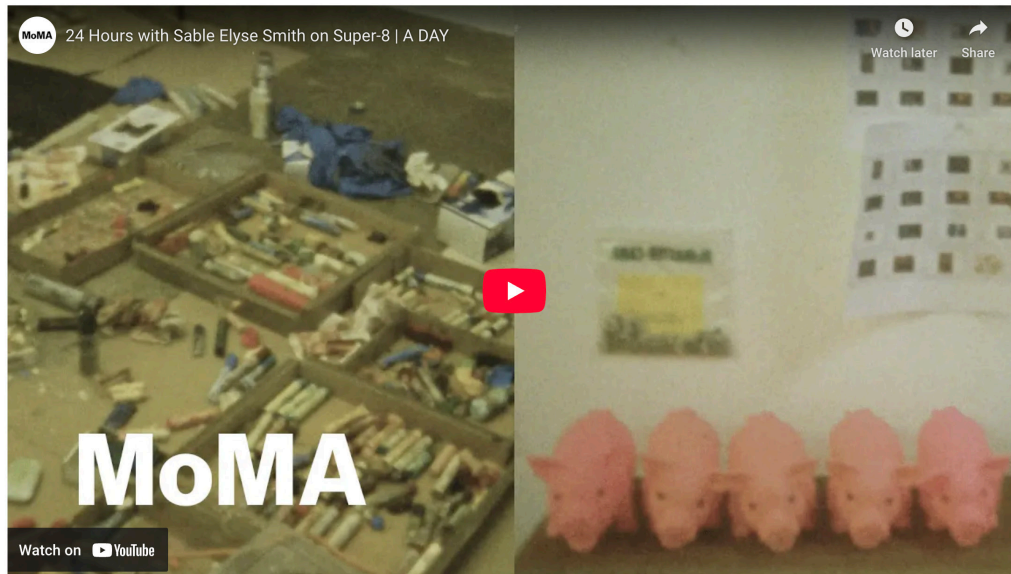


24 Hours with Sable Elyse Smith

The artist uses a Super 8mm camera to document, in short bursts, the formation and collapse of routine across a day.

Sable Elyse Smith, DaeQuan Alexander Collier
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“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives,” writer Annie Dillard reminded us in 1989. How does an artist choose to spend their time? Our occasional A Day series invites artists to document a 24-hour snapshot of their life, revealing ordinary, creative, and professional routines. For this year’s reboot, we sent artists a Super 8mm camera and a single, four-and-a-half-minute roll of film. What would they choose to shoot, working within the bounds of that medium, with its unique light capture, finite length, and lack of real-time playback?

Artist Sable Elyse Smith considers this filmed day “the anti-reel.” Known for her

expansive, multidisciplinary practice—ranging from monumental sculpture and neon works to paintings and operas—Smith embraced the analog medium as an invitation to turn the lens inward. What emerged was a constellation of quiet fragments: rhythms of thought, fleeting gestures, missed moments, and a small window into the in-between.

How would you describe your artistic practice to someone who may not be familiar with your work?

Sable Elyse Smith: My work is multidisciplinary. I follow my curiosities, which has led me to make monumental sculptures, videos, works on paper, neons, operas, dinner, cocktails, diversion programs, books, works of fiction, works of poetry, any and everything in between!

How did you decide what moments to capture in your day, and did the limitations of Super 8 (finite film, no playback) influence your choices?

I wanted it to feel like the cadence of my typical day. Which is honestly pretty atypical. The real constant across all my days is going to my neighborhood coffee shop, but I did not end up capturing that. I started off by shooting small bursts of things that were happening around me. I think these small bursts were also a way to contend with the format and the slowness of my days, if I was just reading or listening to music. The rhythm is probably closer to how my thoughts form and take shape throughout the day.

Did you plan your shots, or did you film more spontaneously? Were there any moments you wanted to capture but missed?

I definitely filmed spontaneously and was restricted to the moments or places where I intentionally brought the camera. It was a hectic week so a lot was going on that I couldn’t film, but I wanted to be somewhat true to my every day and both the formation and collapse of routine that happens weekly, at least this year.

Did working with analog film change your usual way of seeing and documenting the world?

Yes, framing an image/shot is completely different when working with the Super 8 camera. It’s handheld and I’m documenting alone, so it’s all presumably my point of view. Although I did turn the camera on myself on a walk, but we lost that footage. I guess one could methodically plan out the shots but that did not feel like the spirit of the project to me. I think also because it was on film, I was very conscious of the time and mostly shot in 45-second or so bursts. I have a couple of longer takes but these short time bursts were what presented themselves to me instinctually.

Were you thinking about the film as a linear narrative or more as fragments

of time?

Definitely fragments of time. But I think of everything that way also, so it was probably less an influence of the format.

Did shooting on Super 8 spark any new thoughts about your work?

At the same time that I was shooting this, I was in the process of purchasing a new cinema camera rig. So I definitely considered getting something that was analog as well in the future. I often enjoy mixing formats anyway. And, restrained by this format, I started conceptualizing some aesthetic approaches to a new film project I'm in pre-production on at the moment.

What do you think your footage reveals about your life and artistic practice?

LOL, probably nothing! That it isn't regimented. I don't treat the studio like a job. I'm not there on XYX days from X to X time. All of it is about a certain kind of spontaneity and I spend a lot of time hanging out with my dog Quincy.

How does this filmed "day in your life" compare to how you usually document experiences, and did it change how you moved through your day?

It's nice. I've thought many times during the process: I want to do this again. It feels slower in a way even though I just said I shot in quick bursts. Moving through my day probably logistically, it made me think a lot about both permission and awareness. There were many things that happen in my day that I didn't take the camera to at all because if I strictly shot my day there would be other people involved. And of course I can ask people's permission to film them but then for me the filming would almost be akin to a reenactment. It would all be about the presence of the camera and the fact that I was documenting. That's not to say that that's completely a bad thing either; it just was not the intention I understood for what I was doing.

What do you hope viewers take away from your footage?

Honestly, no hopes. This is like the anti-reel, the anti-story. People will probably be searching for the pay off.

Sable Elyse Smith
Artist

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