where the family moved shortly after she was born, in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1954. She had a peripatetic education, completing high school in a local alternative program. After graduating she moved to San Francisco, lived communally with the rock group the Tubes for a year or so, then returned east and enrolled in Hartford Art School, where she studied film for about eighteen months. In 1976 she moved to New York, where she supported herself by working as a cook, a waitress, an electrician, and a factory air-brusher, among other odd jobs.

In the late 1970s Smith joined Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab), a loosely knit cooperative artists' group that worked outside the commercial gallery system. The group would become known for the densely packed thematic exhibitions it held in



roughhewn alternative venues, and for exploring social concerns through bold figurative imagery. One of Colab's tangential activities was an important series of stores that sold inexpensive artworks and artist-made accessories. Known as the A. More Store, these impromptu shops, held at different venues every year (usually around Christmas), became lively outlets for artists' multiples (fig. 1). Smith spear-

headed the first one, which was held in a storefront on Broome Street, SoHo, in 1980, and she continued to make multiples for the store for the next few years.⁹ Colab launched a new aesthetic, one poised against the post-Minimal abstract art of the 1970s and centered on community concerns and a return to representation. Following in a tradition of activist artist collaboratives, aiming for a democratic approach and emphasizing the accessibility of the art objects it produced, Colab embraced a philosophy that clearly gelled with Smith's and encouraged her populist tendencies. This was the formative milieu of her early years in New York.

The artists Smith met through Colab, including Charlie Ahearn, Jane Dickson, Tom Otterness, Cara Perlman, and Robin Winters, among many others, formed her intimate circle of friends and colleagues. In 1979 Dickson invited Smith to make mono-



types on a friend's etching press in a loft on Grand Street in Lower Manhattan (fig. 2).¹⁰ These early printed images included some of the same cigarette-pack and pill-bottle motifs seen in Smith's

2. Kiki Smith. Untitled. (c. 1978–79). Monotype on machine-made paper in hand-painted frame, comp. (including frame): approx. 8 1/2 x 11" (21.6 x 27.9 cm). Printer: the artist. Unique. Collection of the artist, New York

still life drawings and paintings of the time. It was also Dickson who taught her how to apply oil paint to Plexiglas to make monotypes while Smith was staying at her friend Ellen Cooper's on Mulberry Street. Smith made many prints simply by painting on paper and transferring the image onto another sheet.

Smith's scanty art education had not included training in print techniques, so she enrolled in many classes, notably a photo-etching course at the Lower East Side Printshop in the late 1970s and an etching course at Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop in the mid-1980s. But it was her friend Ahearn who taught her to make screenprints, inspiring her first large body of printed work. The spontaneity and ease of the medium were a perfect fit with Smith's hands-on, craft-oriented working methods.

Smith's first screenprint was a T-shirt, *Corrosive* (plate 1), that she made for the souvenir shop at Colab's sprawling 1980 exhibition *The Times Square Show*, staged in an abandoned bus depot and massage parlor on Seventh Avenue and 41st Street in Manhattan. The image she printed on the shirt was a preexisting symbol for toxic liquids, an emblem in sync with the destructive tone of the pill and cigarette-pack imagery. That same year Smith made some of her earliest multiples—plaster cigarette packs, mold-bearing fingers, and wooden radios, clocks, and cameras, all sold out of Colab's first A. More Store (plate 8).¹¹ The cigarettes and fingers resonate with her early themes of death and of life growing out of death, while the delicately painted mold spores suggest flowers more than parasites. The death of Smith's father that year had provoked her to concentrate on issues of mortality and rebirth. The contrast between the amputated body part and the symbol of growth and regeneration would become a consistent thread in her work.

Smith also worked quite extensively in screenprinting on fabric.¹² She had always been attracted to fabric design, and often hoped in these early years to work professionally as a designer. (The decoration of her home with painted fabrics and handmade furniture occupied a good deal of her time.) Her Colab friend Winters lived upstairs from a screenprint workshop that Smith would use at night. Some of her earliest scarves, from 1982,

depict fragmented body parts floating in an all-over field (plate 4). In 1985, Smith enrolled in a fabric-design class at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology in order to learn to create repeat patterns; working at the Institute on long tables, she printed fabric for friends' clothing as well as her own. One of her most dynamic designs, an amalgam of Spanish text and skeletal images, was copied from posters of body parts she had brought back from a trip to Mexico, and she used it in skirts, shirts, and dresses (plate 2). She had begun to draw images from the illustrated medical textbook *Gray's Anatomy* in 1979, and the Mexican posters undoubtedly appealed to the same interest. Meanwhile, at home, Smith made scarves that she sold at the Times Square bar Tin Pan Alley, where she worked as a cook in the early to mid-1980s. The bar's owner, Maggie Smith, a dynamic, politically active woman, showcased artists whose work tackled difficult content.¹³ Like the Mexican-inspired fabric, Kiki's scarves often combined text and images and contained what she considered self-empowering or demystifying messages. It was equally important to her that both the imagery and the cost be accessible. Smith made roughly five scarves, each in an edition of twenty to twenty-five, in varying colors, and sold them for approximately \$20. A yellow-and-black scarf from 1985 (plate 3) combines a poignant protofeminist text by Emily Brontë with her own clinical yet lyrical designs representing the inner organs of the ear.

Smith also screenprinted many posters during this period, some announcing specific events, others arguing a political agenda, such as opposition to the war in Nicaragua. In 1983, inspired by old maps that her father used to show her, she made the poster for *The Island of Negative Utopia*, a combination exhibition and performance event with music by the group Cardboard Air Band, which included Smith and her sister Beatrice, at the New York performance space The Kitchen (plate 6). Acrid colors and varied typefaces lend the image an exhilarating yet ominous tone. Among Smith's political posters is *Cause/Effect*, a work she made with Ahearn in 1984, at the height of the Nicaraguan conflict (plate 7). Colab had initiated a street-poster project for which members had to work in teams; Smith had designed *Cause/Effect* but, insecure



about her drawing skills at the time, asked Ahearn to draw its sea of skulls in the Reflecting Pool on the Mall in Washington, D.C.¹⁴ In 1984, on the occasion of an exhibition at the Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, Smith made a screenprint on fabric as a gift to the visitors at the opening. She has made this concept of printed gifts—or “party favors,” as she calls them—an ongoing device, secreting little treasures inside many of her artist’s books and exhibition catalogues. Her other early printmaking experiences included a visit to Avocet Press, a screenprint facility run by her friends Jolie Stahl and Andrea Callard in Lexington, New York, in the summer of 1985.

In 1988 Smith began a series of screenprinted works on paper based on an image of a fetus she had found in a Japanese anatomy book. Her original idea had been to print this image inside a drawing of a womb, to represent the womb’s precarious, fragile status as a setting for the growing baby. She photocopied the fetus in a range of sizes and had screens made, intending to cut out the individual images and insert them into a drawing, but in the end she printed them on sheets of Thai tissue paper that she attached together in various formats, including the fifteen-foot length of *All Souls* (plate 9). Andy Warhol’s screenprints of rows of repeated photographic found images were undoubtedly an

influence here (fig. 3). But while the mechanical quality and coloration of Smith’s screenprint heighten the depersonalization that results from repetition, the multifold content inherent in the image of a fetus, as opposed to one of Warhol’s Hollywood screen idols, endows *All Souls* with a powerful expressive impact. Smith’s awe at the vastness of the human population, her passionate belief in women’s rights, and her concern over child abuse inform this important work. The Minimalists too used serial repetition, as Warhol did, if to different effect; but Smith’s use of the device, unlike their formalist aesthetic, is redolent with metaphor. The themes of birth and regeneration are paramount here. The title *All Souls* has Catholic allusions: it refers to All Souls’ Day (November 2), which the Church calendar sets aside for prayer for dead souls caught in limbo—a state Smith has described as similar to her own during these years. The theme may also have resonated with Smith’s experience in Mexico in 1985. She had gone for the country’s Day of the Dead celebration, which coincides with All Souls’ Day; the ubiquitous *calaveras*, black and white printed images of the ritual’s traditional skeletons, could have suggested the fragile, large-headed fetus to her (fig. 4). It is also illuminating to think of some of Smith’s recent work, such as her 2002 lithograph *Born*, in the context of these early images (plate 128). A preoccupation with regeneration and birth remains in the forefront of her work.

The format once established, Smith would create many works by attaching single sheets of printed imagery. In 1990 she was inspired by an image of a toddler in a book that her friend and collaborator Lynne Tillman had given her: she abruptly decapitated



4. José Guadalupe Posada. *La Calavera revuelta de federales, comerciantes y artesanos* (The revolutionary calavera of the federal police, traders, and artisans). (1911/1913). Etching on colored paper, plate: 5 ¹¹/₁₆ x 10 ⁵/₈" (14.5 x 27 cm). Publisher and printer: Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, Mexico City. Edition: unlimited

the girl in a haunting untitled work of repeated heads, printing each image in the negative (plate 10). She also played with both positive and negative printings in several images derived from the child's lower body, attaching the sheets in rows and leaving the child's genitalia and chubby fingers visible in some rows but not in others (plates 11 and 12). It is rare, even startling, to see a naked female child in art; the *putti* of the Old Masters aside, images of naked children, and of girls in particular, are taboo. Smith is challenging the viewer to confront issues ranging from child abuse to puritanical notions of female sexuality. At the same time, the repeated circles of the heads and the cylinders of the legs have an abstract quality that suggests the work of Tony Smith: "All those things come from my father, because as children we used to make the same forms over and over for him so he could put them together to make a whole [in maquettes for his sculpture]. But mine get put back together and they remain unwhole. Somehow they make a ruptured whole."¹⁵ There is also a cinematic quality to these screen-prints, reflecting Smith's art-school training and predicting the films and videos that would appear in her work a decade later.

Anatomy

The 1980s witnessed a resurgence of interest in figurative art in both Europe and the United States. Many artists, and sculptors in particular, developed their ideas out of the conceptual and the body- and performance-based movements of the late 1960s and '70s rather than from the figurative painting tradition. The art and actions of Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, and Carolee Schneemann, for example, often focused on the physicality of the human body in provocative ways, and set the stage for Smith and others of her generation such as Robert Gober and Annette Messager, who displayed the body dismembered.

Valorizing the physical body as our primary means of experiencing the world, Smith sought to unravel its functions, marvel at its mysteries, and acknowledge its place within the wider environment. Her depictions of our vital biological parts are shockingly honest, nonhierarchical, nearly clinical. At first Smith focused on internal fragments of the human form, then turned to

disquieting investigations of the skin as the boundary between inside and out, and by the early 1990s she was making full-scale figurative sculpture. Her Catholic upbringing played a significant role in this preoccupation with the corporeal over the intellectual: "Catholicism has these ideas of the host, of eating the body, drinking the body, ingesting a soul or spirit; and then of the reliquary, like a chop shop of bodies. Catholicism is always involved in physical manifestations of [spiritual] conditions, always taking inanimate objects and attributing meaning to them. In that way it's compatible with art."¹⁶

As a woman, and a woman artist, Smith also turned to female experience: she was attempting to universalize the female body, and characteristics specific to women, as generically representative of humanity, in a break from the long history of male artists' exploitation of women's bodies as tools of erotic aesthetics. Her mentors here included Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Lee Bontecou, and Nancy Spero, all women who have dissected and reassembled the female form in fiercely expressive and original bodies of personal work.

Smith credits her 1985 trip to Mexico for the Day of the Dead with inspiring a major aesthetic shift—ironically away from images of mortality, which had pervaded her work since the death of her father, in 1980, and toward a renewed focus on life and living. "I was so impressed by the vitality of the Mexican people," she remembers, "that I decided to start making work about being here in the body. For me, it was the beginning of my work."¹⁷ That year she embarked on her first printed work on paper depicting parts of the body, *How I Know I'm Here* (plate 13). This sixteen-foot horizontal frieze is a dense yet syncopated network of sinuous lines in which white internal body parts intermingle with images based on photographs of Smith taken by her friend David Wojnarowicz. The frieze begins with the heart and lungs and ends with the stomach and brain, so that the body parts seem randomly arranged—a leveling of the hierarchy of organs that is consistent throughout Smith's work; to her the spleen is as worthy as the heart. The image of her eating a pomegranate that appears in the rightmost panel is based on one of Wojnarowicz's photographs

and reappears several times in her work, most notably in *Puppet* (1993–94; plate 63). This visceral image alludes to taste, one of the five senses—critical signs of being alive.¹⁸ Other senses are suggested in vignettes throughout this cinematic work. The format of *How I Know I'm Here* reflects Smith's fondness for the medieval and Renaissance prints depicting pageants and royal parades (fig. 5)—prints often conceived as extended horizontal foldouts bound into books—and evokes a lavish expedition in time through the fluid, dreamlike environment of the body.¹⁹

Smith carved this monumental image out of economical linoleum. Even so, common sense and shallow pockets prevailed, and the print was not editioned at the time. Fifteen years later, however, in 2000, Editions Fawbush partner Thomas Jones suggested reembarking on the project and an edition of eighteen was pulled from the four original linoleum blocks. In the intervening years Smith had played with the images, adding watercolor to one fragment and making postcards out of others (plate 14). When she enrolled in a bookbinding class at New York's Center for Book Arts in 1991 she bound some of the proofs into a conventional 8½-by-11-inch book format, recycling the images into another new narrative (plate 15).

