

# SEVEN SISTERS

ADAM MARNIE, EDWIN SMALLING

## BACK TO BASICS

May 30–August 1, 2026

*Seven Sisters* is honored to present a two-person exhibition that brings together new paintings by Adam Marnie and Edwin Smalling, offering a view into the practices that underlie the activity of these two Houston-based artists and small business owners. In addition to their close dialogue, shared goals in life, and mutual influences, their shared love of painting has sparked a synergy that is tenderly insular and generative. *Back to Basics* includes paintings authored by Marnie and those by Smalling, and collaborative paintings made specifically for this show.

Through the organizations they founded and run—Marnie's F Magazine and Smalling's Basket Books & Art—community building and working with other artists have made up the brunt of their creative output for the last number of years. Increasingly, Marnie and Smalling work collaboratively, organizing exhibitions together, sharing tables at Printed Matter's LA Art Book Fairs, and co-publishing the free Houston arts newspaper *The Houston Associated Experimental Press*, the first issue of which was released May 1, 2026. In addition to the overlap of their professional lives, Marnie and Smalling are both fathers of young daughters (Marnie's Isa is nearly 3, Smalling's Dot is 6). Fatherhood and community building alike inform their work which in both cases exudes elementary notions of visual language: contrasting shapes, primary colors, and simple compositions that reach to abstraction as indicative of early learning modes and models, where language is raw, big, and still being formed.

Marnie's work over the past two decades has explored form making and building in many mediums, including sculpture, architectural intervention, collage, photography, publishing, and writing: in short, everything but painting. Shortly after the birth of his daughter in 2023, Marnie had a solo show at Smalling's Basket Books gallery, where he exhibited his first painting in twenty-five years. For him, painting is an embrace of the solitary studio practice away from the chatter din that comes from working with others, in the classroom, organizing exhibitions, and producing publications. Marnie's paintings exhibit a minimal tendency. A graphite grid is visible, marking out the territory of the visual space. Layers of black and white gessoes are applied to raw canvas. His paint handling carries the experiences gained working for and with other painters as well as non-art interior wall painting: the paint is applied primarily with a two-inch brush.

Marnie writes: "So much of my artmaking has been marked by 'shaking the foundation,' a critical effort to redefine any given medium or to create space to identify and investigate the essential components of mediums and the environments of their display. This ethos extends to my community building efforts in publishing and exhibition organizing. In my recent studio work, this has been replaced with a more purely creative aim, as I return to the music and art I've loved most in my life, introducing them to my daughter, experiencing them anew through her enjoyment: Aphex Twin, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, the Beatles' "Blackbird," The Ramones—all elemental foundational building blocks marked by a kind of simplicity. Even Phillip Glass—the music we put on when we do 'ballet'—fits into this rubric: sophisticatedly simple, creating a place

to play. My paintings are informed equally by her early-childhood expressions and development of language and the work of proto-revolutionary abstractionists such as Malevich, Mondrian, Ad Reinhardt, Blinky Palermo, and Agnes Martin, as well as contemporary masters like Mary Heilman and Steven Parrino."

If Marnie has returned to painting reaching for a kind of peace, Smalling's practice has been bound in tension with the constrictions and concerns of painting for years, seeking the excessive anarchy in its possibilities. With a sincere mind and hand, he approaches each canvas wittingly. The pull between form and spontaneity is held in balance with the addition of wooden popsicle sticks, twins of tongue depressors, evoking both the suppression of speech and a wry acknowledgment of the limits of painting and language alike.

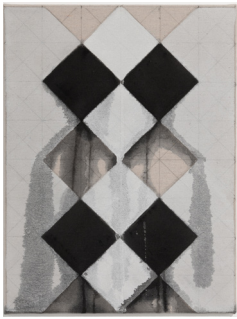
Smalling writes: "My most recent body of work combines interwoven impulses; to free myself from a sense of indebtedness to an ideological construct historically embedded in painting, that of representation, meaning, and depiction. I am also trying to shed a cerebral impulse towards the conceptual, making a thing that is explicable and rooted in a rationality that one can give a name to. I embrace a sort of inborn feral spirit, one through which I might rebel against my own sense of formal righteousness. This rebellion is against my own understandings of taste, order, form, in favor of an instinctual grappling with line, shape, color, the tottering by-products of an unsettled consciousness. These paintings manifest as collage-like constructions, interrupted, repaired, and structured by popsicle sticks as scavenged from the dripping lips of my daughter and her friends and dyed in saturated primaries. The sticks are glued to the surface using colored acrylics, oozing berms of paint leak and form alongside them, creating a low-relief topography that disrupts the smooth continuity of the picture plane. Paint is otherwise applied with a fumbling intention, with colors abut in decisive contrast. Drawing constrains form, a precondition that lays the groundwork for its future fragmentation."

