

ARTFORUM



Jo Smail, *Salvaging Flowers*, 2020, archival pigment print, 24 1/2 x 23 1/2".

BALTIMORE

Jo Smail

GOYA CONTEMPORARY
3000 Chestnut Avenue Mill
Centre #214
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In 1985, when Jo Smail emigrated from her native South Africa to Baltimore, she brought with her some scraps of paper. Among these remnants were family recipes, which were often transcribed on the backs of newspaper articles about apartheid. Struck by the marriage of such disparate subjects, Smail integrated reproductions of these archival snippets into jaunty abstract paintings and collages for a show at this gallery in 2017. They are Smail's most

political works to date and remain poignant, especially as her adopted homeland grapples with its own history of violent racial injustice. Smail is yet again conjuring her past in this exhibition, but this time she's relying heavily on her decades-old collection of African textiles to further her ever-expanding lexicon.

Three shaped paintings from Smail's ongoing series "Mongrel Collection," 2018—fifty-four of which are displayed in her concurrent survey just a few miles east at the Baltimore Museum of Art—hang salon-style near the entrance. Their eccentric shapes, cut from MDF, are primarily based on Matissean forms and serve as the foundation upon which the artist layered her precariously arranged fabrics into a mélange of beguiling compositions—an homage to the beloved Frenchman and her erstwhile upbringing. The textiles also appear in each of the twenty-five pigment prints populating the remaining walls. To create these works, Smail paired the jaggedly scissored bits of cloth with meandering pen drawings on intimately scaled sketchbook pages, which were then photographed, enlarged, and printed. The act of reproduction magnified the subtle warp and weft of the patterns while highlighting their frayed edges, as we see in *Butterfly Eyes*, *Salvaging Flowers*, and *Twilight*, all 2020. The fabric's idiosyncrasies are what make these works endearing. They're like people: clever, exuberant, a tad whimsical, and just a little rough around the edges.

— Andy Martinelli Clark