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Michael E. Smith / Maxwell Graham Gallery

Art Gallery Shows to See in September

By Andrew Russeth



Michael E. Smith's installation at Maxwell Graham

Twelve windows in Maxwell Graham's capacious new fifth-floor space are currently obscured by well-used textiles — moving blankets, a bedsheet, down comforters and “our tablecloth,” a checklist says. They mute the sunlight entering the almost-empty room, which is otherwise illuminated by only a single bulb. The mood is sepulchral and uneasy, as if someone is trying to block out the world, yet it is all quietly beautiful, the colors and designs of these domestic items recalling canonical artworks by Agnes Martin or David Hammons.

Can you hear the minimal music emanating from two speakers? A T-shirt covers one, a circular red reflector atop it bouncing gently with the beat, moving like a small alien organism. There are a few tables present, and a white comforter has been carefully laid out atop one as if for an important ritual, religious or familial. That is “Time for dinner” (2026), one of the few pieces with a title.

This is the work of Michael E. Smith, an artist in Providence, R.I., who for two decades has assembled uncanny and discomfiting sculptures from humble and even abject materials that can register as both cast off and personal. Early on, he tended to use such things because he “didn't have a ton of money,” he recently told *Art in America*.

Smith's ready-mades are likely to stick with you, but they are so unassuming that you first have to let them in, as you would a person. Fundamentally, they are invitations to believe.

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