

**The Contemporary Austin and The FLAG Art Foundation  
Announce *Clockwork*, a Solo Exhibition of Sable Elyse Smith  
March 6 - August 2, 2026**

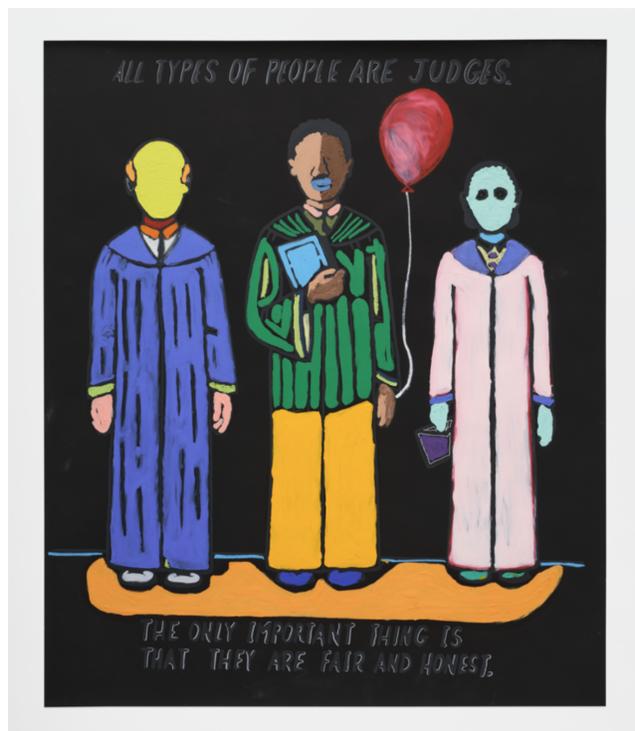
AUSTIN, TX (November 19, 2025) – The Contemporary Austin announces *Clockwork*, a solo exhibition by the 2026 recipient of the Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize, Sable Elyse Smith, on view from March 6 through August 2, 2026. *Clockwork* marks Smith's most robust institutional exhibition to date and her first solo show in Texas. Following its debut in Austin, the exhibition will travel to The FLAG Art Foundation in New York in September 2026. The exhibition will be co-curated by Alex Klein, Head Curator & Director of Curatorial Affairs, and Julie Le, Assistant Curator, The Contemporary Austin, and the presentation at The FLAG Art Foundation, New York will be curated by Jonathan Rider, Director. Alongside the exhibition, Smith's first institutional monograph illustrating the themes in her work will be co-published by Dancing Foxes Press in early 2027.

First established in 2016, the Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize is a biennial award honoring an artist selected by a rotating, independent advisory committee of leading curators and art historians. Since expanding in 2018 to include The FLAG Art Foundation, the prize now comprises a \$200,000 award, a solo exhibition premiering at The Contemporary Austin and traveling to The FLAG Art Foundation in New York, an accompanying publication, and public programming. The prize honors artists of exceptional achievement with established exhibition records, those whom the committee believes merit wider recognition, and for whom the award can serve as a transformative opportunity.

Led by Alex Klein, the 2026 selection committee included Dan Byers, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown; Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, faculty-at-large, School of Visual Arts, New York City and former Director, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam;



Christine Y. Kim, Britton Family Curator-at-Large at Tate Modern, London; and Jonathan Rider who served as institutional advisor. Smith is the fifth artist to receive the award. Past recipients include Rodney McMillian (2018), Nicole Eisenman (2020), Tarek Atoui (2022), and Lubaina Himid (2024).



A New York-based interdisciplinary artist, Sable Elyse Smith (b. 1986, Los Angeles) employs sculpture, photography, and text to examine systems of language, power, and visibility that shape daily life. Her work has been presented at MoMA PS1, the New Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, among others. Most recently, in 2024, Smith unveiled a new theatrical and video installation opera as a part of The Museum of Modern Art's *Studio Sound* series, which highlights artists exploring sound and music. In 2022, she participated in both the Whitney Biennial and the 59th Venice Biennale. Smith has received awards from Creative Capital, the Fine Arts Work Center, the Queens Museum, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Rema Hort Mann Foundation, the Franklin Furnace Fund, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and Art Matters. She currently serves as Associate Professor of Visual Art at Columbia University.

*Clockwork* is the first solo museum show to consider Smith's robust practice from the last five years. The exhibition brings together key series across Smith's oeuvre, including sculpture, video, text, and images, with a commissioned neon alongside a new body of two-dimensional works and a never-before-seen video. Smith's conceptually-driven practice examines systems of power, tracing how they operate not only as infrastructure but as psychological and cultural conditions that are often hiding in plain sight. Through formal strategies such as seriality, disorientation, appropriation, and shifts in scale, Smith builds on legacies of postminimal sculpture and conceptual art to reveal how these narratives are constructed, internalized, and unrelenting.

