

SHINY THINGS FOR MY QUARTERMASTER: SEVEN SWALLOWTAIL FLAGS



- 1 The Green Ray: Because A Rainbow is Not Enough



- 2 They Got You Scared of the Dark



- 3 Shiny Things for My Quartermasters



- 4 Swallowtail Seven Never Surrenders



- 5 The Limits of Hospitality



- 6 Yes, Sir



- 7 Hanging On A Clothesline...Not.

For more information about Fort Mason Art, visit: www.fortmason.org
Instagram + Facebook: @fortmasoncenter

SHINY THINGS FOR MY QUARTERMASTER: SEVEN SWALLOWTAIL FLAGS

Landmark Building B, Pier 2, and the Festival Pavilion at Pier 3

In a nod to its military past and inspired by the United States Army Quartermasters Corps flags that once flew over Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture's (FMCAC) campus, the flags pay homage to those who labored in those units—particularly Black service members limited by segregation—using recurring motifs from the artist's previous works as well as the larger lexicon of Afrofuturism.

"I wanted the flags to perform a kind of time travel between the history and meaning of this space and the possibilities of another, future time," said Cauleen Smith. "What could be if we re-imagined the labor of logistics and care, envisioned different types of supplies to be stored and safeguarded, and reflected different values of equality and forms of social relations? With this series, I wanted to evoke a reality that didn't exist and doesn't still, but could."

Fort Mason's use as a United States military site dates to the Civil War, and beginning in the early 20th century, it served as a critical logistics and transport hub as a base for the Quartermasters Corps of the Army. By the late 1930s, Fort Mason's three piers bore the insignia of the Quartermasters Corps and flew flags on its land-facing façades during World War II.

During Fort Mason's heaviest use in WWII, 80 percent of nearly one million Black American soldiers were assigned to service and logistics units in the U.S. and abroad. As historian and professor Henry Louis Gates noted: "When black men volunteered for duty or were drafted following the Japanese sneak attack, they were relegated to segregated divisions and combat support roles, such as cook, quartermaster, and grave-digging duty. The military was as segregated as the Deep South."

Though constrained by institutional racism, the contributions of Black quartermasters at Fort Mason and similar bases around the country *were* integral to the war effort and matched by the efforts of Black quartermasters near battle lines thousands of miles away.

Against this historical background, Smith places her new works, embracing and subverting the visual language of military symbology, including swords, an American eagle, or the Quartermaster's key.

Guest curator Elizabeth Thomas notes, "While the latter might evoke the physical work of storage and the safety ensured by supply chains, it also stands still against America's history of slavery, segregation, and the containment of Black peoples."

In this way, the artist challenges the dominance of major institutions like official military symbols as markers of human worth, asking instead: who got left out? How could they get back in? Do they want to? What other ways can humans exist with and for one another?

"As an arts hub focused on place-based exhibitions and installations, we are excited to present Cauleen Smith's newest work, which is deeply rooted in this space," said Frank Smigiel, FMCAC's Director of Arts Programming and Partnerships. "We hope that the re-installation of these historic flag poles and the artist's re-imagined flags inspire visitors to see the past, present, and hopes for the future across our campus and the wider community."

MAKE YOUR OWN FLAG

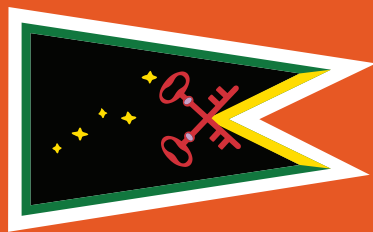
As you venture along the water to view the flags atop Pier 2 and Pier 3, think about what what type of flag you would design.

Cauleen Smith's flags are inspired by the United States Army Quartermasters Corps flags, which use colors, symbols, and animal motifs to represent honor and achievement. In the original flags, the stars and spokes of the wheel symbolize the original colonies, the swords represent military forces, and the key symbolizes military supplies.

How can you use these symbols and animal motifs to design a flag that is meaningful to you?



Quartermaster Flag, U.S. Army Transportation Service, 1923-1943



Cauleen Smith, Hanging on a Clothesline ...Not, 2023

Cauleen Smith

Cauleen Smith is a Los Angeles-based interdisciplinary artist whose work reflects upon the everyday possibilities of the imagination. She actively invites engagement, and with much of the work, she employs a purposeful undermining of image and language to elicit contemplation. Smith's films create worlds that expand on the discourse of mid-twentieth-century experimental filmmaking.

Drawing from structuralism, third-world cinema, and science fiction, she assembles poetic compositions that gently reveal nuanced narratives, both familiar and frequently, purposefully opaque. Her text-based tapestries follow a historical tradition of heraldry. These banners, which can be understood as a social device symbolizing community organizing, declare personalized idioms sewn in script that simulates her own handwriting, lifted directly from her sketchbook. Through her installations, Smith constructs archetypes of the universe and she assembles miniature worlds using myriad items, which often include mundane object and figurines alongside symbols of colonialism, such as porcelain objects and potted plants, paired with disco balls, rocks and minerals, resulting in something otherworldly and musicological.

Will you use the **colors** from the Quartermaster flags, the artist's flags, or use new colors entirely?



Will you use the **symbols** from the Quartermaster flags, the artist's symbols, or create new symbols from your own imagination?