**Adam Marnie** (b. 1977, Minneapolis) lives in Houston, Texas, where he runs the publishing press F Magazine and the exhibition platform F. His extensive exhibition history includes national and international venues such as Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, Night Gallery, Los Angeles, Almine Rech, Paris, and Basket Books & Art, Houston. His book *The Origin of Mark Flood*, chronicling Flood's early years from 1987-1992, was published by Karma, New York, in 2022. Recent F publications include F Magazine, issue 15: IN MEMORIAM, F. Richard Coldwell's dystopian noir *Lies from the Flies on the Wall*, and the chapbooks *Ex-Best Friends* by Fiona Alison Duncan and *Weak Potion of Invisibility* by Ed Steck.

**Edwin Smalling** (b. 1977, Virginia Beach) is an artist and founding co-owner of the Houston independent bookstore Basket Books & Art. His art has been exhibited in Paris, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and most recently at The Garage in Houston, Texas. After completing an MFA at Yale University in 2016, he worked as an artist, educator, exhibition coordinator, and graphic artist in New York City. He moved to Houston, TX in 2021.

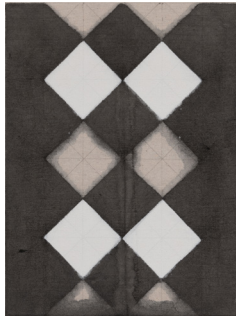
BACK TO BASICS

INDEX OF WORKS



ADAM MARNIE  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain* 2026

gesso and graphite on canvas  
16 x 12 in. ✦



ADAM MARNIE  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain (Blackbird)* 2026

gesso and graphite on canvas  
16 x 12 in.



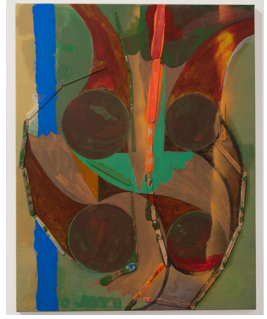
EDWIN SMALLING  
*Tree Painting (For Climate Resilience)* 2026

acrylic, polyester dye and wood on nylon, 23 x 14 in.



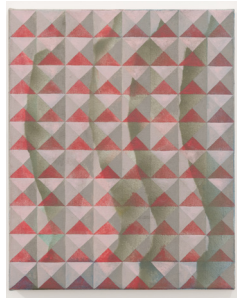
EDWIN SMALLING  
*Loose Sentence* 2026

acrylic, paper and wood on canvas  
28 x 22 in.



EDWIN SMALLING  
*Provisional Abundance (For F.P.)* 2026

acrylic and wood on canvas, 28 x 22 in.



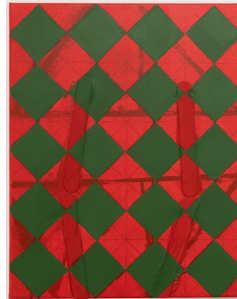
EDWIN SMALLING (with ADAM MARNIE)  
*Little-Boxes* 2026

acrylic and graphite on canvas  
20 x 16 in.



ADAM MARNIE  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain (Pay Attention Mother-fucker)* 2026

gesso and graphite on canvas  
24 x 18 in.



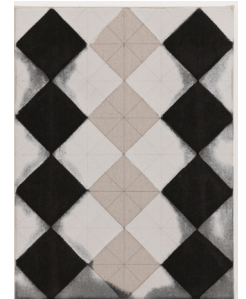
ADAM MARNIE (with EDWIN SMALLING)  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain (War is Over (if you want it))* 2026

acrylic, graphite, and wood on canvas  
20 x 16 in.



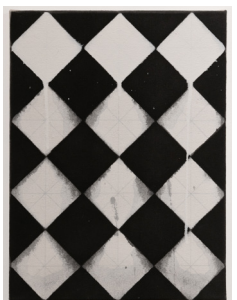
EDWIN SMALLING  
*Cant:Slant* 2026

acrylic, paper and wood on canvas  
22 x 28 in.



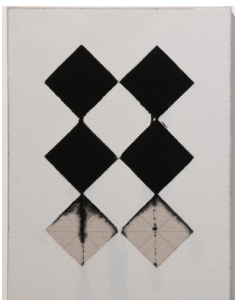
ADAM MARNIE  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain (It Rained, and it Rained, and it Rained)* 2026

gesso and graphite on canvas  
16 x 12 in.



ADAM MARNIE  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain (Like a Virgin)* 2026

gesso and graphite on canvas  
16 x 12 in.



ADAM MARNIE  
*The Sky is Heavy with Rain (Tears of Rage)* 2026

gesso and graphite on canvas  
16 x 12 in.



EDWIN SMALLING  
*Écorché (For E.C.)* 2025

acrylic and wood on canvas  
28 x 22 in.

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