The exhibition features a selection of career-defining works, including *A Clockwork* (2021), first presented in the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Smith's largest sculpture to date, a slow-moving kinetic sculpture in the form of a Ferris wheel constructed of prison waiting room furniture, that visualizes the entanglement of spectacle with the constant churn of the carceral state. Smith's ongoing neon works turn her enduring interest in language and text into luminous sculptural forms, drawing on the aesthetics of institutional and commercial design to explore language as a psychological terrain. Also on view is a curated selection from Smith's ongoing *Coloring Book* series, which recontextualizes pages from a found children's coloring book, highlighting the equal complicity of the justice and educational systems. The exhibition also features two videos made from a combination of found and shot footage that take cues from the trope

of the police chase popularized by reality television shows like *Cops*, which went on to shape decades of televised entertainment in the U.S. The presentation has been thoughtfully designed by the artist to bring together distinct, interconnected bodies of work that explore Smith's iterative sculptural vocabulary and have never before been placed in conversation together. The exhibition title, *Clockwork*, evokes the mechanical precision of the systems Smith interrogates—cyclical, seemingly inevitable, and often imperceptible—underscoring their quiet but persistent operations in everyday life.



“The Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize was established in 2016 to support artists whose work challenges us to see the world anew and to engage deeply with its complexities,” says **Suzanne Deal Booth**. “Sable Elyse Smith embodies this vision through her profound exploration of the prison-industrial complex and the systems that shape language, perception, and identity. Her work transforms lived experience into a powerful cultural critique, revealing the often invisible structures of power that shape our collective reality. I am honored to recognize her as the 2026 recipient of the Prize, and to celebrate art’s enduring capacity to inspire reflection, dialogue, and change.”

“For almost a decade, the Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize has enfranchised some of the most innovative artists of our time at crucial points in their careers,” says **Glenn Fuhrman**. “I could not be prouder of the

four, singular exhibitions The Contemporary and FLAG have made with Nicole Eisenman, Tarek Atoui, Lubaina Himid, and now Sable Elyse Smith.”

“I have long admired Sable Elyse Smith’s practice for her unique sculptural and visual vocabulary that mines the forms of material culture to reveal the systemic power structures that underwrite much of the American experience”, says **Alex Klein, Head Curator & Director of Curatorial Affairs at The Contemporary Austin**. “Through conceptual strategies of estrangement and appropriation she lays bare the layers of indoctrination and violence that undergird pedagogy, entertainment, religion, and law. Through Smith’s deft deployment of language and objects, the everyday becomes uncanny, allowing us to understand that the mechanisms of social control we often take for granted are in fact by design.”

“From its inception, Suzanne Deal Booth and Glenn Fuhrman believed this prize would be a remarkable opportunity to support artists, a sentiment at the very core of The Contemporary Austin’s and The FLAG Art Foundation’s missions,” says **Jonathan Rider, Director of The FLAG Art Foundation**. “That support is both a collaborative venture and a generous act—between patrons and between institutions—to combine resources and teams in effort to better champion artistic practice. The prize also represents an unparalleled opportunity for both artist and institution to push each other forward, together. It’s an honor to be involved in every facet of the Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize, and I cannot wait to see how Sable transforms our institutions in this iteration.”

Image Credits: Portrait of Sable Elyse Smith. Photograph by Tommy Kha.; Sable Elyse Smith, *A Clockwork*, 2021. Aluminum, steel, motor. 175 ½ x 165 x 98 inches. Installation view, *Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet As It's Kept*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2022. Image courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. Photograph by Charles Benton.; Sable Elyse Smith, *Coloring Book 130*, 2023. Screen printing ink, oil pastel, and oil stick on paper. 63 ¾ x 53 ½ x 2 ½ inches, framed. Image courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

## ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN

As Austin’s only museum solely focused on contemporary artists and their work, The Contemporary Austin presents exhibitions, educational programs, and events that spark conversations and fuel the city’s creative spirit. With artist-focused exhibitions and collaborations, the museum invites exploration at both its urban and natural settings. The Jones Center (700 Congress Avenue) is a historic building located just blocks away from the Texas State Capitol with two floors of exhibition space and the Moody Rooftop. Through the ongoing mural program and Jim Hodges’ *With Liberty and Justice For All (A Work in Progress)*, the building’s facade has been transformed into a highly visible public art experience in the heart of downtown.

Laguna Gloria (3809 West 35th Street) is a 14-acre lakeside campus that includes the historic Driscoll Villa, The Art School at The Contemporary, and the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, featuring a growing program of commissions, temporary projects, and a permanent collection of outdoor sculptures by artists Ai Weiwei, Terry Allen, Carol Bove, Sarah Crowner, Tom Friedman, Anya Gallaccio, Ryan Gander, Liam Gillick, Nancy Holt, Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler, Paul McCarthy, Wangechi Mutu, Clare Rojas, Tom Sachs, Monika Sosnowska, Jessica Stockholder, SUPERFLEX, Marianne Vitale, and Ursula von Rydyngsvard.

To learn more, visit [thecontemporaryaustin.org](https://thecontemporaryaustin.org) and follow @contemporaryatx.

**ABOUT THE FLAG ART FOUNDATION**

The FLAG Art Foundation is a non-collecting, nonprofit exhibition space that mounts solo, two-person, and thematic group exhibitions centering on emerging and established artists from around the globe. Organized by a diverse community of curators and thinkers within and beyond the art world, FLAG opened to the public in 2008 and has staged over 100 exhibitions celebrating the work of nearly 1,000 artists. Committed to providing education and resources for its surrounding community, and across New York City, all exhibitions and programs—including artist talks, artist-led workshops, and guided tours for school and museum groups—are free and open to the public.

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