

## ARTILLERY

### PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

ZieherSmith Gallery

by Arthur Ivan Bravo - March 7, 2017



Paul Anthony Smith's third solo exhibition at ZieherSmith represents an ultimately fruitful distillation, apparently in both the methods of his practice, and subsequently in the visual nature of the roughly dozen works that make it up. "Procession," as Smith's latest collection of works is titled, features the practices and mediums, visuals and themes that have characterized his art; however, in a welcome provocative development, it also finds him honing aspects of his practice.

Smith has long mined the Jamaica of his childhood and family—alongside his identity as an American and immigrant—and of his imagination, for inspiration in his paintings, prints and other multimedia works. Likewise, he has more often than not distorted and obscured what he has chosen to depict, and then layered over, overlapped or applied upon these already rich images from a limited set of patterns, themselves evocative of either scarification and the Kuba stylings of the African Congo, or physical boundaries such as cinder brick walls. These patterns have been created mostly through Smith's trademark method of "picotage," inspired by an 18th-century French practice associated with textile arts, in which he utilizes a ceramic tool to laboriously pick away at and from the surface layer of his photographic prints. The resulting effects can mean different things

to different people: decorative, damaged, shimmering; to me they looked like tiny dabs of white paint, meticulously and strategically applied and arranged.

For "Procession," Smith has focused on particular aspects of his practice even as he has transcended its boundaries. The locations and events the photographs which make up the 'body' of the exhibition were taken in and of—Vieques, Puerto Rico, and Brooklyn's 2016 West Indian Day Parade—suggest Smith's geographical and cultural interests expanding beyond Jamaica, towards the pan- or diasporic Afro-Caribbean world. In works citing Miles Davis and John Coltrane compositions, for example *Kind Of Blue I and II* (2016), which consist of blurred picturesque tropical snapshots picotaged with abstract brick wall patterns, nature now shares as much visual representation as the human subjects that have always interested Smith; other works, like *Giant Steps, So What, and Afternoon Brew* (all 2016), all of which impose Caribbean carnival scenes onto those of tropical-esque nature, centering on female dancers, introduce a newfound enthusiasm for the kaleidoscopic. In all of the aforementioned works too, Smith is found to have further mastered and refined his picotage process, effecting a heightened juxtaposition between abstract and more figurative elements.



Alongside his continued employment of brick wall imagery, representative of boundaries, Smith has introduced that of chain-link fencing on works such as 'Manhood,' and in the 6-part 'Blurr' series, where images of scenes are obscured to unrecognizability, becoming compositions of color, glimpsed through a pattern spray-painted in the style of said fencing. Collectively, Smith's receptiveness to new locales—both literally and conceptually, and the maturation of his unique methods and skills, all herald an artist coming into his own, all while in the thick of developing his practice.