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ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week



SABLE ELYSE SMITH

*Through Sept. 1. Recess | Assembly,
370 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn*

In her exhibition of new works at Recess | Assembly, Sable Elyse Smith addresses — sometimes obliquely, sometimes directly — what it was like for her to grow up with an incarcerated parent.

Most of the objects in her latest show, “and then the streetlights — like a warning bell,” employ familiar formats. “Landscape II” is a neon sign

Sable Elyse Smith’s “Landscape II” is reminiscent of Glenn Ligon’s and Bruce Nauman’s neon word sculptures. Recess

that reads “Planking or the lying down game,” which refers to the internet phenomenon of posting photos of yourself lying prone in an unusual spot (potentially as a form of civil disobedience) and is reminiscent of Glenn Ligon’s and Bruce Nauman’s neon word sculptures. Another work, “scapeG.O.A.T.,” is a light box with a banal photograph of an empty basketball court reminiscent of Jeff Wall’s light boxes.

Most effective are Ms. Smith’s zine-like artist’s book “Landscapes & Playgrounds” and painted wall text. The book includes reproductions of handwritten letters from her father, who is in prison in California, and a facsimile of a little yellow activity book for children, complete with text and pictures. The booklet has exercises like a maze that offers a primer for going through a metal detector (“to make sure everyone inside the court is safe”) and a connect-the-dots drawing for Judge Friendly’s black robes. “It takes a lot of people to make sure that everyone is treated fairly,” Judge Friendly explains.

Ms. Smith contributes writings that are more abstract and poetic. “We are a weird triangle of silence and smiles and pauses of stepping backward one foot after another after another until we’ve found the cold corner of a wall,” reads an untitled text painted in black on the white gallery wall. Ms. Smith’s work, which doesn’t feel fully developed here, resides somewhere between the potent platitudes of appropriated material and an attempt to distill her personal experience. Perhaps this exhibition can be viewed, then, more as a teaser for her show at the Queens Museum, which opens next month.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER