

# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Rosenberg, Karen, "Bundles of Energy," *Oprah.com*, June 5, April 2011



## Bundles of *Energy*

Shinique Smith gives castoffs a second life as fine art.

**Shinique Smith, AGE 40**  
PAINTER, SCULPTOR, AND  
INSTALLATION ARTIST  
BROOKLYN



Clockwise from above:  
*Open Secret* (2010), *Bale Variant*  
*No. 0017* (2009), *Heart & Soul* (2008).



➤ **Her work** Shinique Smith elevates the green maxim "Reduce, reuse, recycle" to an art form. Fragments of other people's discarded leisure suits, holiday sweaters, and sequined evening gowns have all found their way into her dynamic collages and sculptures, which often bring to mind multicolored calligraphy and graffiti exploding into three dimensions. "I weed my own closet constantly, and I've raided my grandmother's linens several times," says Smith. "You can see her decorating style in my work—she'd always mix florals with brocades."

➤ **Her inspiration** Some of Smith's sculptures take the shape of a bale or bundle, just as thrift shop clothing does when it's packaged for resale abroad—an international market unknown to most Americans but often on Smith's mind when she works. "Some countries in Africa have barred the importing of used garments because they were destroying local textile industries," she explains. "It's crazy to think

that our castoffs could have greater value to other people than new things in their own culture."

➤ **Her home base** Though she lives in Brooklyn, Smith grew up in Baltimore, where she was briefly the sole female member of a graffiti crew. These days you're more likely to find her creations indoors, at contemporary art hubs such as the Brooklyn Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem. (A traveling survey of Smith's work is on display at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art in Wisconsin until May 8.)

➤ **Her mission** "I'm interested in how we create personal mythologies through objects, and how objects connect us," says Smith. "When people look at the sculptures, it tends to stir up memories and nostalgia. I hope they can reflect on what we own and why we value it, on what we keep and what we don't—and be grateful for all of it." —KAREN ROSENBERG