Also in 1985, Smith completed her first published portfolio, *Possession Is Nine-Tenths of the Law*, a set of nine screenprint and monotypes with hand coloring (plate 16). Here she elevates individual internal organs to precious still lives by isolating and floating them in the middle of the sheet of paper, an austere compositional strategy that recurs frequently in later work. Treating a

gall bladder or pancreas in this stark way, Smith pushes viewers into learning about this intimate part of their existence and confronting its relevance, even while she also abstracts the organs as form. Smith's sister Beatrice had wanted to become an emergency medical technician, and Smith had agreed to study with her: "I was already doing work about the body and wanted to have information from another point of view about it. I did the EMT training for the same reason I take an exercise class . . . I try to get information about the body from different disciplines."²⁰ The portfolio's title, a legal adage, refers to the political ideologies surrounding the body and reflects the influence of her socially engaged friend Maggie Smith. Controversies ranging from genetic engineering and organ transplants to governmental controls of the body, whether through inoculation or incarceration, are embroiled in this suite.

Smith made the prints at home, working in a fresh, experimental way. First she screenprinted outlines of the forms in black, then flooded the screen and rubbed its back with paper towels to camouflage the lines with expressive strokes. Each set of prints in the edition is different.²¹ The yellow-ink additions were added last, by hand. In some prints, such as *Heart*, the black monotyping is thickly applied and nearly cancels out the linear image, while in *Lungs* the black merely echoes the shape and emphasizes its form. Smith insists that this process evolved out of turning mistakes to advantage; she acknowledges the punk fashion designs of Vivienne Westwood, Malcolm McLaren, and others, with their intentional rips and damage, as an influence



5. Anonymous, after Titian. *The Triumph of Christ* (detail). 1517. Woodcut on five sheets (three shown), comp. and sheet (overall): 15 3/8" x 8' 8" (39 x 264.2 cm). Publisher and printer: Gregorio de' Gregoriis, Venice. Edition: unknown. Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

on her aesthetic at the time. Viewed overall, the portfolio shows a lively syncopation between small and large forms, and Smith's deadpan, nonjudgmental style conveys a Surrealist tone as the individual organs become recognizable.

Smith has made several pieces about bodily fluids, substances generated by the body without intervention from the intellect and, like the gall bladder and pancreas, generally disdained or undervalued. And yet, as Smith says, "You see how much of your life surrounds those liquids. Semen and saliva are social and political, and also extremely personal. Diarrhea is one of the largest killers of children."²² Her first interpretation of the theme appeared in 1986, in *Untitled (Book of Hours)* (plate 18), which emulates those medieval books of hours that offered a prayer for specific hours of the day. Smith has always been comforted by that type of thought: "I used to love . . . the idea that every hour you had some kind of meditation, something to think about or believe in. I was wondering how anyone could believe in anything, and I wanted to make a calendar with the fluids written on it, to think about every day."²³ In *Untitled (Book of Hours)* she replaces prayers with rubber-stamped words in Gothic script, each naming one of twelve fluids produced by the body—urine, milk, saliva, mucus, semen, and so on. Smith often attaches meaning to numbers, and the twelve fluids refer to temporal concepts—the hours on the clock, the months in the year. Each of the book's pages is also stamped at the bottom with a day of the year, reinforcing these temporal and sequential allusions as well as adding a meditative quality through the suggestion of an ongoing daily recitation. In an untitled sculpture from later that year, Smith lined up a row of large glass water bottles, each etched with the name of one of the same twelve bodily fluids in the same Gothic script.²⁴

In the late 1980s Smith completed several more images on the themes of birth and fertility. Her first published etching of this type, *Black Flag* (1989; plate 19), completed at one of her earliest university workshop experiences, depicts a human ovum surrounded by protective cells.²⁵ She repeated the image the following year in a series of five woodcuts that she inserted into the invitations for an exhibition of her work at the Fawbush Gallery, New

York (plate 20); in these delicate prints, the ovum's off-center placement, and the abrupt fractures made in it by the image's edges, suggest a form in motion, floating in space, or in the aqueous environment of the body's interior. Smith carved all of the images onto a single block of wood. Four hundred sheets were printed, then each sheet was cut into five to make 2,000 individual prints. Smith titled the prints *'Cause I'm on My Time*, suggesting the self-empowerment she felt in creating an elaborate printed gift just because she could.²⁶

In 1989 Smith was invited to make prints at the renowned workshop Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE), in West Islip, Long Island. The shop's director, Bill Goldston, had seen *All Souls* in the 1989 National Print Exhibition at The Brooklyn Museum, New York, and was immediately struck by Smith's approach to the medium. Although reluctant at first, Smith came to relish her collaborations with ULAE, and now considers them among her most rewarding experiences as an artist. The workshop provides a collaborative environment that she finds nurturing both personally and creatively: "At ULAE my prints are very influenced by the printmakers and the publishers, by their interests and curiosities. . . . Bill likes to keep pushing it, to go someplace that you wouldn't go normally. He really wants you to enter some unknown territory."²⁷

Two monumental etchings from Smith's early years at ULAE are among her major works on the internal systems of the body. *Sueño* (1992; plate 23) explores the human musculature and recalls several sculptures from the same year, particularly *Blood Pool* (fig. 6). Curled up fetuslike, with spine exposed,



Sueño's abject female figure appears both vulnerable and frightening in its dreamlike pose, life-size scale, and murky dark-red ink. The sharp scratches and raised linear surface native to the etching process intensify

6. Kiki Smith. *Blood Pool*. 1992. Painted cast bronze, 14 x 39 x 22" (35.6 x 99.1 x 55.9 cm).
Edition: 2. Collection of the artist, courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York



the harrowing impact of this skinned being. Smith sees *Sueño*, one of her favorite prints, as a portrait of her sister Beatrice, who died in 1988. She compares the intricate twists of the striated muscles to the braiding of the challah bread that she learned to make in baking school in the 1970s. To accomplish this enormous etching, the printers traced Smith's body as she lay on the copper plate (fig. 7). The outline

is still visible in the print. Commenting on Smith's unusual approach and ambitious scale in her early etchings, printer John Lund remarked, "Working on this scale requires different mark-making. Not having learned small, she didn't feel constrained. She jumped right in."²⁸

Kiki Smith 1993 (1993; plate 27) represents the digestive system from the tongue to the anus in a long sinuous zigzag charting the full length of the intestinal tract. An etching and



aquatint, it is among the only prints in which Smith worked from a study, in this case a blue-and-black screenprint that she made at the Lower East Side Printshop, where she had worked on and off since the mid-1980s (fig. 8).²⁹ The screenprint in turn was based on a clay sculpture representing the digestive system.³⁰

Kiki Smith 1993 is printed from two plates. Smith filled in the intestines with tiny fan-brush lines (similar to those used in *Sueño*) and fingerprints, creating a feathery, tactile surface. The

background aquatint is full of cascading splashes reminiscent of Abstract Expressionist painting (the art of many friends of her father's) and brilliantly evokes the body's fluid internal environment. Master printer Craig Zammiello remembers that Smith was displeased with the quality of the paper after printing and asked the ULAE team to wet the sheets down, a radical idea considering that the edition was already done: "Once these beautiful flat sheets were all finished, we just spritzed them with a little pump sprayer and they curled and wrinkled and bubbled and that gives the prints that little bit of life that [Smith] was after, what is very evident in all her work with oriental papers, this type of crinkly, folded, distressed look. . . . It adds a little bit of depth to it. You get a little bit of shadow playing with some of the little folds in the paper."³¹ *Kiki Smith 1993* creates something elegant out of the system of bodily waste, presenting it as a system of growth and regeneration.

Throughout her printmaking career Smith has alternated between complex, elaborate processes at ULAE and the direct, simple methods she often uses at home. Two years after completing *Kiki Smith 1993* she made the delicate yet visceral potato print *Untitled (Kidneys)* (plate 28). This pair of precious miniatures, centered on a large sheet, is printed in the red and blue of blood. An overprinted layer of silver leaf, recalling the lettering of medieval illuminated manuscripts, injects a decorative, jewellike feeling into these otherwise unappealing organs. Smith's passion for craft and decorative traditions, and her desire to infuse her art with elements from them, is also beautifully resonant in *Veins and Arteries* (1993; plate 29). Related to sculptures such as *Pee Body* (1992) and *Train* (1993), in which long strands of found glass beads representing bodily fluids extend from wax figures, this multiple makes poignant use of two strands of glass beads to suggest pools of blood as they coil from wall to floor.

Among Smith's most important printed statements on the body's internal systems is *Endocrinology* (1997; plates 33–36), a collaboration with the poet Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and a masterpiece in the modern tradition of the illustrated book. This elaborate project took several years to complete. In 1991, Rena

8. Kiki Smith. *Untitled*. (1986). Screenprint on handmade Japanese paper, comp.: 65 x 28 1/2" (165.1 x 72.4 cm), sheet: 6' 1" x 36 1/2" (185.4 x 92.7 cm). Publisher: unpublished. Printer: the artist and Brigitte Engler, New York. Edition: approx. 15. Collection of the artist, New York

Rosenwasser, of the Berkeley publisher Kelsey St. Press, a supporter of innovative female poets, invited Berssenbrugge to create a book. Berssenbrugge had recently seen an exhibition of Smith's work at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, and suggested that the two women collaborate.³² Smith then expanded the scope of the project by proposing that ULAE produce a limited-edition illustrated book to complement Kelsey St. Press's smaller-format trade edition. Choosing the theme of the endocrine and lymphatic systems, she made paper cutouts of the relevant vital organs based on images in an anatomy coloring book. Berssenbrugge responded with a poem redolent of the emotions controlled by these bodily parts. Sinuously shaped, evoking foliage as much as organs of the body, Smith's pancreas, kidneys, spleen, and ovaries dance across the pages in a brilliantly syncopated layout of images and text, their placement on the spreads creating a tremendous sense of drama as the pages progress.

Smith's approach to designing each spread was physical and sculptural: when proofs of her prints were pulled, she cut Berssenbrugge's typeset poem into strips and moved them around on the sheets, along with other bits of paper featuring her own handwritten words, to determine the placement of the text. She liked the casual look of the cut-up text and decided to retain the collage element rather than print the poem directly on the pages. The tensions this creates—between hand-drawn and printed writing, between textured, creamy handmade paper and stiff white commercial paper—parallel the tension implicit in her deadpan, unsqueamish presentation of anatomical motifs. The contrasts extend to the book's sturdy chipboard cover, which began as merely an experiment in firmness and weight—but Smith responded to the chipboard's humble nature and decided to keep it.³³ She juxtaposed this rough, dense surface with two appliqués of transparent tissue, one laid over a portrait of Berssenbrugge on the front, one over her own portrait on the back. In a decision reflecting Smith's numerological fascinations, she chose the eighteen-inch-square format to correspond to the date of her birthday, January 18. The trade edition, meanwhile, is a nine-inch square.³⁴

Smith's depictions of the body evolved from the inside out, moving from internal organs to skin and orifices, the boundaries between the internal and the external. *A Man* (plate 37), a monumental lithographed scroll of 1990, is a poetic tapestry of male ears, anuses, and other such, ethereally printed after Smith's own photographs. By enlarging the photographs and then sand-blasting the lithographic plates to create bleeding effects, Smith has almost camouflaged the orifices into abstract decorative blotches and nebulae, an effect enhanced by the delicate Nepalese paper. Associations with Japanese scrolls are unavoidable, but in her quintessential style she conflates the formally beautiful with the confrontational. In a process similar to that of her large screenprints, Smith created *A Man* by assembling several small sheets into an expansive whole. In what would become a typical working method, she printed the individual sheets at ULAE during idle periods of waiting for the next proofs of current projects; then she brought the sheets home for possible use in the future. In this case she created two variants of the same printed material: *A Man* also exists in a horizontal version measuring six feet six inches by sixteen feet eight.

Also in 1990, Smith completed several haunting pieces based on repeated images of a child's eyes. The previous year she had met a professor of psychology, Catherine Best, who was studying the facial expressions of babies.³⁵ Best's research photographs became sources for Smith, who initially printed some of the faces on Mylar and installed them in windows. Next she isolated the babies' eyes, printing several pairs on sheets of Nepalese paper and assembling them into a variety of works. In one, particularly powerful version, *Untitled (Fluttering Eyes)* (plate 38), she added long vertical red lines that suggest streams of tears or blood. Since the Surrealist period, images of staring eyes have been associated with voyeurism and the male gaze. Smith's image, by contrast, conveys a poignant empathy and pathos.

A Surrealist tone pervades, however, in several artist's books that allude to the body as a nurturing, life-sustaining entity. *Fountainhead* (1991; plates 39 and 40) depicts several orifices, each leaking fluid—tears from the eyes, milk from the breasts,

semen from the penis. The isolation and abrupt fragmentation of the body parts, and in some cases their provocative positioning on the paper, are reminiscent of Surrealism's jarring strategies.³⁶ Several pages fold out, emulating a format common in medieval books—a creative strategy that Smith would use with increasing complexity in the future. In *The Vitreous Body* (2000; plate 41), Smith pairs images of the eye derived from an anatomical book with a text about vision and the cosmos by the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides.³⁷ As the pages progress, and the scope of the text expands out into the universe, the images bore closer and closer to the eye's center. In another example of Smith's sculptural approach to bookmaking, she has cut out sections of the pages, literally enhancing vision by allowing views through the book onto the page below. The placement of the text as a horizontal line piercing through the eye, and the translucency of the paper, reinforce the theme of sight in this tightly conceived work.

Smith has made multiples sporadically throughout her career, and in the early 1990s she completed several based on the body and its orifices, exhibiting her characteristic fusion of beautiful materials and deadpan, almost clinical depictions. Among the most forceful of these is *Untitled (Mouth)* (1993; plate 42), a raw evocation, in bronze, of a mouth ajar, tongue, teeth, and muscles all anatomically correct. This was one of the first pieces on which she collaborated with Dwight Hackett, of Art Foundry Editions in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she would work regularly for the next ten years, on sculpture as well as multiples. In another confrontational early multiple, *Tongue in Ear* (1983–93; plate 54), Smith conjoins two of the body's orifices to represent the dual processes of speaking and hearing.³⁸ Although redolent with sexual allusions, the composition was inspired by a printed sign in a hospital showing an ear with radiating lines to indicate sound. Carving the forms into a cavity, Smith created a niche for this intimate experience of the senses.

