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Sadie Barnette

How to Win

Sean Kelly, New York

June 27– August 1, 2025

Opening reception: Thursday, June 26, 5:30-7:30pm

Sean Kelly is delighted to announce *How to Win*, a solo exhibition of new work by Sadie Barnette. In this conceptually rigorous presentation, Barnette offers a poetic visual lexicon for navigating contemporary life. Featuring meticulously rendered drawings, candid photography, and text-based sculpture, the exhibition mines the tension between public and private, structure and improvisation, the mundane and the monumental. There will be an opening reception on Thursday, June 26 from 5:30-7:30pm. The artist will be present.

Barnette's body of work is an investigation of language and legacy. Her "how-to" manuals—modular compositions that explore how we learn to exist within and in resistance to imposed systems—consider not only what it means to "act normal," but who defines the metrics of success, and how those judgments are internalized. Formally restrained yet conceptually expansive, Barnette's drawings eschew gesture in favor of precision and control. Their flat planes of color and detailed linework call attention to the labor of drawing itself. So exacting, they almost conceal the hand of the artist proffering an anti-preciousness that challenges the conventions of artmaking.

Presented as polyptychs that combine drawing and photography, these works create layered narratives that span the micro and the macro, the personal and the political. The photographs, ranging in source material from family archives to street scenes and gritty smartphone snapshots, act as documentary fragments of lived experience.

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Paired with the drawings, they become visual anchors in Barnette's ongoing investigation of the human dilemma: how to be, how to behave, how to belong.

A large text-based wall sculpture fuses the words "winner" and "loser" into a single contranym. Styled like a nameplate necklace, this bold text piece embraces duality and contradiction, emphasizing the layered meanings in language and the arbitrary binaries that shape our lives. As Barnette notes, even in an imagined future where world issues may be resolved, we remain entangled in the paradoxes of being human.

Through her multidimensional approach, Barnette's work speaks to both internal reflection and broader societal critique. Drawing on the traditions of conceptualism, minimalism, and West Coast vernacular, she distills complex ideas about identity, power, family, and resistance into deceptively simple forms that leave space for doubt, multiplicity, and reinterpretation.

Born in Oakland, CA in 1984, Barnette received a BFA from CalArts and an MFA from University of California, San Diego. Her work has been presented in major solo exhibitions at institutions including the ICA Los Angeles; SFMOMA; The Lab and the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; MCA San Diego; the Manetti Shrem Museum, UC Davis; the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College; and The Kitchen in New York. Barnette's work has been included in exhibitions at LACMA, Los Angeles, CA; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Monument Lab, Philadelphia, PA. She has been awarded grants and residencies by The Studio Museum in Harlem, Art Matters, Artadia, Eureka Fellowship, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Headlands Center for the Arts, and the Carmago Foundation in France and was an Artist Fellow at UC Berkeley's Black Studies Collaboratory. Her work is featured in many permanent collections, including the Whitney Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Pérez Art Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, the Oakland Museum of California, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Walker Art Center. She is represented by Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Barnette is currently working on a forthcoming permanent, site-specific commission for the Los Angeles International Airport, CA. The California African American Museum (CAAM) has commissioned Barnette to create a site-specific installation for the Museum's atrium on view August 2025 through August 2027, coinciding with CAAM's 50th anniversary.

For additional information on the exhibition, please visit skny.com

For media inquiries, please email Adair Lentini at Adair@skny.com

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Image: Sadie Barnette, *How to Win*, 2025, Pencil, colored pencil, powdered graphite, spray paint, rhinestones on paper, archival pigment prints, paper: 30 x 24 inches each Photo: Philip Maisel © Sadie Barnette Courtesy: the artist, Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco