



CRITICS' PICKS

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New York

Sable Elyse Smith

RECESS | ASSEMBLY
370 Schermerhorn Street
June 23–September 1

A camera scans a dim, panoramic street scene, dogging but never catching the slight figure beyond the screen's edge. An oscillating, angular elbow marks slowed time, leading us through an obscure landscape in the video *How We Tell Stories to Children*, 2015—a looping, exaggerated excerpt of a longer piece of a chase that appears to be a game of tag but could be something far more sinister. In poetry filtered through works executed in glaring light boards and neon, Sable Elyse Smith proposes parallels between this playground activity and another kind of hunt with much higher stakes.

A paragraph scrawled in black paint on the gallery walls, *Untitled*, 2017, is followed by an ellipsis of three white pages laid out on the gray tile floor. While kneeling to look at the papers, your position is mirrored by the pictures of six men crouched across two sheets. Three faceless bodies are spanned by a black shape, a "weird triangle of silence and smiles and pauses," as Smith has written on the wall above. To their right, three other men pose in a casually synchronized row, an image taken directly from an album of Polaroids made by California inmates, which was sold for \$45,000 at the Paris Photo Los Angeles art fair. The commodification of these photos mines new ways to survey the friendships that happen against a backdrop of chain-link fences and family reunions celebrated in guarded rooms. Pairing these tableaux with a picture of an enclosed basketball court in *scapeG.O.A.T.*, 2017, Smith notes the material correspondences between this egalitarian urban arena and an oppressively supervised jail yard. In Smith's hands, youthful amusements blend fluidly into horrifying realities of subjugation, cruelty, and capriciousness.



Sable Elyse Smith, *How We Tell Stories to Children*, 2015, video, color, silent, 45 seconds.

— *Nicole Kaack*

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