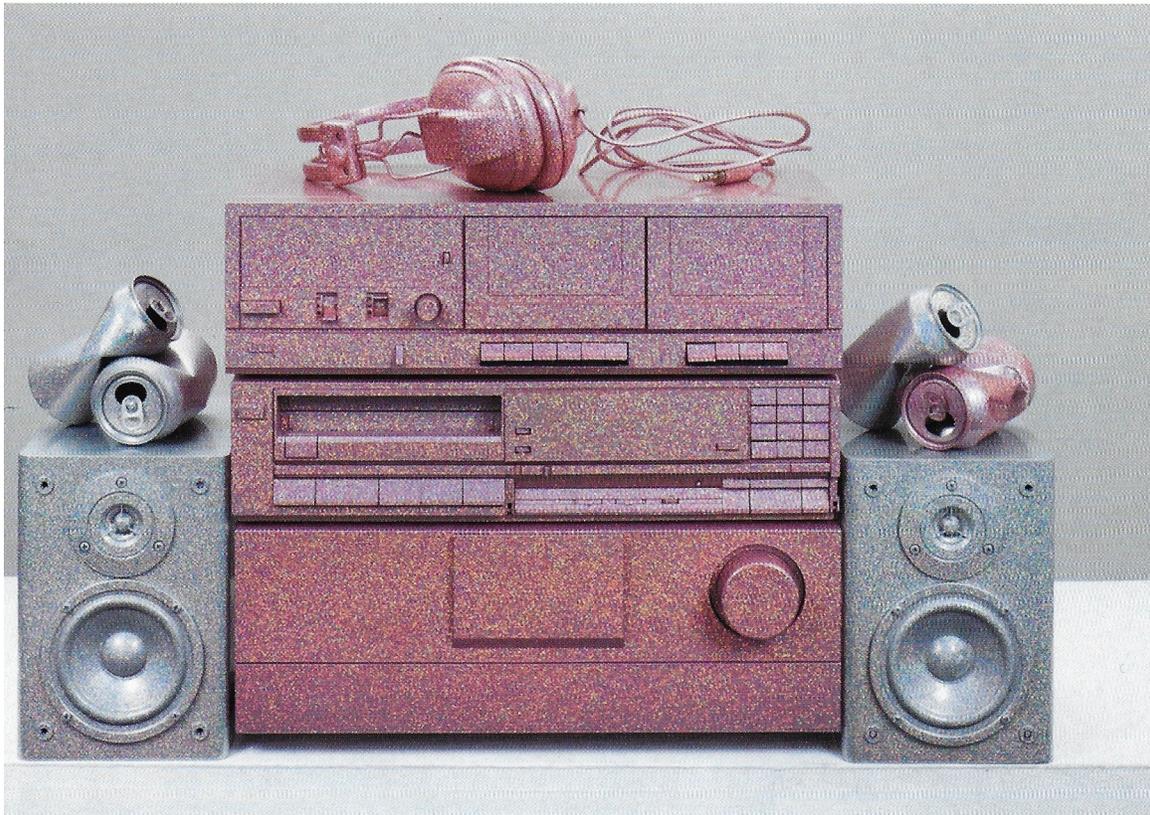


# Art in America

Sadie Barnette: "First Look: Sadie Barnette"

By Brandon Brown

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Sadie Barnette: *Untitled (Sound System)*, 2018, metal flake on found objects, 20¼ by 29 by 14½ inches.

Courtesy Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo Michael Underwood.

"NOSTALGIA" WAS coined by joining two ancient Greek words that mean "returning home" and "pain." We commonly use "nostalgic" today to dismiss art that seems overly wistful for an irretrievable past, too facile and corny to produce authentic joy or angst. But the word's etymology makes it useful for understanding the work of Oakland-based Sadie Barnette.

For the sculptures in "Phone Home," her solo exhibition now on view at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, Barnette takes familiar household items and transforms them with glamour. Turntables, big headphones, crushed aluminum cans, and landline phones are covered in metal-flake pink or platinum paint. At the show's entrance, two iPads connected to Spotify playlists stream tunes from the last century, like Funkadelic's "Good to Your Earhole" and Lonnie Liston Smith's "A Chance for Peace." Even the iPads dazzle, studded with glass crystals. Although these objects sparkle, they retain a domestic feel.

Barnette's family life and 1980s childhood are constant themes in her work." All Power to the

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People: Black Panthers at 50," a 2016 exhibition at the Oakland Museum that interspersed archival materials with contemporary artworks, included her installation *My Father's FBI File, Project 1* (2016). Barnette's father, Rodney, co-founded a chapter of the Black Panther Party. Through the Freedom of Information Act, Barnette obtained the 500-page dossier developed on him through COINTELPRO, the FBI's 1956 anti-communist initiative, which in the late 1960s and 1970s was used to discredit, imprison, and assassinate Panther leaders. Fastening black-and-white laser prints of the dossier's pages to the museum's walls, the artist sprayed passages with pink and purple paint, vivid colors that signify in equal measure her childhood feeling of safety and her resistance to the domination signified by the bureaucratic monochrome.

Barnette, who holds an MFA from UC San Diego, returned to these materials in her traveling solo show, "Dear 1968," which appeared at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego last year, featuring pages from the dossier mounted on pink panels. "I figured glitter and pink and rhinestone hearts would be ... most antithetical to J. Edgar Hoover," Barnette said in an interview for the "Dear 1968" catalogue. These alterations are potentially jarring, but the work forcefully demonstrates the power of using components that pertain to both national and personal histories.

An untitled wall-length installation in "Phone Home" collages the artist's family photographs with pictures of Trayvon Martin and Nia Wilson, a teenager murdered by a deranged white youth on a BART train in Oakland last year. The work connects Barnette's childhood and adulthood, her happiness and pain both past and present. Balancing the brilliance of glittering pink paint with the intensity of elegy, Barnette's work might serve as a talisman against a bad future.

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