When Smith's interests turned to the external body, one of the first things she depicted was hair. The first print she completed at ULAE, *Untitled* of 1990 (plate 43), is a tour de force on the theme, and signals the unique approach to two-dimensional

imagery that Smith, as a sculptor used to working in the round, would bring to her printmaking. Before her first visit to the Long Island workshop she had asked Goldston what to bring with her, and he had replied, "Just bring yourself." Smith did almost that, bringing none of the preparatory drawings typical when artists visit print shops, but she did arrive with dental molding plaster. To represent an "unfolded" head—a flat image in which the head is somehow seen in the round, an idea that would preoccupy her for several years—she used the plaster to take a mold of her head and neck. Printing directly from the plaster was unsuccessful, since the material would not retain the printing ink, so a vulcanized-rubber cast was made from it, inked, and then impressed on the lithographic plate. Profiles of Smith's face are visible in three corners of the resulting image (all but the lower left), their leathery texture differing markedly from that of the cascading skeins of hair. To create that mass of lines Smith not only printed photocopy transfers of her own hair but inked and printed from a wig and corn silks bought for the purpose.

One is reminded here of Jasper Johns, who, in dealing with the challenge of depicting three-dimensional objects, used a range of techniques—stamping, tracing, photographing—but not drawing. To represent his hands and face in the lithograph *Skin with O'Hara Poem* Johns pressed them directly onto the stone, fusing his body with his art in the imprinting process and creating the appearance of the artist trapped or embalmed in the picture

10. Eva Hesse. Untitled. 1966. Wash and pencil on paper, 11 7/8 x 9 1/8" (30 x 23.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Fischbach, 1969

plane. In reference to Johns's work of this type, Smith has said, "What I also really love about them is that they have a relationship to funerary masks—like unfolding the head . . . you have a three-dimensional version of what the head is—like a topographical map unfolded or [a] flattening of the information."³⁹ The remark, of course, is equally relevant to work of her own.

For Smith, hair has a multitude of historical, religious, and personal associations, from the Victorian mourning jewelry containing locks of hair to Catholic relics, physical mementos of a departed soul. She herself was named after Santa Chiara (Saint Clare), who cut off her hair as an act of piety—an act Smith interprets as symbolizing a renunciation of female sexuality.⁴⁰ With its swirling allover lines and almost square format, *Untitled* lies on the verge of abstraction. For Smith, though, this quality relates to a historical source in figurative art: "In Mogul painting there are images of people having sex in which the entwined bodies are seen within a cube or a rectangle—forcing the body to fit a geometry. That was the influence for the hair print."⁴¹

Smith reused images from *Untitled* in several other prints and sculptures. For *Bluebeard* (1990; plate 44) she connected twenty-two photocopies left over from *Untitled* to make a vertical scroll. The stillness of the individual images contrasts with the cinematic sense of movement created by their repetition. Using the same photocopies, Smith simultaneously made a film of her hair on the floor: "I thought about [Bluebeard] dragging his wife down the hall by her feet and [her] hair is falling, waving, being dragged on the floor."⁴² The strands of hair in Smith's print, abruptly severed by the edges of the photocopies, imply the violence in the Bluebeard story; their repetition implies his many wives, and their downward-hanging placement implies his name.

As Smith gained confidence as an artist, other potent feminine symbols besides hair began to appear in her work, culminating in a series of prints depicting fragmented breasts and vaginas. Formerly the realm of male artists, erotic art was taken up in the 1960s and '70s by artists of the emerging women's movement who were interested in the representation of a specifically female experience. Their work encompassed both traditionally feminine craft



techniques and explicit feminine imagery, often revolving around the female body. Feminists such as Judy Chicago perhaps broadcast these interests most loudly, but other artists including Bourgeois, Hesse, Yayoi Kusama, Spero, Hannah Wilke, and Martha Wilson explored them as well, through a compelling new vocabulary of forms and mediums. Smith is a descendant of this tradition, and in her work on the body she often refers to these groundbreaking figures from earlier generations.

Hesse's wide range of traditional and nontraditional materials included many soft, pliable substances, such as latex and cord, that distinguished her from the "heavy metal" of 1960s Minimalists like Donald Judd and Carl Andre. Although her mature work was never literally representational, it often abstracted female forms and particularly female body parts. An untitled drawing from 1966 (fig. 10), among many other examples, conforms to the modernist grid, and employs geometric shapes, but references female breasts and nipples. And Wilson explicitly explored the marginalization of women in *Breast Forms Permutated* of 1972 (fig. 11), which used the grid format subversively to ridicule both the modernist heritage and the degrading value system that many women feel is imposed on them.



Smith drew on these precedents for her own themes of female nourishment and regeneration. In 1990, for an exhibition at the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, she designed a poster in which a hand supports a lactating breast.

11. Martha Wilson. *Breast Forms Permutated*. 1972. Nine photographs mounted on board with pencil text, 24 x 30" (61 x 76.2 cm). Collection of Ian Murray, Toronto

The image was inspired by a detail from Rubens's painting *Origin of the Milky Way*, of 1638; she made it by photocopying a magazine photo she had found in a Times Square porno shop. This provocative piece of printed ephemera was then plastered through the streets of Geneva. Two years later, while browsing in the art-supply store New York Central, Smith found a stack of thin sheets of magenta paper, bought the entire lot, and used it to make *Untitled (Pink Bosoms)*, a series of screenprints based on the poster, adding three additional images of lactating breasts (plate 45).⁴³ The size of the edition—sixteen—was limited by the number of the magenta sheets.

In 1993, again using her own body at ULAE, Smith made dozens of photocopies of her breasts. For a series of both editioned and unique lithographs, she assembled these images into a grid, “making jokes on Eva Hesse. She was abstracting the body and then I was bringing it back in.”⁴⁴ In one of the most elaborate examples, *Untitled (Moons)* (plate 46), Smith cut up and collaged together individual lithographs of breasts printed on a delicate, translucent Nepalese paper, which she allowed to puff and pucker.⁴⁵ The expansive scale and sculptural nature of the work reflect Smith's interest in the crafts of quilts and wall coverings, whose associations with nurturing and warmth are enhanced by the imagery of breasts, while also relating to the artist's childhood: “Protecting the walls, like blanketing something. All the puffiness . . . came out of Moroccan wall tapestries, very traditional. Someplace in the attic we had rugs on the walls. We put rugs up because it was so cold.”⁴⁶

Smith usurped other traditionally “*femme*” crafts in depictions of breasts and vaginas. In 1994, after she joined the PaceWildenstein gallery, New York, she was invited to collaborate with the staff of Pace Editions' Spring Street Workshop. At first unsure what to try at the new shop, she became inspired when Richard Solomon of Pace Editions opened a drawer that happened to contain some doilies once owned by the sculptor Louise Nevelson, whose estate the gallery represents. Smith was immediately taken with these decorative, craft-oriented relics of femininity: to her the doilies suggested mammary glands and a host of

other anatomical parts, including the pupil of the eye, the anus, networks of capillaries, and generic human cells. She further saw them not only as “orifices or holes” but as “holy, cosmic mandalas. A cosmic mandala beneath your teacup.”⁴⁷ Smith made bronze sculptures from the doilies and then she learned from Spring Street Workshop printer Ruth Lingen how they could also be used to make prints on a letterpress machine (plates 47–50): she arranged the doilies in various compositions and Lingen laid a sheet of thin Japanese paper face up over each one. Lingen then ran a fully inked plate through the press face down over the paper at a precise pressure, so that the ink adhered only to the areas raised up by the doilies below. Sometimes she then ran the plate through again, with another sheet of paper but without any doilies, capturing the ink remaining on the plate wherever it had not been removed by the previous impression, so as to yield a print with a black ground and the doilies appearing in white—the reverse, in other words, of the print before. Smith took these prints home and assembled them into a variety of unique printed collages. To each collage she added a word—CUT, GRACE, FLESH, GENTLE—and these, combined with the stained-glass, rose-window effect of the doilies, convey a spiritual aura. When read together, they may also suggest such rituals of the body as scarification, and indeed tattoos have relevance for Smith, who has used them to decorate her own body.

Smith's deadpan depictions of the body have always challenged social taboos, but none have done so as overtly as her images of the vagina. In the first wave of feminist art, female genitals were introduced not so much as an erotic gesture than as a political one, notably by such figures as Chicago, Schneemann, and Wilke, who “scarred” her nude body with vagina-shaped loops of chewed gum and photographed herself in fashion-model poses.⁴⁸ Spero too has used vagina imagery, in work that celebrates women and comments powerfully on oppressive politics. Her lexicon of printed female images includes the sheela-na-gig, the carved-stone figure, found in the churchyards of Ireland and elsewhere, proudly displaying her enormous vagina (fig. 12).⁴⁹ The unconventional stamping technique through

12. Nancy Spero. *Sheela and Wilma*. 1985. Zinc cut collaged on four attached sheets, sheet (overall): 20" x 9' 2" (50.8 x 279.4 cm).
Printer: the artist. Unique. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong, New York



which Spero creates her unique scrolls of printed images was an important model for Smith's own working method.

In *Untitled (Blue Blanket)* (1994; plates 51 and 52) Smith composes an overall pattern out of delicate rubber-stamped vaginas, flowers, and butterflies that mirror her own tattoos. The stamps' color is indigo blue, which Smith began to favor during this period, inspired by seeing a friend on the street who had just gotten a blue tattoo: "I thought I needed blue on my body—like I had a deficiency without it. First I got a marguerite tattoo because I was curious thinking about how many petals were on flower representations in the ancient world. . . . Then I got a blue butterfly." The same friend also told Smith about the blue-vegetable dye woad, used by the warriors of ancient Britain as body paint.⁵⁰

For Smith the vagina is just one more body fragment, as worthy of attention as any other and part of her own, female experience. She experimented with the image in various formats—printed on single sheets installed randomly on a wall, printed on a papier-mâché sculpture, printed on numerous blanketlike works.⁵¹ *Untitled (Blue Blanket)* and other works enter the third dimension through twisted paper cords that dangle from the vaginas. The technique—inspired by the cording in Japanese bookbinding, which, in 1994, Smith had recently studied—applies sculptural methods to printmaking and suggests leaking bodily fluids. Hanging cords extend from many of Hesse's works as well.

Also in 1994, Smith combined her doily and vagina images in a magnificent wall-sized collage, *Untitled (Doily Drawing)* (plate 53). Here the doilies are printed lithographically, which renders them ghostlike and faded—more suggestive of the past

generations that these old-fashioned niceties in any case evoke. Seen from a distance the shapes clearly read as breast and vaginal imagery. The work also includes sheets printed with vaginal and anal orifices, and dripping with paper cord to reinforce this sexual interpretation. In this monumental work as in all of her anatomical works, Smith synthesizes startling, often difficult imagery with decorative and craftlike elements. Particularly in her printed works, which reveal her extraordinary sensitivity to paper, she magically conflates the ethereal and the confrontational.

Self-Portraits

Smith has rarely depicted herself in her sculpture, preferring to use a model or other neutral figure. In her printmaking, however, she began making self-portraits as soon as she arrived at ULAE, in 1989. Zammiello recently remarked that "one of the hallmarks of our prints together at ULAE is the fact that they almost always, up until recently, involved Kiki Smith as 'self,' as the self print."⁵² In fact her first print at ULAE, the untitled print of her hair, can of course be considered a self-portrait. Smith's work of the 1980s, predominantly body fragments, had not focused on her experience as a woman or as a woman artist, and in 1991 she remarked, "It's the internalized self/cultural hatred of feminine stuff. To me it's much more scary to be a girl in public than to talk about the digestive system."⁵³ Smith credits the nurturing environment of ULAE with giving her the confidence to make art with a strong personal stamp.

Banshee Pearls (1991; plate 60), a lithograph on twelve sheets, was Smith's coming-out party, a tour de force agglomeration

of dozens of self-portraits in different scales, orientations, processes, and expressions.⁵⁴ If her early screenprints blanketed walls with fetuses or a baby's legs, this monumental piece does the same with Smith's face. She is intrigued by the distortions of her portraits here: "There's something really nice about transgressing your own image. It's endlessly amusing to make yourself horrific-looking."⁵⁵ A banshee is a female spirit from Irish folklore who foretells a death with a high-pitched wail. Smith remembers her father calling her a banshee as a teenager; instead of being angry she embraced the idea: "I made a celebration of being a death figure."⁵⁶ She has toyed with the idea of making a horror film and is currently at work on a book reusing some of the photographs she used in *Banshee Pearls*.

This monumental work involved an explosion of activity and experimentation for Smith and ULAE. The piece expanded as work on it progressed, and some small elements grew into entire panels. Lithographic plates were made from photographs and photocopies of Smith's face, and printed in both negative and positive registers. Plates from the untitled print of her hair were reused in certain sections, and childhood photographs inserted. Smith even pressed her teeth against the photocopier and transferred that image onto a plate. She drew flowers and heraldic symbols directly on some plates with tusche, then held the plates upright to create long dripping lines. And contrary to her usual practice of depicting objects true to scale, she printed some heads smaller than life, in dense clusters, then enlarged other body parts nearly beyond recognition, as in the spooky panel of dark, negative-printed eyes. Smith plays with degrees of reality in *Banshee Pearls*, from blurry, skull-like masks to photographic accuracy.⁵⁷ In this respect she owes a debt to Robert Rauschenberg's photographic transfers, as well as to Warhol's experiments in printing photographic images in negative registers for an integration of the beautiful and the creepy.

