

# ARTFORUM

## Barbara T. Smith

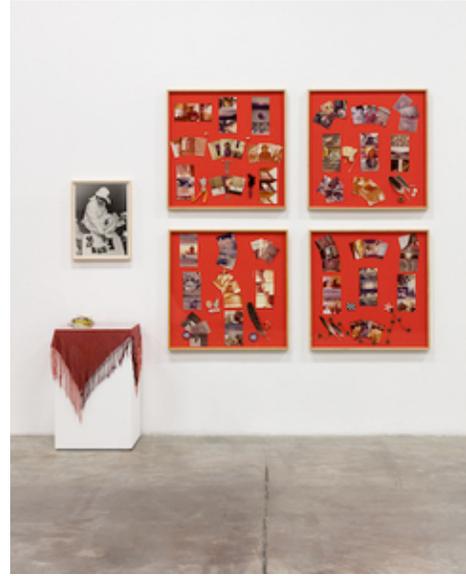
THE BOX

805 Traction Avenue

September 17–October 29

Outfitted in a white dress and matching head wrap, Barbara T. Smith sits on the ground. She places a photograph ceremoniously on a piece of fabric, next to eight others. This is the tarot by way of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*; photographs of plants, architectural spaces, friends, students, colleagues, and the artist's own body form the major and minor arcana of *The Cloistered Study*, 1976, an arrangement based on Smith's performance at the experimental Johnston College of the University of Redlands, where she taught at the time. An enlarged black-and-white photograph documenting Smith's performance is installed above a pedestal draped with fabric and photographs that were used in the performance, adjacent to a grid of four shallow shadow boxes, each containing a baroque composition of photographs, feathers, shells, and sundry other items from the natural world. *The Cloistered Study* is both activity and ideogram—a picture of a practice, and it is emblematic of the focus on language and meaning that runs through Smith's decades-long, complicated oeuvre.

Two years ago, the Getty Research Institute acquired the artist's archive of correspondence, photographs, project files, and artists' books. Although none of the books from that collection are displayed here, Smith's books are, in many ways, at the heart of this exhibition and of her practice in general. Ever shifting in format, they document epic road trips, banal business contacts, and an ongoing (perhaps spiritual) relationship to materiality. Many of the books in the Getty's archive are restricted due to their fragility, and the ones shown here are sealed up in vitrines. But no matter: The vibrancy of such a book as *Reminder* (1967) spills out from its edges, exceeding what we think we know about this important artist.



Barbara T. Smith, *The Cloistered Study*, 1976, color photographs, black-and-white photographs, and found objects on felt and chipboard, plastic, embroidery, dimensions variable.

— *Andy Campbell*