

Alexis Smith

Rapido

July 18, 2026

François Ghebaly is honored to present *Rapido*, an exhibition of historic works by artist Alexis Smith. Featuring an installation and works on paper dating from the 1970s, it brings together a group of rarely exhibited works from a formative period in the artist's career.

The exhibition is anchored by *Rapido*, Smith's installation in which a model train travels continuously around the perimeter of an otherwise empty gallery. Exhibited here for the first time since its original installation at the UC Santa Barbara Art Galleries in 1975, *Rapido* reorients one's sense of scale. The enclosed space of the gallery becomes a vast and barren landscape in which the viewer is an oversized interloper. Time and distance expand as the train makes its nonstop, lonely circuit around the gallery. While many of Smith's installations incorporate collages, wall paintings, texts, and architectural interventions, *Rapido* is comparatively reserved. Yet the spare, conceptual rigor of *Rapido*'s presentation is suffused with the artist's idiosyncratic humor, at once enigmatic and playful.

A second gallery focuses on a series of works on paper made between 1972 and 1974, among the earliest of Smith's career. Their presentation at François Ghebaly is the first time these works have been exhibited publicly. Produced during a formative period when Smith was part of Los Angeles's emerging Conceptual art scene, this series points toward many of the concerns that would come to define her practice: narrative, popular culture, literary appropriation, chance associations, and the construction of meaning through sequence. These works were originally presented in highly choreographed, one-on-one encounters with visitors to her studio. Smith would set the sheets out on a felt topped table, stacked and presented for individuals to move through at their own pace. As she later recalled, these early works functioned as "one of a kind books" whose primary subject was the experience of reading itself. Meaning emerges through an unfolding of found images, fragments of language, and unexpected juxtapositions; much like the view from a train winding through the country.

Alexis Smith (Los Angeles, 1949–2024) is known for her meticulously crafted mixed media collages and large-scale installations. With her signature sense of humor, Smith turns a keen eye to literature, film, and pop culture to scrutinize the myth of the American Dream. Themes of self invention and reinvention are central to many of these narratives, whether they concern questions of identity and the roles of women in U.S. society or critiques of the pretenses of wealth and class. Situated alongside movements in Conceptual and Pop art and shaped by the feminist movements of the 1970s, Smith's extensive body of collage work provokes critical reflection on contemporary American culture.

Since the early 1970s, Smith has been a central figure in the Los Angeles art scene and an important presence in the development of conceptual art. She exhibited extensively throughout her career, which included three major museum retrospectives: the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1992); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1992); and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2022). Smith also realized several major public art commissions, including *Snake Path* (1992), part of The Stuart Collection at UC San Diego, and *Taste* (1997) at The Getty Center.

Smith's work is included in the collections of major museums throughout the United States, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Walker Art Center; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Hammer Museum.