Smith continued to experiment with her own image, completing *Puppet* (plate 63) and *Worm* (plate 64) between 1992 and 1994. These works also exemplify the elaborate constructions that characterize Smith's early work at ULAE, and illustrate the collab-

orative and evolutionary process that developed between her and the printers at the workshop. Smith compares the making of *Puppet* to composing, assembling a vocabulary of disparate elements into a coherent composition. She began with a small photograph of her niece, Antonia, whose head and hands appear in the lower section of the print, manipulated from a snapshot showing her hanging upside down on outdoor scaffolding.⁵⁸ The top and center sections are derived from two photographs Wojnarowicz had taken of Smith ten years earlier, and that had served as the basis for *How I Know I'm Here* (plate 13). The small blue figures are based on images Smith found in a Dutch magazine on nudist camps. She began making etchings of these children on three small plates. As proofs were pulled and pinned on the wall of the workshop for critique, Smith moved elements around and ultimately attached strings and cutouts of the blue figures to a columnar totem of self-portraits. The final print comprises active fingers and faces in an expressive commentary on childhood innocence. As so often happened, Smith took home many printed sheets containing elements of *Puppet* and recontextualized them into several new works, such as an untitled image from c. 1992–93 (plate 61).

Zammiello, then one of ULAE's leading etching printers and a master of photogravure, exerted a significant influence on Smith's work at the shop. The substantial role of photography in her ULAE prints of these years is a direct result of his expertise. The monumental composition *Worm* incorporates a photograph by Zammiello, showing Smith in a fetal position that recalls her pose in *Sueño* (plate 23), which she was working on simultaneously. Her image is printed in the negative, creating a dark, looming figure, and the veins and stretch marks in her skin, made visible with photographic filters, promote a sickly, almost frightening aura. Smith's self-portraits do not arise from narcissism: in fact she often exaggerates what she considers her physical flaws, turning weakness into an advantage for her art. In *Worm* she contrasts the feminine with the abject, the high-tech look of the photographic image with the handmade diamond cutouts around it. Other decorative, craft-oriented components also appear—

marbled papers, collaged flowers, string—as well as a grotesquely oversized photographic collage of body parts printed and folded into a large worm shape. An image of Smith's outstretched head tops the worm collage, conflating Eve and the snake in a wry commentary on commonplace interpretations of female iconology.

Zammiello took the photograph that became the starting point for *Free Fall* (1994; plate 65) at the same photo session that produced the portrait in *Worm*. Although Smith was actually lying on the floor, her uplifted arm and legs, and her flowing tendrils of hair, evoke a figure falling through space—an allusion, she has said, to her life as an artist.⁵⁹ This metaphoric sense of falling is heightened by the drama of viewing the work, which must be literally unfolded to see—in storage it is gathered up and sandwiched between two small boards. Like a road map, the sheet unfolds across and downward, becoming increasingly ungainly and awkward to handle, and creating a certain anxiety that the piece itself, like its naked subject, may fall. Folding appears frequently in Smith's work, especially in her books: "I was just really into . . . the thing of folding paper, folding things. . . . Folding has a sort of quiet, modest plainness. . . . I like the medieval [and] early Renaissance books where they collage the pieces of paper together . . . to show things larger, where they're piecing together information."⁶⁰ Smith also takes a fetishy pleasure in the action of unfolding the paper, and enjoys the ability to appreciate the work in two forms, open and closed.

Zammiello's photography and printing add a great deal to the impact of *Free Fall*. The Victorian look of the photogravure is enhanced by the use of infrared film to give Smith's body a prickly texture. To further this worn, nineteenth-century effect, Smith rubbed sandpaper over the background of the etching plate, creating a random network of scratchy marks evocative of old and used materials. *Free Fall* is a testament to the trust between Smith as artist and Zammiello as printer, which has fostered a truly stimulating collaboration.

Smith has explored the printed self-portrait at other workshops besides ULAE. In the summer of 1993, during her second residency at the Pilchuck Glass School, in Stanwood,

Washington, she made a series of self-portraits derived from charcoal drawings. First she enlarged or reduced the drawings on a photocopier, then arranged the photocopies face down on sheets of paper in loose grid formats. Rubbing solvents on the backs of the photocopies, she transferred the images to the paper below. (This technique was used extensively by Rauschenberg beginning in the late 1950s.) Experimenting with different scales and papers, including some elaborate and colorful Nepalese papers, she achieved radically different results: in the large *Untitled (Self-Portraits)* (plate 67), the iterations of the image produce ghostlike effects that exaggerate the sense of bleakness and loss created by the haunting, staring face. The smaller version (plate 69), meanwhile, is printed on a patterned Nepalese paper that provides a strong decorative texture to mitigate the melancholy. Also in 1993, Smith screenprinted the same image of her face onto a menu for the New York restaurant Chanterelle.⁶¹ The menu was printed in three rainbow-roll color variations, including a dazzling one that emphasizes the disembodied nature of the image, rendering the faces as floating heads receding into the distance (plate 68).

One of Smith's longstanding goals had been to construct an image of a splayed body. As a sculptor accustomed to depicting a whole figure, she had challenged herself to come up with a way to do the same on paper. This led her to experiment with various photographic techniques at ULAE, including one in which Zammiello took roll after roll of photographs of her turning on a stool: "We'd sit there and cut them out, collage them together to try to make a flat version of her head."⁶² *I Am* of 1994 (plate 70) is constructed from elements printed at ULAE but is not in fact flat: it is a macabre three-dimensional self-portrait in which three paper heads dangle from strings. The heads seem helpless, almost bloody, as if freshly decapitated.

Searching for a tool that might help Smith achieve her long-held desire, Goldston and Zammiello found a rare camera—a form of periphery camera—that makes photographs of objects in the round. The subject sits on a rotating turntable and the camera moves laterally at the same speed; the film records the image in

13. Breviary (girdle book). 1471. Book of parchment pages bound in leather and engraved brass with leather pouch, 9 1/2 x 4 1/8 x 2 3/16" (23.5 x 10.5 x 5.5 cm). Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremburg

successive strips that together form a periphery photograph. Only two such cameras exist, one owned by Shell Oil, its developer, and the other by the British Museum, London.⁶³ In July 1994, Goldston, Zammiello, and Smith traveled to London and rented the British Museum camera for two days. Smith had to sit motionless on the turntable for four to six minutes as she revolved. The innovative process yielded several four-by-five-inch negatives, from one of which Zammiello printed the enlarged photogravure for *My Blue Lake* (plate 71). In an uncharacteristic gesture, Smith decided to add bold color to the image and painted the etching plate with red and blue inks *à la poupée* as each print in the edition was pulled. She also added a dotted lithographed texture to her skin, giving definition to the distended depiction. In this extraordinary image Smith figuratively skins herself, transforming her head, neck, and shoulders into a textured and tattooed topography. The streaks of blue read as the water of the work's title, so that the cascading red-brown hair suggests land and the shoreline. Smith seems more exposed and vulnerable here than in any of her earlier self-portraits. The influence of the sculptor's vision can be seen on her depiction of her body as a landscape, in this ultimate representation of three-dimensional form on a two-dimensional surface.

Smith has incorporated photographic self-portraits in several other projects, including a small gem, on the theme of birth, that she made to benefit the University of California, Santa Barbara, on the occasion of her exhibition there in 1994. The work (plate 74), photoengraved in book form, is titled *Re*, after the Egyptian sun god, and includes text based on a fragment from an ancient Egyptian papyrus that discusses the creation of humanity. The photographs show Smith's distorted reflection in a piece of Mylar; she is pushing her ears outward in emulation of Hathor, the Egyptian goddess known for her cow ears, who alternately represents death, love, fertility, music and dance, and the sky.⁶⁴ In an ingenious design that Smith would use again, the text and images were printed on a single sheet of paper that was then folded, in a format known as a French fold, and slit to facilitate handling. The inventiveness did not stop here: attaching a sheet of Japanese paper to the edges of the original sheet, Smith created a kind of



billowing skirt beneath the images. The resulting contrast between firm and limp was inspired by the medieval prayer books known as girdle books, in which a floppy leather sac extending from the body of the book was attached to the owner's belt to keep the volume accessible (fig. 13).⁶⁵ Many of Smith's sculptures and occasional prints also reveal this

juxtaposition of solid and limp, body and dangling appendage.⁶⁶ In this delicate paper creation Smith reveals her identification with women from ancient cosmologies and suggests spiritual kinship through subtle historical references and her imaginative approach to materials. And, in a further self-reference, Smith requested vintage paper for this project, watermarked with the year of her birth.

In an inventive multiple of several years later, *What Girls Know about Grids: For Leslie Gore, Mo Tucker, Laura Nyro, and Mama Cass* (2000; plate 73), Smith incorporates actual photographs of herself. This multipart edition, which is related to the doily prints, was made from four pairs of sheets of Japanese paper, printed, crumbled, and glued together at the edges to resemble used handkerchiefs.⁶⁷ Included with the piece are four endearingly awkward photographs of Smith as an adolescent in suburban New Jersey. Tied with twine into a neat bundle, the work brings to mind a memento buried in a grandmother's drawer, and romanticizes a lost youth while simultaneously poking fun at it. The title's satirical mention of grids refers to the serial and geometric arrangements of Minimalist art, a jibe that Smith reinforces along gender lines with her lace-handkerchief-like squares and her list of four female musical heroes of the 1960s.

Nature

Once the body became a central theme in contemporary art, in the early 1990s, Smith chose to look outward and began producing

images of nature—of birds, animals, the cosmos.⁶⁸ Syntheses of human and animal, such as mermaids and winged fairies, were among the first images reflecting this renewed interest. (Her motifs of the late 1970s had included bees and other insects.) The precarious state of the environment, and our vital connection to it, are underlying themes in these works. By 1995 to 1996 motifs of nature had begun to appear in prints such as *Moth*, *Tattoo Print*, and *Ginzer and the Birds* (plates 75–77). Moths and butterflies are classic symbols of feminine fragility and metamorphosis, and Smith used them to underscore themes of rejuvenation and reanimation that had been present in her work for many years. In the woodcut *Moth*, which closely follows the design of a 1993 sculpture, the woman's tongue gracefully skimming the tip of the moth alludes to the spark of life. Additions of glitter, a decorative material with its own feminine associations, suggest the magical and electric atmosphere of creation. For Smith, "Glitter makes something alive and active."⁶⁹

Smith points to a more sexual interpretation of the butterfly, with its formal similarities to the vagina, in the playful *Tattoo Print*, a collection of temporary tattoos of butterflies, vaginas, and flowers, complete with application instructions. She intended the collector to cut up the sheet and apply the tattoos to his or her own skin; the idea of a disposable print displays Smith's fondness for the rich and varied functions of printed art. She has been getting tattoos herself for many years, drawing inspiration from the surface detail on African and Indian art. The marguerite flower, repeated throughout *Tattoo Print*, is among her tattoos—it is visible on her right shoulder in *My Blue Lake* (plate 71). In the lithograph *Ginzer and the Birds* Smith plays with the orientation of her images, a strategy begun dramatically with *Banshee Pearls*. The evenly sketchy draftsmanship and seemingly random alignments of the figures level any hierarchy among the individual elements—Smith, her cat Ginzer, a dove, and a canary—metaphorically suggesting the interconnectedness of all living things.

Smith's abiding interest in nature's creatures has rarely extended to their habitat: she has undertaken few conventional landscapes. *Etc., Etc.* (1999; plate 79), based in part on a photo-

graph she took from a car window in Pennsylvania, is an exception.⁷⁰ The long evolution of this elaborate print recalls Smith's working method for *Worm and Puppet*, and is typical of the ULAE environment. *Etc., Etc.* began with a photographic self-portrait from which the eyebrows had been removed—the eyes are still visible, peering out through holes cut in the sheet of snowflakes. The addition of the snowy-forest photograph turned the portrait into a landscape. Smith wanted veils of color in the landscape, and Zammiello devised an unusual technique that emulates the effects in turn-of-the-century children's books.⁷¹ Victorian illustration is an important influence on Smith: "I grew up in a house where everything was nineteenth century. All my grandparents' things were in the attic. I grew up with all my father's children's books. . . . All that printmaking is beautiful—you see all the separations layered over one another as thin transparent colors."⁷² (This influence would become more pronounced in the years to come, when Smith began to use color more aggressively.) The disparate parts of *Etc., Etc.* are unified by the text running down a strip of Japanese paper along the right edge: the words "Let me freeze again to death," at the top of the strip, quote the poet John Dryden's and Henry Purcell's opera *King Arthur*, of 1691, and are trailed by a string of "etc.'s" ending in an image of a luna moth. The allusion is to the cycles of the seasons and to nature's suspended state in the bleakness of winter.

Smith completed two beautiful flower studies with Pace Editions, where she often experiments with processes that are unusual (as in the doily prints) or new to her. *Red Linoleum* (1996; plate 80) is a linoleum cut printed in relief on the same letterpress used for the doily prints. To evoke the metamorphoses of nature, Smith first carved the larger, flowering image on the right, then cut away the sprouting stem to print the smaller image on the left. In the series *Dandelions* (1999; plates 81–83) Smith exploited the rich blacks and vaporous effects of the mezzotint to suggest nature's fragility. Both projects use cinematic, temporal effects to illustrate Smith's vision of nature's regenerative patterns.

