



## Jo Smail: Thinking Like an Oyster

3 Mar — 25 Apr 2026 at the Goya Contemporary in Baltimore, United States

9 March 2026



*Jo Smail: Thinking Like an Oyster*, exhibition view. Courtesy of Goya Contemporary

Goya Contemporary Gallery is pleased to present *Jo Smail: Thinking Like an Oyster* on view from March 3 through April 25, 2026. A public reception will take place on March 18 from 6:00–8:00 pm, and a book signing will be held on April 23 from 5:00–7:00 pm.

*Thinking Like an Oyster* marks the artist's eleventh solo exhibition with the gallery, celebrating more than twenty-five years of representation. The exhibition will feature forty-six new works presented in dynamic groupings that emphasize the rhythms, accumulations, poetics, and transformations central to the artist's practice. A new publication on this body of work will be released in late April, with essays by Louis Fratino, Amy Raehse, and Kristen Hileman.

Baltimore-based South African artist Jo Smail (b. 1943, Durban, South Africa) is internationally celebrated for her abstract paintings, drawings, installations, collages, and prints. Her work

evolves through layered processes of accumulation, erasure, repurposing, and revision—material transformations that echo the emotional and historical depth embedded in her practice.

Educated in South Africa, Smail relocated to Baltimore in 1985. From 1988 to 2017 she taught at the Maryland Institute College of Art, where she is now Professor Emeritus. A deeply committed educator as well as a pioneering artist, Smail has influenced generations of artists at pivotal moments in their careers—from fellow South African artist William Kentridge, with whom she has collaborated, to younger painters such as Louis Fratino, among many others. Smail’s practice is profoundly shaped by both personal and collective histories, navigating themes of memory, displacement, resilience, and reinvention. In her work, formal experimentation and material invention remain inseparable from lived experience.

Smail’s art has been shaped by formative events including apartheid-era South Africa, a devastating Baltimore studio fire in 1995, and a life-altering stroke in 2000. These experiences, alongside her engagement with the natural world, the socio-political resonance of found materials, and art historical traditions, have contributed to a body of work that is at once intimate and globally resonant.

In March 2020, Smail was the subject of a major retrospective at the Baltimore Museum of Art, marking her first comprehensive one-person museum exhibition and affirming her significant contributions to contemporary abstraction.

Her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions and major publications, with reviews appearing in *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The Washington Post*, among others. She has received numerous awards and residencies, including the Trawick Sapphire Prize, Maryland State Arts Council Awards, a Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Fellowship, the Rochefort-en-Terre Residency in France, a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, and a nomination for Anonymous Was A Woman.

Smail’s work is held in public and private collections internationally, including the Baltimore Museum of Art; the National Gallery of South Africa; the Johannesburg Art Museum; the Pretoria Art Museum; the Durban Art Gallery; the University of the Witwatersrand; Johns Hopkins University; and major corporate collections in both South Africa and the United States.

She is represented in the United States by Goya Contemporary Gallery.