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Creators *VICE*



Images courtesy of ZieherSmith, NY

THIS ARTIST RECREATES MEMORIES WITH PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLAGE

LAURA HUTSON HUNTER - Jun 27 2017, 2:26pm

Paul Anthony Smith turns photographs into pointillist representations of social constructs.

By working with many metaphorical layers, artist Paul Anthony Smith turns simple photos into chill-wave diamond patterns on fever-dream seascapes, faces that look like [African cowrie shell masks](#), and [chain-link fences](#), [cinderblocks](#), and [door-bead curtains](#) made from multicolored plastic gemstones. His method is an idiosyncratic process he calls *picotage*, and it's something he developed in his childhood in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica.

"I grew up looking at family photos" Smith tells *Creators* from his studio in Williamsburg, "and later on used my ceramic tools on photos that constructed something new." He takes the same hand tool ceramicists use to cut shapes into clay and tears tiny, rhythmic spots into the surface of a photograph, lifting it just enough to obstruct the image without actually removing it. The result is a pointillist photograph that functions like collage, but instead of adding images, Smith's method subtracts from them.



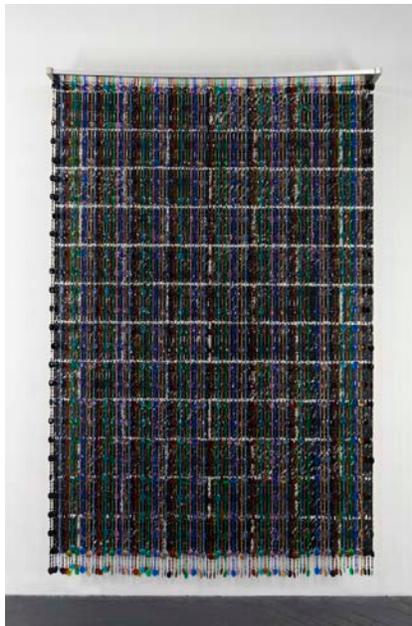
Nostrand, 2016 unique picotage on Inkjet print 48 x 71 in (121.9 x 180.3 cm)

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"The items in photographs acts as an engine, directing the work to its final stage," says Smith, who compares his art making process to a dance. "Often times I aim to disguise certain subjects—unlike what modern photography was constructed to do, revealing and capturing moments in time."

In the past, Smith's work has covered faces with mask-like patterns, references to African scarification and ritual magic. For a new series of works currently on view at Atlanta Contemporary, Smith has pared his conceptual palette down from masks to walls, a change that shows Smith's capacity for artistic evolution while staying true to his conceptual foundations. He moves from masks, which obstruct personal identities, to walls, which obstruct social landscapes.

"For years I've been interested in cinder blocks and walls," Smith says, "and how they create social structures. I've also been interested in the ways images are read, when memory becomes broken and fragmented." The works not only show photographs of walls, but also cinderblock patterns carved into the surface of photos of Smith's Jamaican homeland and photos of crowds that seem unremarkable, if it weren't for the time-consuming remnants of Smith's *picotage* layer.



Blurred Lines, (Beads2) Multi-Colored, 2017 Oil sticks on Canvas with Beads 96 x 66 x 8 in (243.8 x 167.6 x 20.3 cm)

Nostrand, an inkjet pigment print from 2016, captures a graffiti-covered plywood construction wall, a storefront gate, and an orange-and-white striped traffic barrier covered with Smith's cinderblock *picotage* pattern. The repetitive nature of his technique evokes the obsessive quality often seen in outsider art, and turns what would otherwise be an unremarkable image into a cohesive vision of how memory works, and how personal histories color reality.

"We all have time when we create walls to restrict others but don't necessarily need borders," Smith says. "Often times it's a fear. We're afraid of the unknown."

The Paul Anthony Smith exhibition *Walls Without Borders* is on view through July 30 at Atlanta Contemporary. To learn more about the artist, [click here](#).