Smith is an avid believer in astrology and the influence of celestial bodies on human affairs; the moon, the constellations,

and other astral phenomena have been important motifs in her art since 1996. That year she was invited to work at the newly founded LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies at Columbia University, and, having recently seen a series of photographs of the moon taken in the nineteenth century from the observatory at Harvard, she asked if Columbia had a telescope. On a night in January 1997, between the hours of midnight and 2:00 A.M., when New York's skies were at their darkest, Smith and Tomas Vu-Daniel, the director of the Neiman Center, used a camera attached to the university's telescope to photograph the moon. They later went to Coney Island, where, with a panoramic camera designed by Columbia Associate Professor Thomas Roma, they photographed ocean waves. In 1998 Smith combined these images in *Tidal* (plate 84), a tour de force of narrative artist's-book-making: she designed an accordion fold of thirteen panels, each one holding a photogravure of a single round moon (there are thirteen full moons in the year), and attached beneath it a length of Japanese paper photolithographed with a continuous image of rolling waves. The drama of unfolding *Tidal* recalls *Free Fall*; the fusion of contrasting papers recalls *Re*, and enhances the dichotomy of stillness and motion inherent in the opposing forces of moon and sea. Implicit in the juxtaposed images of the moon and of undulating water is a sense of the passage of time. The evocation of the monthly pull of the moon on the ocean's tides also suggests a woman's bodily cycle, highlighting Smith's theme of the interdependence between people and nature.

In the exquisite book *The Blue Feet* (2003; plate 86), many of Smith's themes and strategies coalesce into an ethereal spirituality. An elegy on the forces of nature and the cosmos, the text comes from a poem written by Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century Mexican nun who is among the first female North American poets. Using a French fold similar to the format of *Re*, with its central slit and unique folding sequence, Smith creates an intriguing amalgam of feet and stars, suggestive of a figure rising to heaven.

Smith is fascinated by birds. On a personal level she grew up with birds in the house, and at one later point kept thirty or

forty of them in her bedroom; they are also important to her as symbols—of the Holy Spirit, for example, in Catholicism, but also of other qualities in other cultures. “I dream about birds,” Smith has said. “A few years ago I started to notice all these images from around the world of bird-humans—how birds become stand-ins for souls, that our identity is deeply, sometimes tragically connected with the natural world. So I began making bird sculptures.”⁷³ The first such sculpture came in 1992, and birds have featured in her work ever since.

In the fall of 1995 Smith undertook a three-week residency at Alfred University in western New York State, her first of three visits there. In its arts and design programs Alfred has a tradition of encouraging work across disciplines, and although Smith had been invited to work in glass, she asked to use the printmaking facilities as well.⁷⁴ The father of one of the technical specialists at the school owned a collection of specimens of local Allegany County birds—mainly owls, hawks, and woodpeckers—from which Smith was able to sketch, and these drawings became the basis for many of her prints there (fig. 14). Meanwhile an Alfred student, Jackie Janks, taught her a new technique that involved using a sharp tool to scratch an image into a black Kodolith film that was then exposed on a printing plate. Printed as a lithograph, the resulting images appeared as white lines on black grounds. Smith was hooked: her work with hair and now feathers required



14. Kiki Smith. *Blue Owl*. (1995). Lithograph and collaged lithograph on handmade Nepalese paper, comp. and sheet: approx. 20 x 29 1/2" (50.8 x 74.9 cm). Printer: Alfred University, Alfred, New York. Unique

15. Kiki Smith. *Peabody (Animal Drawings)* (detail) from the installation *Landscape*, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston. 1996.
Floor piece of multiple layers of etchings, all on handmade Nepalese paper, comp. and sheet: various dimensions,
overall: 2,000 square feet. Printer: Massachusetts College of Art, Boston

networks of fine lines, and these were easily attainable through the scratching process. And the Kodolith film was lightweight, portable, and manageable in scale. Smith would use this technique for several years, printing hundreds of sheets with it. Also during that first residency at Alfred, when she wanted richer, denser blacks, printer Joseph Scheer suggested she try working directly on metal plates in relief etching. She hesitated at first, fearing the resistance of the metal to the burin would forestall the fluid line she was able to achieve on the film; but she did complete one etching, *Owl*, which was printed in an edition of twenty-five. Then, during her second residency at Alfred, in 1998, she completed a more ambitious, four-sheet work titled *Owls* (plate 95): having etched two images on copper plates, she printed each twice, once as an intaglio in black lines on a white ground, and a second time in relief, in a white line on a black ground.

Smith thoroughly enjoys her university collaborations, seeing them as important learning opportunities that offer relatively unpressured environments in which to experiment. She also flourishes in group situations, thriving on the ideas generated through collaborative methods. In 1996, invited to fill a residency at the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, “She took over the school for three weeks,” according to Vu-Daniel, master printer there from 1993 to 1996.⁷⁵ Working in the school’s glass workshop as well as its print shop, she created a monumental installation, *Landscape*, based on the theme of the female life cycle from puberty to menopause. Among several sculptural components *Landscape* included two printed-paper floor pieces, inspired by rugs Smith had seen in mosques on a recent trip to Turkey. The larger of these comprised hundreds of sheets of Nepalese paper printed with white snowflakes, moons, and animals, including rabbits, deer, and wolves, on a dark red ground suggesting a vast field of menstrual blood (fig. 15).⁷⁶

Landscape was a turning point in Smith’s work, an ambitious, daring experiment encompassing new imagery, new formats, and new mediums. She began by drawing directly on copper etching plates, which the students printed in relief. But the process was slow, cumbersome, and labor-intensive, and once the work’s



massive scale had been decided on—2,000 square feet, to be covered completely in multiple layers of prints—a quicker method had to be developed. After a false start in lithography, Vu-Daniel gave Smith Kodolith film that she took over to Harvard’s Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, with its adjunct Museum of Natural History, to make sketches of animals. These images were transferred onto etching plates, which were then relief printed in a three-week marathon that produced over 20,000 sheets. Most of the installation no longer exists. Details from it appear on this book’s half title, contents, and plate-section divider pages.

Working with a similar process from one of the sketches she had done at the Peabody, in 1997 Smith created one of her grandest bird images, *Peacock*. The bird’s dense and detailed plumage at first appears so abstract as to obscure its face and body. Smith printed some versions of the image in relief, making for white lines on red or black backgrounds, and others as intaglios, with black ink forming the image and the white paper the ground (plate 92). The authoritative majesty of the peacock’s frontal stance reflects Smith’s admiration for this inspiring creature. The following year she reused parts of the image in several unique prints, including *Double Animals* (plate 93) and *Untitled*

(plate 94), both on semitranslucent Nepalese paper and both layering a detail of *Peacock* under a second sheet showing a detail from a wolf image in *Landscape*. In *Untitled* the two sheets are attached back to back, so that the wolf's legs, facing us on the upper sheet, appear clearly while the peacock feathers, both under the wolf sheet and facing away from us, appear faint and ghost-like through the paper, as if to evoke not so much a peacock as a memory of one; in *Double Animals* the back of the wolf sheet is attached to the front of the peacock sheet, making the bird's feathers clear enough to create a background and spatial context for the wolf's back.

In 1997, invited to prepare an installation for the following spring at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, Smith again made drawings on film, this time sketching from bird specimens at the city's Carnegie Museum of Natural History and selecting mostly species native to Pennsylvania (fig. 16). Transferring these images onto twenty-five screens, she made a series of screenprints on colored cotton blankets, choosing colors close to the feather colors of the birds, and installed them on the gallery floor in a stack (plate 88).⁷⁷ The work's title, *Flight Mound*, refers to North American Indian burial mounds. Each blanket is unique, screenprinted with a seemingly random number of birds all heading in the same direction, suggesting a flock somehow frozen, petrified in flight.

Later that year Smith asked the Carnegie Museum of Natural History to lend her a selection of its bird specimens for



a series of etchings she wanted to make back in New York. She brought the specimens to the shop of etching printers Felix Harlan and Carol Weaver (which is located on Manhattan's Lower East Side, not far from Smith's home) and there drew directly on five large copper plates, creating an austere horizontal frieze from a beautifully synco-pated sequence of dead birds

(plate 87). The work's title, *Destruction of Birds*, inverts the Bible's description of the world's fifth day, and the creation of fishes and birds (Genesis 1:20–23), transforming the passage into an image of death. Smith had been struck by the compact storage of the specimens in the museum: "When the birds are preserved, they tend to get kind of flattened like shrouds or corpses. For storage, they are laid in drawers, thousands of them in drawer after drawer. I think about them in relation to the layouts depicted in etchings of slave ships, a tight containment."⁷⁸ In the etching Smith liberates the birds into a sparse, ethereal arrangement across twenty feet of white paper, in a delicate, morbid procession reminiscent of the medieval pageant illustrations that had inspired *How I Know I'm Here*.

Smith was by this time an experienced, prolific, confident printmaker, and felt comfortable taking control of her projects—in fact yearned to do so. She had published several prints independently over the years; she now decided to establish her own imprint, Thirteen Moons, setting herself up as a publisher (although not a legally incorporated one) and embarking on a new phase of her career. *Destruction of Birds* was Thirteen Moons' first print. It was also Smith's first with Harlan & Weaver: wanting to make straightforward etchings that could be produced relatively quickly for an upcoming exhibition, she had sought accomplished printers who could work for her as she needed.⁷⁹ She responded immediately to the shop's intimacy: "I have to think of a lot of good things to do so I can come here often."⁸⁰ Smith considered using the Kodalith process at the shop, but Harlan and Weaver suggested she work directly on the copper plates, illustrating for her the more refined line she could achieve that way. This first experience launched a rich collaboration that continues today. Smith relishes what she can learn from Harlan and Weaver about etching's history, and as she has become increasingly involved in the technical aspects of the craft (in part, no doubt, because she has been teaching printmaking periodically since 1997) she has enjoyed discussing the intricacies of the medium with them as well. Printer Maggie Wright, who works closely with Smith at the shop, remarks, "It's so very gratifying working with someone like Kiki.

16. Kiki Smith drawing from bird specimens on Kodalith film at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, to make *Flight Mound* for exhibition at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, 1998

17. Kiki Smith. On wall: *White Mammals* (1998; see plate 99). On floor: *White Mammals*. 1999. Seven ceramic reliefs mounted on wood platforms, each platform 31 1/2 x 19 11/16" (80 x 50 cm). Collection of the artist, courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York. Installation view from the exhibition *Kiki Smith: Small Sculptures and Large Drawings*, Ulmer Museum, Ulm, 2001

She's so enthusiastic and inquisitive . . . she always asks really curious questions about the technique. She's interested in getting her hands dirty."⁸¹

Smith is passionate about etching, whose delicate line and crisp, tactile surface mesh perfectly with her detailed depictions of feathers and animal fur. She has said of this attraction, "I started drawing animals because I like to draw hair. I realized how similar we are to birds or to other mammals. . . . How the hair and skin move on a face is the same as how hair patterns itself on an animal's body."⁸² In 1998, again working from animal specimens at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, she made the powerful *White Mammals* (plate 99), which showcases her exquisite handling of fur in etching. She produced this seven-sheet piece for her exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art that year, for a gallery in which she focused on white—on arctic and albino animals, and the way they function in their surroundings. This time, instead of borrowing specimens from the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, she took the copper plates to the museum and sketched in situ. The animals are mostly rodents and small mammals, including ermine, arctic rabbit, and albino squirrel, and float suspended in the center of each sheet. At top and bottom the images run off the paper, emphasizing their verticality, much as the images in *Destruction of Birds* run horizontally off the sheets to heighten that work's scroll-like effect. *White Mammals* is among Smith's most affecting and morbid works. Instead of drawing the animals in lifelike poses, as traditional naturalists might, she accentuates the specimens' status as corpses, even to the point of including the cotton that covers their eyes. The vertical format reinforces the feeling of creatures hanged and dead. Smith attributes her renewed interest in animal life in part to a vision she had in the mid-1990s telling her to make a "Noah's ark as a death barge of singular animals."⁸³ Depicting the animals in *White Mammals* in black ink on a white ground, she undoes their whiteness, negating their perfectly engineered camouflage in snowy landscapes. Yet she also uses the sensual quality of the fur's etched lines to animate the creatures, in a style reminiscent of Albrecht Dürer, an artist she greatly admires.

Contrary to the typical creative sequence, *Destruction of*



Birds and *White Mammals* inspired subsequent sculpture projects. In 1997, Smith photocopied and reduced *Destruction of Birds* to make a small accordion-folded book (plate 90). From those photocopies she also generated rubber stamps, which in turn became wax molds, which she used to cast hundreds of low-relief metal birds that she has set in varying numbers in rows on a wall in an installation titled *Flock*.⁸⁴ In the case of *White Mammals* Smith derived a ceramic floor piece from photocopies of the etchings (fig. 17), again illustrating the central role of printmaking in her creative thought.

From 1998 to 2000 Smith worked intensively at Harlan & Weaver, visiting the shop two to three times a week. She would often call in advance, asking for plates of a specific size to be prepared for her arrival and knowing precisely what she would do when she got there—a very different approach from her practice at ULAE. During this period, working either from actual specimens or from photographs, she made a group of works based on dead animals and birds: a monkey, a falcon, a cat, the skeleton of a small bird, and a fawn (plates 100–104).⁸⁵

Smith's technical mastery of the etching medium gives all of these images an eerie, distilled, frozen quality. Rich and dense, the works are built up layer by layer, a process she learned from the prints of William Bailey, which she saw around the Harlan & Weaver workshop. Where the approach in *White Mammals* and *Destruction of Birds* is exclusively linear, these works incorporate

areas of aquatint. *Immortal* and *Falcon* include color; for the cat's fur in *Ginzer* Smith has added layers of spit-bite, a washy aquatint process that yields a fluid, watercolor effect. She loves to draw with a burnisher, actually erasing some of the etched areas on the plates to highlight certain passages, most noticeably in *Fawn*. The bright white paper she prints on highlights residual marks and scratches in the worn and recycled copper plates that she uses frequently at Harlan & Weaver. She calls these random marks "the chance and generosity in the material," and they contribute to the nineteenth-century feel of Smith's animal imagery; these works may seem conventional and old-fashioned but in fact manifest a spine-tingling tension as Smith combines the straightforward, detailed drawing style and centrally posed compositions of traditional animal portraiture with her cadaverous subject matter. The prints present a beautiful if disturbing menagerie, almost as if paying homage to some of nature's fallen heroes.

