

ARTFORUM

Joshua Smith

ESSEX FLOWERS

365 Grand Street

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Seven abstract monochrome canvases are displayed between unframed black-and-white photographs in Joshua Smith's solo exhibition "The Blue Album," some of which document a day trip to the beach that the artist took with two friends. *Liz at the Beach*, 2014, depicts one of his companions sunbathing along a calm ocean shore as she scrutinizes the screen of an iPhone. A large untitled arched canvas painted bubblegum-pink is positioned to the image's right—its vertical orientation conjures a malformed Roman letter. The intimate proximity of Smith's camera to his leisurely subject adds a tender air against the stark, sharply executed color field paintings that recall the abstractions of Ellsworth Kelly. Other untitled acrylic works assume forms that range from a crooked greater-than sign to a serif-like cane in maroon and jet-black, respectively. Upstairs, mounted within the flower shop above this artist-run basement gallery, is a cluster encompassing napkin drawings, old party photos, scenic snapshots, and monochrome studies with canvas shreds or Polaroid film exposure.



View of "The Blue Album, 2014.

The insertion of tender, youthful, or domestic scenes amidst the historically onerous tradition of color-field painting suggests the artist holds minimalism as a space not solely for material rigor, but also for humor and affection. Only two untitled canvases adopt a customary rectangular form and, mounted beside each other, they evoke the scale of Felix Gonzalez Torres's 1988 monochrome quadryptic *Forbidden Colors*. With that work, the late artist sought to challenge the "divine dogma of modernism" and stressed the response to his abstractions would be factored by political contexts and biases. Smith might agree here, adding nostalgia and intimacy to the mix.

— Nicolas Linnert

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