

# Mane Event

One day, in the offices of the artist-book publisher Arion Press in San Francisco, Kiki

It was Hoyem who first suggested using Smith's hair to illustrate the ballad. Smith was sold on the idea once she heard the ballad read at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York. "It resonated and made me laugh a lot," the artist says of the song-poem, which Adam wrote in 1958 and which was based on a Celtic version of the Medusa myth.

The imagery of hair crawling over the house ("It thumped on the roof, it hissed and glowed over every window pane") reminded Smith of some of her projects from 20 years ago, like the films in which her hair is being dragged across the floor or stuck under doors. Smith had also used her hair in early prints. For one work, she photocopied single bits of hair, while for another she used

casts of her head, flattened out in the corners with a big swirl of hair in the middle.

Smith considers her own mane intriguing artistic material. "It is about how to make a drawing that is informed by you, but not in a way that comes out of your hand," she says, adding, "It's unpredictable." She calls John Cage, the composer and artist who used chance in his work, "one of my drawing heroes."

Hair also has cultural meaning in her work. "Many women artists use hair as a language to play with. It can be about femininity, sexuality, or conformity," she says. "I use it more in the sense of nonconformity. It represents disobedience,

the uncontrollable, the hag—that's why I love this poem."

Arion has recently completed 75 numbered editions of the book, *I Love My Love*, priced at \$5,000 each. Adam's poem is handset in letterpress type and arranged alongside 16 lithographs of Smith's hair, colored in brown-black, tan,



**Kiki Smith photocopies her hair with help from Arion Press's Andrew Hoyem.**

Smith put her long wavy hair down on the photocopier machine. She and Arion's publisher, Andrew Hoyem, then sat down and selected copies of her strands to go with the 14 stanzas of "I Love My Love" by Helen Adam. In the ballad, a woman enchants, then entraps, her lover with her golden tresses. Even after he murders her, her hair grows wildly from the grave, killing the lover.



**A panel from *I Love My Love*, Arion Press, 2009. Hair by Smith, poem by Helen Adam.**

and yellow-orange tones—a rare sight, since Smith has gray hair and no plans to dye it. —Amanda Gordon