Smith subsequently added to this series a sixth image, *Two* (2002; plate 105), a haunting, death mask-like double portrait of a friend. While the closed eyes of the upper head suggest sleep or death, those of the lower are slightly open, and the intriguing questions this effect provokes go to the core of the work's mysterious power. *Two* also exhibits Smith's skills as a draftsman and etcher: while the heads appear in precise detail, the lines of the shoulders and chests diffuse into the paper, for a ghostlike,



almost spiritual mood. Smith admires the etchings of Jacques Villon and Mary Cassatt, whose portraits make an interesting comparison to *Two* (fig. 18).

Smith photographed her friend in her backyard. Then, because she wanted the finished print to have the same orientation as the original photograph, she had a computer flip the photographs so that her source material would be in the same

orientation as her drawing on the copper plate. For the upper portrait she traced the photograph, for the lower she drew freehand, so that the drawings themselves show differences. Smith built the image out of lines, then created highlights on the faces with sandpaper, which she calls "a poor man's aquatint." She could have achieved similar effects with spit-bite aquatint, a more painterly method typically practiced with a brush, but, in another example of her sculptural approach to printmaking, she chose sandpaper, a tool often used on bronze sculpture.

Smith has produced several books and multiples on natural themes. Some of her earliest editioned prints appeared in *A Bestiary* (1990), a book of prose poems by Bradford Morrow that includes illustrations by eighteen artists. Publisher Leslie Miller of The Grenfell Press had asked each artist to select two of Morrow's thirty-six animals; Smith chose the anemone and the bat (plates 106 and 107). For the anemone she brought a photography book of sea creatures to the Grenfell Press workshop and made an ethereal pochoir, printing each of two stencils in overlapping layers of pink and white; for the mother and baby bats she aggressively carved a graphic woodcut. More recently, in 2003, she traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico, to work with publisher and artist James Brown on *Hunters and Gatherers*, a book of haikus by writer Susanna Moore (plates 109 and 110). Here Smith made seven etchings of field animals—a frog, a snake, and so on—that Brown had preserved in jars for his children. In drawing these creatures she figuratively reanimated them by depicting them in the same form but without their aqueous environment and jar, so that the frog appears in mid-leap and the snake, although barely sketched in at certain points, seems poised to strike—a change in context that completely alters their meaning. These prints are looser than Smith's earlier images of dead animals, exhibiting a new freshness in their sketchy, unfinished state and fluid drawing style.

As Smith gained wider recognition, publishers increasingly invited her to produce multiples. In 1999, working with A/D of New York, she created a series of paperweights on animal themes, including a glass egg yolk and a bronze bird with emerald eyes, that alluded to issues of birth and death (plate 91). Stark and

18. Mary Cassatt. *Portrait Sketch of Mme. M.* . . . (c. 1889). Drypoint, plate: 9 ¹¹/₁₆ x 7" (24.6 x 17.8 cm), sheet: 14 ³/₁₆ x 10 ⁷/₈" (36 x 27.6 cm). S. P. Avery Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

beautiful, these works evoke a fragility belied by their hard materials. In 2001 Smith began making multiples at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, initiating another new workshop relationship. Her first project there was a wool blanket depicting a cluster of furry animals surrounding a female figure against a starry background (plate 113). (The doubled image is a result of the jacquard loom on which the blanket was woven.) This poignant work, *Familiars*, is Smith's ultimate expression of humanity's connection to the natural world. A familiar is an attendant spirit, usually an animal, that offers comfort and protection to a human, typically a witch. It provides that person with a link to the animal kingdom. Finally fulfilling her long-held desire to make a functional blanket, Smith aptly chose to adorn it with these images of security and warmth.

Feminine Contexts

From her early growing up as, in her phrase, a “girl-child” to her later years of maneuvering through the professional art world as a female artist, Smith has strongly identified with her gender. While rarely presenting any polemical agenda, much of her work revolves around feminine forms and contents and could only have been made by a woman. Smith attempts to express universal concerns from a female perspective. In the course of this career-long endeavor she has turned to a large cast of characters from the domains of literature, myth, history, and religion, ranging from Egyptian goddesses and classical Greek nymphs through biblical figures to the heroines of fairy tales. Smith does not just co-opt these personas to convey her own meanings, she reinterprets their stories and reputations from a female point of view.

One of the first female heroines—and undoubtedly the earliest in time—to whom Smith referred was Lucy, the prehistoric hominid whose 3-million-year-old skeleton was discovered in Ethiopia in 1974. In *Lucy's Daughters* of 1990 (plate 115), Smith fuses this ancient character with other, even older specimens collected in Tanzania to symbolize the first woman. Smith drew the image and then photocopied and rephotocopied it to achieve a processed, degraded appearance. The work comprises sixty

small cloth figures (reflecting her enduring interest in dolls and puppets) screenprinted with generic female forms and assembled into a pyramidal structure in which each figure supports the one in front.⁸⁶ In several variations on paper made in 1992, Smith used the same screenprinted images to render a similar but inverted pyramid, this time emulating the format of a family tree—but Smith's tree is composed exclusively of women, each generation spawning the next (plate 114).⁸⁷ In 1990 Smith had remarked, “I've been thinking about ancestors and about being an older woman in society—how one gets to be an elder.”⁸⁸ In either format, *Lucy's Daughters* is among Smith's most literal interpretations of the themes of birth and regeneration, as well as a potent statement on the social role of women.

Around this period Smith completed several sculptures of women from myth and the Bible, including *Daphne*, *Lilith*, and *Lot's Wife*, but rarely depicted these figures on paper.⁸⁹ In 1992, however, when she exhibited one of her most controversial sculptures, *Virgin Mary*, in an exhibition at Vienna's MAK—Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, she derived two prints from the work. *Virgin Mary* shows the Virgin not robed and serene but flayed, bloodied, and defenseless, her arms held vulnerably open. *Silent Work* (plate 117), a multiple of screenprint and candle made as a benefit for the museum, and a large-edition poster for the exhibition (plate 116) are based on the sculpture and reuse some of the same printed elements. The candle is printed with the German words “*Nehmet und esset alle davon, das ist mein Leib*,” or “Take ye and eat. This is my body.” The words invoke the Catholic concept of the transmutation of spirit into body. The candle, a traditional symbol of mortality, further suggests the contrast between earthly existence and the Virgin's eternal life. For the poster Smith separated the two images of the statue with a stream of diamond shapes, extensions of the decorative techniques seen in works such as *Worm*, made the same year. The decorations, which include a version of Smith's marguerite-flower tattoo, create an atmosphere of floating, crystalline shapes and supply an aura of spirituality.

In 1999, during a residency at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, Smith completed the etching and aquatint



Josephine, which depicts a friend's young daughter holding to her eye a glass teardrop, one of many that Smith has incorporated in sculptures and installations. *Josephine* represents the beginning of a new focus in Smith's work, on themes of childhood. By the summer of that year she had decided to embark on the Blue Prints series, which she originally imagined as portraits of

a group of renowned women, ranging from historical figures such as Joan of Arc and Clara Barton to more contemporary figures such as Rosa Parks, but which she now reconceived as fifteen etchings, aquatints, and drypoints portraying mostly young girls, many of them taken from literature (plates 118–22). Blue Prints was made at Harlan & Weaver, and, typical of her working method there, Smith arrived at the shop with a well-conceived project.

The Blue Prints series reveals artistic interests ranging from Northern European old masters to Victorian art, including Currier & Ives prints, costume photographs, and children's books. One of the first to be completed was *Emily D.* (plate 120), in which Smith conflates several nineteenth-century elements: the gruesome tale of Lizzie Borden, the famous young Massachusetts woman accused (and eventually acquitted) of murdering her parents in 1892; Longfellow's nursery rhyme about the horrid little girl "who had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead"; and the poet Emily Dickinson, the melancholy symbol of American Victoriana. Smith based the composition on a photograph from Priscilla Harris Dalrymple's book *American Victorian Costume in Early Photographs* (fig. 19).⁹⁰ The print has both a nostalgic sweetness and an eerie coldness, a tension that distinguishes much of Smith's recent work. Other images of the period inspired the anxious face of Dorothy from L. Frank Baum's *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (plate 118) and the hirsute young woman in *Wolf Girl* (plate 121).⁹¹ But Smith based *Melancholia* (plate 119) on Dürer's engraving of the same title, from 1514; she streamlined that master-

piece of the Northern Renaissance, eliminating its many symbols and focusing on the face of the winged female artist, burin in hand. The cubic shape beside her represented erudition in Dürer's time, but in Smith's rendering surely refers to her father's geometric sculpture. Smith transforms the figure into a melancholy self-portrait with furrowed brow, embarking on her artistic career.

In the Blue Prints series Smith experimented with several new techniques, and in particular with the various textures made possible by the aquatint process. The child in *Emily D.* sits stiffly in front of a grainy-textured aquatint background, which, with the overall blue palette, conjures the sense of nostalgia and romance in Victorian-era pictorial devices. The white of the paper shimmering in dots and dashes through the dense blue field of the dress creates sparkling highlights. Smith originally intended to print the series in a rainbow of colors but finally settled on Prussian blue for the entire group, both unifying it and contributing to its melancholy tone.⁹² Harlan and Weaver, in their discussions of the history of printing techniques with Smith, had pointed out the innovations in aquatint devised by Francisco de Goya, one of history's greatest printmakers. Aquatint involves the use of a rosin-based medium to create broad tonal areas; Goya intentionally spread the rosin unevenly, dusting it through a stocking onto the plate, to achieve highlights and mottled areas (fig. 20). Exploring similar effects in prints such as *Virgin with Dove* (plate 122), Smith airbrushed with stop out, an acid resist that protects the copper plate and



prevents the ink from adhering, creating a lustrous halo around the Virgin and Holy Spirit. Weaver comments, "I think, for Kiki, going back to the beginning and discovering these techniques is very exciting. That's what she's doing every time she comes, and I think that sense of discovery for her is the best thing in the world."⁹³

20. Francisco de Goya. *Asta su abuelo* (And so was his grandfather) from *Los Caprichos*. 1799 (prints executed 1797–99). One from the illustrated book of 80 aquatints, most with etching, drypoint, and/or engraving, page: 11 7/8 x 7 7/8" (30 x 20 cm). Publisher and printer: the artist, Madrid. Edition: approx. 300 (first edition). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Louis E. Stern Collection, 1964

21. Lewis Carroll. Illustration from manuscript for *Alice's Adventures under Ground*. 1864. Ink on paper, page: 7 1/2 x 4 5/16 " (19 x 11 cm). By permission of the British Library, London



The following year Smith embarked on an ambitious series of prints based on Lewis Carroll's own manuscript drawings for his classic children's book *Alice's Adventures under Ground* (fig. 21).⁹⁴ "His [drawings] are gorgeous . . . perfect," she says. "Victorian is out of fashion, but I thought it was just this remarkably inventive period."⁹⁵ (The published edition of the book was illustrated by Sir John Tenniel.) Smith's pervading theme in these and later works based on fairy tales with young-girl heroines, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, is the poignant vulnerability of childhood: as she reworks and reinvents the stories she accentuates the tension between childhood innocence and sexual awakening, between youth and budding maturity. In many images her interest in nature leads her toward dynamic moments between the girls and their animal protagonists. When Carroll describes a shrunken Alice swimming in a pool of her own tears, for example, he surrounds her with animals and birds that have fallen in as well; illustrating this chapter in *Pool of Tears 2 (after Lewis Carroll)* (plate 123), Smith creates an overwhelming feeling of a young girl in peril. The print's massive scale plays a crucial role: the birds in particular seem enormous, dwarfing Alice and brilliantly conveying a sense of childhood anxiety and wonder. The emptiness of the sky further accentuates the plight of the birds, and of Alice, as trapped at ground level. Smith was attracted to this episode for many reasons: tears have been an important motif for her since the early 1990s—several of her sculptures and installations feature glass tears—and she must also have relished the opportunity to draw fur and feathers. For her, furthermore, the scene resonates

with the damage that the human race has inflicted on the animal world: "I seriously saw this as something ecological. If it's the humans who are at fault, it's the animals who start falling by the wayside because of the human situation."⁹⁶

The Carroll prints also mark a change in Smith's working methods at ULAE: after nearly a decade of producing multi-media compositions and complex paper constructions there, she now restricted herself to etching and aquatint. Zammiello remarks, "The feeling I got was that Kiki wanted to express herself in drawings. . . . It was no longer a distant element. I think she felt it could stand alone."⁹⁷ Smith brought a copy of *Alice's Adventures under Ground* to ULAE, along with encyclopedias of animals and birds, and drew freehand on the plates. For the most part she stayed remarkably close to Carroll's linear drawings, while using aquatint to create rich textural effects. The Victorian feel is enhanced through strategic use of such devices as creamy chine collé. For *Pool of Tears 2 (after Lewis Carroll)* Smith used the largest etching plate that ULAE's press could accommodate to create near-life-size depictions of, in Carroll's words, "a Duck and a Dodo, a Lory and an Eaglet, and several other curious creatures." Her consistent desire to represent objects in their actual size, while unremarkable in sculpture, has led to what in prints is considered epic scale. She also slightly enlarged the scope of Carroll's illustration by including more water and sky, giving the harrowing scene a sense of space, even a grandeur, in excess of the rabbit-hole setting. Finally she set off in a striking new direction in *Pool of Tears 2 (after Lewis Carroll)* by adding watercolor to the print. It began as an etching and aquatint in black; Goldston suggested she try color. Smith, whose palette had so far been fairly restricted, drew inspiration from the transparent, thinly applied hand-coloring found in some Victorian prints and photographs.

