

# ARTFORUM

## Sable Elyse Smith



View of “or the song spilling out,” 2019.

A car burns red at night by a deserted sidewalk, then explodes. Sable Elyse Smith’s installation of this silently looping, shaky footage, *Untitled* (all works 2019), on a flatscreen suspended in the corner, suggests a courtroom monitor. Gallerygoers, ordinarily judging artworks, may in other circumstances find themselves serving as witnesses, legal workers, jury members, defendants, or prison visitors. The speech bubble of a large cartoon bird addresses viewers in a nearby silk-screen and oil-stick work on paper: “Thanks for visiting!”

On the floor, *Riot I* and *Pivot II* resemble playground equipment uselessly reconfigured. These stainless-steel asterisks, assembled from prison visitation-room seating, are painted 2K black and blue—colors evoking the US criminal justice system, its racist enforcement, and the heavy-duty finish of finance capitalism with which the culture industry is enmeshed. Smith’s “Coloring Book” series, for which she blew up and framed pages from a children’s book about the US justice system found while strolling through Harlem, here demands thinking about the rate of incarceration in England and Wales—the highest in Western Europe—and ensuing disenfranchisement.

Such a representational gap can perhaps only be rendered in the negative. *Coloring Book 36*’s diptych splits the globe, fracturing North and South America. Left and right panels cleave a group of six characters into two three-person families on each side of Earth—one child per frame flanked by two uniformed adults, faces scrawled out—and are connected by a message: “IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN / MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.” Smith rejects this liberal narrative of betterment, the gap between frames introducing an intangible break between the creative verb *make* and collaboration.