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Cauleen Smith  
*The Wanda Coleman Songbook*

January 19-March 16, 2024  
52 Walker, New York



*The Wanda Coleman Songbook*, 2024 (still) © Cauleen Smith. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its tenth exhibition, *The Wanda Coleman Songbook*, which will feature the work of Los Angeles-based artist Cauleen Smith.

*The Wanda Coleman Songbook* is an immersive video installation that enlists scent, sight, and sound to explore the multidimensional depth of poems by Wanda Coleman (1946-2013). Coleman was widely considered the unofficial poet laureate of Los Angeles, and her work guided Smith's reacquaintance with the city after a sixteen-year absence. At the heart of *The Wanda Coleman Songbook* listening room, visitors are invited to drop a needle on the eponymously titled, limited-edition two-color vinyl 12-inch EP with commissioned contributions by Kelsey Lu, Shala Miller, moor mother and Aquiles Navarro, Meshell Ndegeocello, Jeff Parker and Ruby Parker, Alice Smith, and Jamila Woods and Standing on the Corner.

Also called the "LA Blueswoman," Coleman cultivated her fearless voice through the city's myriad cultural and political landscapes, as well as through initiatives like the Studio Watts Workshop and her experiences writing for television, editing, teaching, and performing. Invigorated by Coleman's intimacies with and revelations in the city, Smith familiarized herself deeply with the poet's oeuvre after returning to Los Angeles in 2017 and considered them alongside her own histories and feelings of rediscovery there. At 52 Walker, Smith not only creates a cinematic environment translating Coleman's lyrical and adventurous verse but also a contemporary soundscape that captures the longing, tenderness, fury, and grief of the writer's poetry and prose, which so often revealed the unruly and untamed aspects of the major West Coast metropolis.

Carpeted in rugs and furnished with comfortable couches, *The Wanda Coleman Songbook* switches on all senses. Smith transforms the gallery space to create an atmosphere akin to that of a live recording studio: friends and familiars hanging out and symbiotically absorbing energies while advancing their respective projects. The central hub of *The Wanda Coleman Songbook* is the record itself: Smith shared a selection of Coleman's poetry with the participating artists and invited them to interpret the writer's words. Spanning genres and experimentations, the commissioned songs on the EP reflect the collaborators' heterogenous approaches to Coleman's euphonious poems and ultimately cohere to present a narrative that is sensitive to the textures of her Los Angeles. Cloaked in a new film that Smith shot on location in fall of 2023, the walls of the gallery envelop visitors in panoramic moving images that capture the expected Los Angeles clichés—the Hollywood Hills, palm trees, Griffith Observatory—as well as a Black Los Angeles that is slowly disappearing into the cultural and geographical periphery.

A bespoke fragrance designed by agustine zegers greets gallery attendees and brings to mind a hike in Griffith Park, Los Angeles's largest public recreational area and the site of many impressionistic moments in Coleman's life. Parts of her poems are printed onto blotters so that visitors can extend the temporal experience of migrating scent beyond the gallery walls while activating olfactory memories of their own.

*Cauleen Smith: The Wanda Coleman Songbook* is curated by Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker. The artist extends a special thanks to Wanda Coleman's brother George Evans.

Cauleen Smith was born in 1967 in Riverside, California. She received her BA, in 1991, from San Francisco State University, and her MFA, in 1998, from the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2007, she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Madison, Maine.

Since the early 2000s, Smith has exhibited across the United States and internationally. In 2020 the Whitney Museum of American Art presented *Cauleen Smith: Mutualities*, which marked the artist's first solo exhibition in New York and was presented in conjunction with the installation *Cauleen Smith: Signals from Here* on the High Line. In 2018, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, organized the traveling exhibition *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It*, which traveled to the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, and the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, in 2019, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in 2021. She has also been included in the Whitney Biennial (2017) and Yorkshire Sculpture International (2019).

Other institutions that have hosted solo exhibitions of Smith's work include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2012); Art Institute of Chicago (2017; 2018); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams (2019; traveled to Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2021); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2020, two-person exhibition); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2021); and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas (2021).

Smith's 1998 feature film *Drylongso* was restored in 2023 by Janus Films and re-released to much critical acclaim. The film was originally presented at the 1998 Hamptons International Film Festival, East Hampton, New York, and was also featured, in 1999, at the Sundance Film Festival, Park City, Utah; South by Southwest Film Festival, Austin, Texas (runner-up, best narrative film); Los Angeles Pan-African Film Festival (best feature film); and Urbanworld Film Festival, New York (best feature film). Other films by the artist have been featured in festivals internationally, including recently the BFI London Film Festival (2019); International Film Festival Rotterdam, the Netherlands, (2019); Media City Film Festival, Windsor, Canada (2021); Ann Arbor Film Festival, Michigan (2022); and the New York Film Festival (2022). Her films have also been screened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2001); Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2015); Art Institute of Chicago (2018); MoMA PS1, New York (2019); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2019; 2020); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2020); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2021; 2022); Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles (2023); and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2023).

The artist is the recipient of awards and fellowships such as the 3Arts Award (2013), Herb Alpert Award in the Arts (2016), Ellsworth Kelly Award (2016), Joyce Alexander Wein Prize (2020), Guggenheim Fellowship (2021), and the Heinz Award for the Arts (2022), among many others.

Smith's work is held in numerous prominent collections worldwide including the Art Institute of Chicago; Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, Claremont, California; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas; Frye Art Museum, Seattle; Kadist Foundation, San Francisco and Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; San Diego Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago; Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

Smith is represented by Morán Morán, Los Angeles, and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago. The artist currently lives and works in Los Angeles.