In another new development, Smith worked on the print at home. Goldston brought the immense plate to her Manhattan house and she positioned it on her dining room table. Its massive scale often required that Smith sit on one section of it while drawing on another; she chose to retain the stray marks of wear that naturally resulted as evidence of this "experience" of printmaking,

22. Kiki Smith working on etching plate for *Come Away from Her* (after Lewis Carroll) (plate 124) outside her house, New York, 2002



and the scratches contribute to her emulation of the worn look of some nineteenth-century prints.

For a related work completed in 2003, Smith chose a scene from Carroll's third chapter, "A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale," in which Alice inadvertently drives away her bird companions by insensitively discussing her cat's eating habits (plate 124). Again Smith selects a

moment of vulnerability, when the girl is deserted because of her own lack of tact; her loneliness is powerfully expressed by the birds' dramatic flight off the corner of the sheet. To complete this enormous plate Smith worked on a table set up on the street in front of her house (fig. 22).

The fairy tale that has preoccupied Smith the longest is "Little Red Riding Hood"; she has created many sculptures, prints, paintings on glass, photographs, and drawings on the theme, beginning in 1999. She has also studied the various versions of the tale, starting with Charles Perrault's—its first appearance in writing. Writing in seventeenth-century France, Perrault treated this complex story of a young girl and a wolf who meet in the woods, and end up sharing a bed, as an adult satire. Then, in the nineteenth century, the Brothers Grimm transformed it into a children's story, complete with a weighty moral about obeying one's parents and not straying from the path.⁹⁸ In feminist literature today the tale is discussed in terms of male dominance and female submissiveness, as well as of cross-dressing and rape. Smith plays on all of these allusions as she shifts and reorients her narratives of a young girl's journey.

Simultaneous with her exploration of "Little Red Riding Hood," Smith began a series of works based on the story of Saint Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris. The daughter of a poor fifth-century shepherd, Genevieve is usually shown surrounded by wolves and lambs, whose peaceful coexistence in her presence symbolizes her virtue and gentility. These attributes appealed to

Smith, who depicted her naked with a wolf in several works on paper of 1999 (fig. 23). Over the next two years Smith conflated the tales of Saint Genevieve and Little Red Riding Hood, both with their attendant wolves, in a variety of prints that play with the representation of feminine roles in these culturally determined contexts.

Smith's Little Red Riding Hood imagery first appeared in *Daughter* (1999), a provocatively titled sculpture in which she draped a red cape over a paper figure of a young girl whose face was covered with hair. Interested in making sculptures that could move, she attempted to make a copper weathervane etched with this image, but the project proved overly complex; the drawings for it were finished, however, and became the source for two elaborate projects of 1999. One was *Gang of Girls and Pack of Wolves*, a series of glass paintings, and the other was *Red Caps*, in which six lithographs with pencil were mounted on plywood to stand upright on the floor (fig. 24). One of the images in *Red Caps* in turn became the source for the left panel of Smith's monumental lithograph *Companions* (2001; plate 125), which took two more years to complete. Smith had first used the image of a wolf in 1996, in her *Landscape* installation in Boston. That wolf stares out at the viewer; in *Companions* the wolf stands in profile and faces the little girl. Smith has depicted the two not as adversaries

but as equals, a relationship confirmed by the work's title. *Companions* went through a long evolution of proofs, as Smith struggled with the color and other elements to convey the subtle connection between the two characters. Integrating the brown and yellow inks of the wolf's body within the image of the girl, and giving the two figures the



23. Kiki Smith. *Sainte Geneviève*. (1999). Etching on multiple sheets of handmade Nepalese paper, sheet (overall): 6' 2 1/8" x 51 1/2" (188.3 x 130.8 cm). Printer: Columbia University, New York. Unique. Collection of Susanne Preissler and Independent Media, Inc.

24. Kiki Smith. *Red Caps*. 1999. Lithograph with pencil additions on mold-made T. H. Saunders paper mounted on plywood, six units (four shown), 70" x 6' 6" x 55 3/8" (177.8 x 198.1 x 140.5 cm). Printer and fabricator: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Unique



same eye color, helped to present them as allies and to unify this imposing print compositionally. The color again reflects Smith's Victorian interests: "That was the closest I came to making nineteenth-century large-scale book illustrations. . . . I grew up with my father's children books, and all that kind of printing, how that color separates, is really interesting to me."⁹⁹

Smith's most recent print on the Little Red Riding Hood theme is *Born* (2002; plate 128), which evolved alongside *Companions* but offers a different, more violent reading of the story. Smith again fused the fairy tale with Saint Genevieve imagery, but added biblical overtones through cloaked figures reminiscent of the Virgin. In recent sculptures and works on paper she had shown Genevieve being born out of a wolf (fig. 23).¹⁰⁰ There is a parallel in some versions of the fairy tale, which have the girl and her grandmother eaten by the wolf but ultimately saved by a hunter, who cuts them out of the wolf's stomach. Smith has remarked, "If you take *Born* out of the context of the story and just look at the image, I thought it looked like the figures were being born out of the wolf. And then I thought of works like Botticelli's *Venus on the shell*—the same image of a vertical and a horizontal, like the *Virgin Mary on the moon*."¹⁰¹ In *Born*, then, the vertical figures of grandmother and girl rise from the

horizontal body of the wolf. Unlike the unthreatening wolf of *Companions*, this one has bared teeth and a bloodied mouth. Intense reds—in the women's cloaks, in the blood from the wolf's innards—reinforce the violence of the scene. The faces of both child and grandmother are self-portraits—as a model for the little girl, Smith used a drawing someone had made of her when she was a child. The work is reminiscent of old master paintings in composition and figure type, but is executed in the style of nineteenth-century illustration.

While Smith was working on these elaborate projects she produced several smaller prints on the Little Red Riding Hood theme. Her work in photography had led her to the Iris print, a computer technique often used to manipulate photographic imagery. Since Smith first tried the medium, in 1997, she has made over thirty Iris prints, working mainly with Pace Editions.¹⁰² In 1999 she completed a double portrait of herself, first as a dour adult, with fur penciled over her face, then as a child draped in a red blanket (plate 129). This poignant amalgam highlights the conflicting urges—wolf and child, predator and prey—that reside in each individual. Two years later, in the lithograph with pencil *Red Cap*, she focused on the innocence in the theme, making a beautiful and ethereal image of the child's face under a lacy white cap (plate 126). Smith's interest in this cap relates to her attraction to doilies and handkerchiefs; before making the work she had bought a collection of nineteenth-century white caps, one of which served as the model for the print. Caps again play a role in *Companion* (2000; plate 127), an accordion-folded book Smith completed at the LeRoy Neiman Center, which has a processional quality recalling Smith's glass paintings on the theme—and in a gesture typical of her inventiveness with books, she tucked a red paper cap inside a slit in the book's last fold. Depending on one's interpretation, this little cap can be seen as a printed gift—Smith has made many such—or as a memento mori for a lost innocence.

Two recent portfolios reveal Smith's continued interest in fairy tales and her unending curiosity about the expressive potential of a new medium. *Spinster Series I–VIII* (2002; plates 133 and 134) is a suite of eight Iris prints for which she scanned pencil

drawings into a computer, manipulated them graphically, then reversed them, producing images in a luscious and spooky white on black. Collaborating with Jean-Yves Noblet and André Ribuoli at Pamplemousse Press, she achieved a density and richness of tone and texture uncommon in Iris prints by running each example through the printer twice. The images, of a little girl with a spinning wheel, relate to the story of Sleeping Beauty, who pricks her finger on a spindle and, bewitched, falls asleep for 100 years. As a traditionally female craft, one that Smith herself has practiced, spinning also reflects her interest in motifs such as doilies and handkerchiefs.

Out of the Woods (2002; plates 130–32) is a portfolio of five photogravures in which Smith depicts herself as a witch: “I have always thought of myself as the crone.”¹⁰³ To create this series Smith dressed in a witch’s costume and danced an awkward cinematic ballet of sudden dramatic poses, each illustrating one of the five senses, as ULAE printer Brian Berry took photographs.¹⁰⁴ “One of my great ambitions in life,” Smith has said, “is to remake Lillian Gish’s *The Wind*. It’s one of my favorite things. So this portfolio was about a woman lost in the forest—a lost witch.”¹⁰⁵ The photographs were scanned into a computer where Smith distorted them—enlarging heads, reducing hands—to enhance the horror-film mood.¹⁰⁶ Below each image is a decorative letterpress text, written by the artist, about one of the senses: “On still moonlight a witch alone haunts the dark. She’s been touched.” This and the velvety photogravure combine to create one of Smith’s most evocative demonstrations—in concept, medium, and expressive effect—of her ongoing fascination with both Victorian art and printed ephemera.

A recent series of etchings that Smith made at Harlan & Weaver alludes directly, through its illustrational style and printed captions, to the nineteenth-century American printmaking firm of Currier & Ives (plates 136 and 137). More blatantly than before, these ambiguous scenes between women and animals reveal the sexual undertones of the Little Red Riding Hood story. As she often has in the past, Smith removes any narrative context by placing the figures in the center of a blank background, leaving the viewer to fill in the gaps. The works seem to be images of

violence, but their titles—*Rapture*, *In a Field*—belie any sense of attack and suggest sexual interpretations and a sense of the woman’s complicity. The contrasts and ambivalences underlying Smith’s complex works based on fairy tales blend a remarkable sense of wonder and innocence with a telling knowledge, as if childhood were being not witnessed but remembered and seen through the prism of experience.

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From editioned giveaways to unique screenprints to collaged assemblages of lithographs, Kiki Smith has expanded the scope of printed art. Her involvement with printmaking has grown steadily over the past twenty years; now the author of an extensive body of work made at numerous workshops in diverse techniques and formats, she is among the most prolific and most committed artists using the medium, and has already achieved a place among the crucial voices of the modern period. But Smith is still young—not yet fifty years old—and her most recent printed works, such as *The Blue Feet* (plate 86), reveal an artist still stretching herself formally and conceptually. A new workshop—Carpe Diem Press in Oaxaca, Mexico—and her new “experiences with printmaking” there nurtured this modestly scaled yet utterly moving work. Earlier devices reemerge—unfolding again, words again, blue again—but are flawlessly fused in an expression of spiritual longing. *The Blue Feet* integrates Smith’s imagery of fragmented body parts and astral phenomena. Her passion for etching continues. A woman’s voice dominates: in the poetry of a reclusive scholarly nun, and in the choice of a woman’s feet (Alexandra Brown, the wife of Carpe Diem publisher James Brown, served as the model). And the tension prevails: where are these feet dangling from? To whom do they belong—a rising spirit, a hanging corpse? The confrontation of the beautiful and the scary that has characterized Smith’s most powerful work is seamlessly embodied in *The Blue Feet*. This consummately resolved work was only recently finished; it is exciting to ponder the beauty still to come.

Notes

1. Kiki Smith, in Mark Lambert, Kerstin Mey, and Smith, "Experience: Kiki Smith—Artist Talk," in Mey, ed., *Sculpsit: Contemporary Artists on Sculpture and Beyond* (Manchester: at the University Press, in association with Transcript, School of Fine Art, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, a Faculty of the University of Dundee, 1999), p. 95.
2. Smith, interview with the author, December 16, 2002.
3. Ibid.
4. Smith, quoted in Michael Kimmelman, *Portraits: Talking with Artists at the Met, the Modern, the Louvre and Elsewhere* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 79.
5. Smith, quoted in Chuck Close, interview with Kiki Smith, *Bomb*, Fall 1994, p. 42.
6. Smith, interview with the author, December 16, 2002.
7. Smith has in her collection the book Alla Sytova, ed., *The Lubok: Russian Folk Pictures 17th to 19th Century*, trans. Alex Miller (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1984).
8. Smith, interview with the author, December 16, 2002.
9. The A. More Store locations were, in 1980, 593 Broome Street, New York; in 1981, the alternative space White Columns, New York; in 1982, the Fashion Moda store at Documenta 7, Kassel, West Germany, the Art Direct Christmas Shop at the New York artist's-book organization Printed Matter, and the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York; and in 1983, Artists Space (a benefit for this New York alternative space), the Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, and the Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia.
10. The loft belonged to KK Kean and was upstairs from artists Mimi Gross and Red Grooms. Jane Dickson's boyfriend, Peter Hutton, knew Grooms. Dickson, conversation with the author, December 17, 2002.
11. Smith credits her friend Sam Rappaport with the design of the wooden radios. In the late 1970s she and Rappaport worked together teaching puppet theater to after-school groups through a CETA program.
12. Many of Smith's unique works of the period, such as those in which letters are stenciled on canvas to spell out "cancer" (1983), are screen-printed, painted, or embroidered on fabric.
13. Maggie Smith ran Tin Pan Alley primarily to provide respite for women in the Times Square sex trade. She eventually began to hold exhibitions, poetry readings, and musical performances, mostly with a political bent, at the bar. Smith, the photographer Nan Goldin, and many others had small exhibitions there.
14. Smith, interview with the author, December 17, 2002. See also Deborah Wye, *Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988), p. 27.
15. Smith, interview with the author, December 17, 2002.
16. Smith, quoted in David Frankel, "In Her Own Words: Interview with David Frankel," in Helaine Posner, *Kiki Smith* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little Brown and Company/Bulfinch Press, 1998), p. 38.
17. Smith, "Kiki Smith," *Aperture* no. 137 (Fall 1994): 34. Artist's statement.
18. Another image based on a photograph of Smith appears between the kidneys and spleen in the third panel, where her hands are shown pulling nits out of her niece Antonia's hair.
19. Smith, interview with the author, December 17, 2002.
20. Smith, quoted in Lawrence Rinder, *Matrix 142: Kiki Smith*, exh. brochure (Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California, 1991), n.p.
21. Smith's friend Brigitte Engler assisted her in the printing of *Possession Is Nine-Tenths of the Law*.
22. Smith, quoted in Amei Wallach, "The Way of All Flesh," *Newsday*, December 16, 1990, Part II, p. 19.
23. Smith, quoted in Frankel, "In Her Own Words," pp. 56–57.
24. Between 1986 and 1990, Smith completed five versions of this sculpture. For the second one she used mirrored glass for the jars; for the next three versions, two of which have the names of the fluids in German, Smith used old mirrored glass, which tarnishes with time. In addition to these five, she also completed a similar piece using smaller jars.
25. Joe Fawbush, Smith's dealer, was a native of Texas and knew the director of the San Antonio Art Institute, where *Black Flag* was made. Smith was asked to make the print after an exhibition—her first in a museum—at the Dallas Museum of Art in 1989.
26. Smith used the same title on another printed giveaway, a screenprinted scarf that she handed out at the opening of her show at the Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, in 1984.
27. Smith, interview with the author, December 16, 2002.
28. John Lund, conversation with the author, January 8, 2003.
29. In the mid-1980s Smith was a "keyholder" at the Lower East Side Printshop, which offers a competitive program that allows an artist complete access to its facilities for \$60 per month. Smith often brought her friend

Engler to help her print there.

