

HYPERALLERGIC

EVENTS

When Barbara T. Smith Traveled the World, Casting Herself as Modern-Day Odysseus

A documentary on “The 21st Century Odyssey” offers an in-depth look at this pioneering work of technologically aided human connection.



Matt Stromberg May 15, 2019



Barbara T. Smith, “The 21st Century Odyssey” (1991-93), installation detail (image courtesy the artist and the Box, LA, photo by Fredrik Nilsen Studio.)

On September 26, 1991, a group of eight scientists sealed themselves inside a research facility outside of Tucson, Arizona to begin a two-year experiment. Dubbed “Biosphere 2” — Biosphere 1 being the Earth itself — the closed structure contained several different ecosystems, including a desert, rainforest, and coral reef, in which the researchers could investigate the possibility of maintaining human life in outer space.

One of those locked inside was Dr. Roy Walford, whose partner at the time was Los Angeles-based artist Barbara T. Smith. While Walford was physically isolated from the world, Smith decided to explore it, embarking on a two-year creative journey that would take her around the globe, from India and Nepal to Germany and Norway, Hawaii and Seattle. She imagined



herself a modern-day female version of Homer’s legendary traveller Odysseus, and considered every element of her trip as part of a durational performance, “The 21st Century Odyssey.” Along her route, she would use a videophone and nascent internet technology to connect with Walford in the facility, as well as with collaborators Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz of the Electronic Café International, an early cyber cafe located at 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, which archived these communications.



Barbara T. Smith, “The 21st Century Odyssey” (2019), installation view (image courtesy the artist and the Box, LA, photo by Fredrik Nilsen Studio.)

For its fifth exhibition with Smith, the Box is exhibiting all manner of material associated with the project, including video documentation, performance ephemera, and offerings and gifts given to her by friends along the way. This Saturday, they’ll be screening a feature-length documentary on “The 21st Century Odyssey,” produced by Smith and Kate Johnson of EZTV, offering an in-depth look at this pioneering work of technologically aided human connection.

When: Saturday, May 18, 4pm

Where: The Box (805 Traction Ave., Downtown, Los Angeles)

More info at [the Box](http://thebox.com).

