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Sable Elyse Smith

For Freedoms – 50 State Initiative with 1708 Gallery

November 12, 2018 to February 3, 2019

Richmond, VA - 1708 Gallery, in partnership with For Freedoms – 50 State Initiative, presents a billboard by Sable Elyse Smith. As part of the expansive network of institutions that is For Freedoms, 1708's role is to amplify the social and political agency of contemporary art in the cultural landscape of Richmond. This multi-site project with Smith is part of an imperative that elaborates on Richmond's relevance in discourses between art and politics. Additional programming will be presented at 1708 and at the billboard location.



The billboard is located in the historic neighborhood of Jackson Ward, at the intersection of W. Jackson St. and Chamberlayne Avenue. This prominent location calls attention to the profound history of the resident community and neighborhood as well as the continued, catastrophic racial inequality, abuse, and erasure both locally and nationally. At the turn of the 20th century Jackson Ward was the most financially successful black neighborhood in the country. Smith's work stands directly in front of the home of W. W. Browne, the founder of the first ever chartered black owned and operated bank in the United States. The Savings Bank of the True Reformers was also originally located in Browne's home.

In response to similar systemic injustices that community leaders faced in Jackson Ward, roughly 80 years later the Black Panthers wrote the Ten-Point Program. The Ten-Point Program is a set of guidelines with the directive for the people of the Black Panther party to establish their own destiny, to strengthen community bonds, demand retribution, and advance a revolution for the needs of the black community. The 10th point states, "We Want Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice And Peace." This echoes a quote by Browne from 1881 calling for co-operation of black people and organizations, "[The Mutual Benefit plan] will also do much to bring happiness and plenty to our families; it will aid in bringing peace to the churches and communities." In Smith's work, the Black Panther's 10th point is re-asserted. Its statement engenders an evaluation of political relations and is also a testament to the strength in the collective "We". Through this project there is a reclamation occurring —the billboard itself a property—and it spans generations, geographic places, political and cultural institutions. The billboard and the in-gallery research present powerful

yet underrepresented histories and pronounces the necessity of civil society to act and demand for equality and rights.

In parallel to the 50 State Initiative's aims, 1708 recognizes the art-historical implications of commissioning an off-site project within the commercial advertising sector. This decision carries an inextricable political weight. Our stake in partnering with For Freedoms has as much to do with our history, as well as ushering in a program that facilitates the complex, and necessary, activity of discerning unresolved concordant artistic and political inquiries.

Sable Elyse Smith is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and educator based in New York & Richmond Virginia. Using video, sculpture, photography, and text, she points to the carceral, the personal, the political, and the quotidian to speak about a violence that is largely unseen, and potentially imperceptible. Her work has been featured at the Museum of Modern Art, MoMA Ps1, New Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, SIGNAL Gallery, Rachel Uffner Gallery, and Recess Assembly, New York; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Artist Television Access, San Francisco, CA; Birkbeck Cinema in collaboration with the Serpentine Galleries, London. Her writing has been published in Radical Teacher, Studio Magazine and Affidavit and she is currently working on her first book. Smith has received awards from Creative Capital, Fine Arts Work Center, the Queens Museum, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Rema Hort Mann Foundation, the Franklin Furnace Fund, and Art Matters. She is currently Assistant Professor of Sculpture & Extended Media at the University of Richmond.

For Freedoms – 50 State Initiative

Since 2016, For Freedoms has produced special exhibitions, town hall meetings, billboards, and lawn sign installations to spur greater participation in civic life. This year, For Freedoms launched its 50 State Initiative, a new phase of programming to encourage broad participation and inspire conversation around midterm and future elections.

Building off of the existing artistic infrastructure in the United States, For Freedoms has developed a network of over 300 artists and 200 institutional partners who will produce nationwide public art installations, exhibitions and local community dialogues in order to inject nuanced, artistic thinking into public discourse. Centered around the vital work of artists, For Freedoms hopes that these exhibitions and related projects will model how arts institutions can become civic forums for action and discussion of values, place, and patriotism.

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