30. In 1988 Smith also based *Digestive System*, a work in ductile iron now in the collection of Tom Otterness, New York, on this earlier clay piece.

31. Craig Zammiello, interview with the author, November 27, 2002.

32. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge is married to the artist Richard Tuttle, who worked as a studio assistant for Smith's father, the sculptor Tony Smith, when Kiki was a child. By coincidence, Tuttle had the first exhibition at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Amsterdam and Kiki Smith the second. In a further coincidence, Rena Rosenwasser was already a collector of Smith's work.

33. Douglas Volle, former ULAE printer, in conversation with the author, December 28, 2002.

34. See Julie Mellby, *Splendid Pages: The Molly and Walter Bareiss Collection of Modern Illustrated Books*, exh. cat. (Toledo, Ohio: Toledo Museum of Art, and New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2003), pp. 102–9.

35. Catherine Best is Professor of Psychology at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. Her research focuses on infants' perceptual discoveries of the sound patterning of their native language. My thanks for this information to Klaus Ottmann, curator of an exhibition of Smith's work at Wesleyan in 1989, which occasioned her meeting Best.

36. Working with Logan Elm Press and Papermill, Smith made *Fountainhead* during one of her academic sojourns, this one at the Arts of the Book Laboratory, The Ohio State University, Columbus, in conjunction with a 1992 solo exhibition at the Williams College Museum, Williamstown, Mass., that traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State.

37. Smith took the text from a surviving fragment of Parmenides's poem "On Nature," which explores a man's journey from night to day and the metaphorical "Way of Truth." She based the drawings—which she made in the mid-1980s, then printed as woodcuts in *The Vitreous Body*—on illustrations in a book on the anatomy of the eye that an optometrist friend of hers, Eileen Gould, had lent to her. The book also contained illustrations from a ninth-century Islamic book on the eye, from which Smith derived a screenprinted scarf.

38. The models for *Tongue in Ear* were Smith's downstairs neighbor Wolfgang Staehle and her sister Beatrice.

39. Smith, on the Acoustiguide tape for *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective*, 1996, at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. In The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Sound recordings of Museum-Related Events, 96.1.

40. Smith, interview with the author, December 17, 2002.

41. Smith, quoted in Frankel, "In Her Own Words," p. 37.

42. Smith, interview with the author, December 17, 2002.

43. Smith cites David Aldera of New York Central Art Supply as an important influence on her work, crediting him with teaching her a tremendous amount about paper. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. In other untitled works using these images, cords stream down from the nipples to suggest leaking milk.

46. Smith, interview with the author, December 17, 2002.

47. Smith, quoted in Posner, *Kiki Smith*, p. 25.

48. See Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S. (Starification Object Series)*, from 1974. For an excellent discussion of feminist art and the imagery of female genitalia see Lisa Tickner, "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970," in *Art History* 1, no. 2 (June 1978): 236–51.

49. Smith has also referred to the sheela-na-gig in her sculpture—for example in *Untitled III (Upside Down Body with Beads)* (1993).

50. Smith, quoted in Brenda McParland, *Kiki Smith: Convergence*, exh. cat. (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1997), n.p. The woad reference is from an unpublished section of the interview transcript for Frankel, "In Her Own Words," kindly supplied to me by the author.

51. Smith sees a formal resemblance between the vagina and the eye of a peacock feather. In a work titled *Peacock* of 1994 she installed a papier-mâché figure in front of a wall printed with individual rubber stamps of vaginas that together suggested a peacock's plume.

52. Zammiello, interview with the author, November 23, 2002.

53. Smith, quoted in Kristen Brooke Schleifer, "Inside & Out: An Interview with Kiki Smith," *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 22, no. 3 (July–August 1991): 87.

54. The orientation of two individual sheets in *Banshee Pearls* has been mistakenly reproduced in prior publications, including the catalogue raisonné *Kiki Smith: Prints and Multiples, 1985–1993* (Boston: Barbara Krakow Gallery, 1994). The artist has confirmed that the orientation in plate 60 is correct.

55. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002.

56. Smith, quoted in Frankel, "In Her Own Words," p. 32.

57. Smith has made death masks of members of her family, including her grandmother and her sister.

58. The background of the lower section is an image of Smith's hip, a detail of a photograph taken by Zammiello and used in *Worm*.

59. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002.

60. Smith, interview with the author, December 17 and 19, 2002. Folding also appears in a number of works Smith has based on the idea of the blanket, including *Untitled (Blue Blanket)* (1994; plates 51 and 52), in paper, as well as literal blankets such as the wool-and-hair *Dowry Cloth* (1990).

61. The Chanterelle restaurant has been commissioning original art for its menus since it opened, in 1979. William Katz invites two artists a year to design its menus, which are usually printed at the New York printer American Menu. Smith's, however—which was used for one night only, a benefit for the dancer Bill T. Jones—was printed at ULAE.

62. Zammiello, interview with the author, November 21, 2002.

63. The periphery camera located by Goldston and Zammiello was developed in the mid-1940s by the Shell Oil Company to study wear on the interiors of pipes and pistons. The process never became commercially viable because of the time involved in processing the film. The British Museum has museological uses for the periphery camera, and in fact had developed an earlier form of the device in the late 1800s.

64. The photographs of Smith were taken by the artist Carl Fudge, a former assistant of hers.

65. I would like to thank Robert Rainwater, Curator, Spencer Collection, New York Public Library, for this information about girdle books.

66. In an unpublished section of Frankel's interview with Smith, she told him, "One thing in practically all of my work, and that I see in my father's work, is body and limp appendage. It's sort of the limp dick as model: energy buildup and then a powerlessness that comes out of it. So that's one form that has different meanings: the body and an umbilical cord, or my mother's head with hair coming down." Frankel, interview transcript.

67. One sheet is a collagraph printed directly from a handkerchief; the other sheet is a soft ground etching. The author would like to thank Ruth Lingen of Pace Editions Ink for explaining the creation of this work.

68. The sculpture *Getting the Bird Out*, from 1992, is considered Smith's first work on this theme.

69. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002.

70. Smith photographed many winter scenes in preparation for her 1998 exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, in which she devoted one gallery to the color white and included images of arctic and albino animals.

71. The photogravure is printed in a range of colors, from green to brown, that were applied to the plate through stencils *à la poupée* before each print was pulled.

72. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002.

73. Smith, quoted in Kimmelman, *Portraits*, p. 74.

74. I would like to thank Jessie Shefrin, Joseph Scheer, Gerar Edizel, Xiaowen Chen, and Sharon McConnell at Alfred University for generously supplying the details of Smith's various residencies there and for sharing their experiences of working with her.

75. Tomas Vu-Daniel (currently the director of The LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies at Columbia University) had begun a visiting-artist program at the Massachusetts College of Art in 1994; Smith was the second artist he invited there. Vu-Daniel, interview with the author, August 1, 2002.

76. The other floor piece comprised sheets of printed blue paper on which Smith installed glass stars, eggs, small animals, salvers, and teacups.

77. The blankets are quilted and are backed with Eastern European fabrics printed with floral patterns. At the Mattress Factory the work contained seventy-five blankets; as she often does, Smith has shown the piece in various formats subsequently. A concurrent exhibition, *Invention/Intervention: Kiki Smith and the Museums*, ran at the Carnegie Museum of Art.

78. Smith, quoted in an interview with Alyson Baker and Madeleine Grynsztejn, in *Invention/Intervention: Kiki Smith and the Museums*, exh. brochure (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 1998).

79. Harlan & Weaver was recommended to Smith by master lithographer Maurice Sanchez, with whom she was working that year on the insert for *Kiki Smith's Dowry Book* (plate 66).

80. Smith, quoted by Carol Weaver, interview with the author, December 5, 2002.

81. Maggie Wright, interview with the author, December 5, 2002.

82. Smith, quoted in Baker and Grynsztejn, *Invention/Intervention*.

83. Smith, quoted in Frankel, "In Her Own Words," p. 41.

84. Smith is interested in Chinese tomb sculpture and Assyrian stone decorations, both of which feature imagery carved in low relief.

85. For *Immortal* (1998), the earliest work in the group, Smith used photographs she had taken of a stuffed monkey she had seen in the home of a curator for a natural history museum in Hannover, Germany. *Fawn* (2001), similarly, is based on a stuffed example, owned by the painter John Currin, that she borrowed and photographed. She later based a sculpture on this image. *Bird Skeleton* (2000) comes from her sketch of a skeleton she found on the street. *Ginzer* (2000) is an image of her beloved cat, traced on a copper plate shortly after his death. Smith began *Falcon* (2001) during a three-day etching workshop at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts,

that she ran with Weaver in 1999. She asked Associate Professor Nancy Campbell, who ran the print shop there, to find a stuffed falcon; since the bird Campbell located was set in a lifelike pose rather than laid out in the position that biologists, and Smith, prefer, Smith found a more suitable model at the nearby University of Massachusetts Amherst and spent an afternoon there sketching it.

86. It is interesting to compare this work to Smith's recent multiple of cloth flipdolls, *Owl and Pussycat* (plate 112).

87. Like her other early screenprints, *Lucy's Daughters* exists in various scales. The largest, measuring over eight by fourteen feet, is in the collection of The Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.

88. Smith, quoted in Robin Winters, "An Interview with Kiki Smith," *Kiki Smith* (The Hague: Sdu Publishers, 1990), p. 139.

89. Smith's prints of these years were primarily self-portraits—a genre, in turn, that she rarely addressed in sculpture, feeling that a sculptural self-portrait would appear narcissistic and would focus too much attention on her own body.

90. Priscilla Harris Dalrymple, *American Victorian Costume in Early Photographs* (New York: Dover, 1991).

91. *Wolf Girl* also relates to *Daughter*, a 1999 sculpture of a young girl with animallike facial hair—an imaginary offspring of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf.

92. Smith originally planned a musical component for the series in which her mother, Jane, an actress and opera singer, was to sing "Somewhere over the Rainbow," from *The Wizard of Oz*. For logistical reasons this plan was dropped, but when Smith installed the series in an exhibition at PaceWildenstein, New York, in 1999, she added a work titled *Story* that includes two paper-cutout figures made from the Blue Prints series and a music box with a score written by Margaret De Wys that sounds as the viewer approaches.

93. Carol Weaver, interview with the author, December 5, 2002.

94. Lewis Carroll's illustrations appear in his manuscript of 1864, titled *Alice's Adventures under Ground*. When the book was published the following year it was retitled *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and illustrated by Sir John Tenniel. A facsimile edition of Carroll's manuscript was first published in 1886.

95. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002.

96. Ibid.

97. Zammiello, interview with the author, November 27, 2002.

98. On the evolution of "Little Red Riding Hood" see Jack Zipes, ed., *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

99. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002.

100. See, e.g., the bronze sculpture *Rapture* (2002).

101. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002. There are many historical images of the Virgin standing on a crescent moon, inspired by Revelation 12:1: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet."

102. Smith's first Iris prints were printed by David Adamson Editions, Washington, D.C. She later worked with Jon Cone, of Cone Editions Press in East Topsham, Vermont, and works currently with Jean-Yves Noblet at Pamplemousse Press.

103. Smith, quoted in Posner and Smith, *Kiki Smith: Telling Tales*, exh. cat. (New York: International Center of Photography, 2001), p. 19.

104. A video featuring "pixelated" versions of these photographs was shown at the International Center of Photography, New York, in 2001.

105. Smith, interview with the author, December 19, 2002. *The Wind*, directed by Victor Sjöström in 1928, stars Lillian Gish as a woman from the East Coast who moves to the harsh environment of East Texas.

106. Also in 2002 Smith produced several sculptures of Sirens to which she gave enlarged heads. These works were inspired by the sculptures Paul Gauguin made in Tahiti.

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Dalrymple, Priscilla Harris. *American Victorian Costume in Early Photographs*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.

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