



David Smith's Fascination with White Featured at Storm King Art Center

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by Susan Hodara

NEW WINDSOR, NY—For its 2017 season, [Storm King Art Center](#), the verdant 500-acre sculpture park in the Hudson Valley, has installed six large sculptures atop Museum Hill. A medley of welded steel geometric forms, all were constructed by the American sculptor, painter and photographer [David Smith](#) (1906-1965). All were created in 1962 and 1963, several years before Smith's untimely death in an automobile accident. And all are painted white.

The grouping is the heart of "David Smith: The White Sculptures," an indoor-outdoor exhibition of more than 70 sculptures, photographs, paintings and prints that examines Smith's fascination with and use of the color white throughout his career. On the lawn outside Storm King's Museum Building, the six sculptures converse with the park's rolling hills and woodlands: a vertical rectangle mimics the trunk of a nearby tree, a flat white circle with a hole in its center both obstructs and frames the scenery beyond. As the light changes, so do the sculptures, their surfaces shifting from blindingly bright to a mix of shadowy grays.



Sculptures by David Smith in "David Smith: The White Sculptures" at Storm King. All works courtesy The Estate of David Smith, New York; courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Art © The Estate of David Smith/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photo: Jerry I. Thompson.

The pieces, reunited from Smith's estate and private collectors, have been arranged to echo their original siting alongside dozens of Smith's other sculptures spread across the grounds at his Bolton Landing home and studio in the Adirondacks. Three —*Primo Piano I*, *Primo Piano II* and *Primo Piano III*—are being exhibited together for the first time. Noting the similarities between the Adirondacks and the Hudson Highlands around Storm King, David R. Collens, the center's director and chief curator, said, "We tried to be sympathetic to the way Smith placed his sculptures in the fields at Bolton Landing."



“Primo Piano II” by David Smith, 1962. Painted steel, stainless steel, and bronze. 85 x 158 x 15 inches; “Primo Piano III” by David Smith, 1962. Painted steel. 124 x 146 x 19 inches. All works courtesy The Estate of David Smith, New York; courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Art © The Estate of David Smith/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photo: Jerry I. Thompson.

Whether Smith intended these works to remain white has been the subject of debate, but Nora Lawrence, Storm King’s curator, pointed out that they stayed white for the few years that Smith lived with them until his death. “Clearly he found them interesting,” she said. In that sense, she added, “This is also an exhibition about the artist’s intention.”

There are more sculptures, outdoors on an adjacent lawn and inside the Museum Building. Thirteen of these are part of Storm King’s collection, purchased from Smith’s estate 50 years ago. That acquisition, made shortly after Storm King’s opening, was pivotal in shaping the center’s mission to display sculpture in the natural environment, incorporating the works into the landscape and the landscape into the works.

In addition to sculpture, the galleries inside the museum are filled with Smith’s explorations in other media. Smith turned to photography to capture the dramatic impact of natural light on his sculptures, including the white ones. A collection of black-and-white photographs in the galleries reveals his insistent attention to the effects of weather, time of day and camera angle. In some, white appears black; in others, shadows add bold layers of patterns and shapes.

“It’s what fascinated him,” Collens said of Smith’s awareness of light. “It’s what drove his aesthetic for placing sculptures in the landscape.”

One gallery contains several of Smith’s “Sprays,” a body of work made by arranging found objects on paper or unstretched primed canvas, spray-painting black enamel onto the surface and then removing the objects. The results are white stencil-like negative spaces outlined by fuzzy areas of black.

Another gallery presents three *Untitled (Nude)* paintings from 1964, also made on unstretched primed canvas. For this series, Smith used an ear syringe to apply black paint in drippy gestural lines that hint at the contours of a woman’s body, but verge into black-and-white abstraction.

The earliest works in the show date from 1932, when Smith was living in the Virgin Islands. Two, *Untitled (Standing Figure)* and *Untitled (Figure)*, are made from small pieces of white coral suspended with wire to conjure the human torso, marking Smith’s first foray into sculpture.



“Untitled (Standing Figure)” by David Smith, 1932. Coral, steel wire, and bronze rod, on artist’s cast-cement base, 5 11/16 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches. © Photo by

David Heald; Courtesy The Estate of David Smith and Hauser & Wirth; © 2017 The Estate of David Smith, licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Elsewhere in the park, [Heather Hart's](#) *The Oracle of Lacuna* is a life-size shingled rooftop, complete with chimney and dormer windows, that seems to have emerged from the earth or fallen from the sky. The installation, in the North Woods, is the fifth iteration of Storm King's "Outlooks" exhibition series, which invites one artist each year to create a temporary, site-specific work responding to the park's setting and history. The rooftop is a recurring image in Hart's work, a space, she said, that lies between earth and sky, shelter and danger, private and public.



"Oracle of Lacuna" by Heather Hart, 2017. Wood, shingles, building materials, iPad, speakers. Courtesy the artist © Heather Hart. Photo by Jerry L. Thompson.

In-between spaces inspire Hart, whose practice involves participatory sculpture, drawing and printmaking. On a recent afternoon at Storm King, she explained that *lacuna* "means the space between words." She spoke of her attraction to oral histories and her interest in "the slippage between what I say and what someone hears," she said, "the liminal space between the two."

Oral histories play a role in *The Oracle of Lacuna*. Visitors who climb onto the roof and enter the attic space below it can listen to selections from an archive of recordings of round-table discussions Hart began organizing earlier this year. For these discussions, she gathered local scholars, artists and residents to share their personal stories about the evolution of the region. Topics include the African diaspora, the displacement of Native American communities and the founding of Storm King. The installation is the first "Outlooks" project to be activated by visitors, performances and other events.

One of the reasons Hart chose the location of her installation is the curious sculpture that sits opposite it. The piece, a primitive stone head, was part of a group of replicas of an Easter Island head originally produced for a fundraiser and eventually placed at Storm King by co-founder H. Peter Stern. Next to Hart's installation, it reinforces her focus on the blurry distinctions between authentic and fabricated, fact and fiction, and becomes a symbol of the endless vagaries of the truth.

BASIC FACTS: "David Smith: The White Sculptures" is on view through November 12, 2017 and "Outlooks: Heather Hart" is on view through November 26, 2017 at Storm King Art Center, 1 Museum Road, New Windsor, NY 12553. See the works under a full moon June 9, 2017 at 8:30 p.m., and July 7, 2017 at 9 p.m. The Summer Fridays Music series features hip-hop artist Decora

performing at *The Oracle of Lacuna*, June 30, 2017, from 6 to 8 p.m. Storm King tours are offered daily at 1 p.m. More at www.stormking.org.

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