



Press Release

The Philosophical Research Society | Hansell Gallery

**BRAIN
DRAWINGS:
THE ART OF
HARRY SMITH**



Harry Smith, *First Note, Fourth Chorus, Boplicity*, 1950

LOS ANGELES - The Philosophical Research Society (PRS) is pleased to present *Brain Drawings: The Art of Harry Smith*.

Brain Drawings: The Art of Harry Smith invites audiences into the singular world of Harry Smith (1923-1991)—experimental filmmaker, anthropologist, musicologist, and artist—whose practice was shaped by a deep engagement with esoteric spirituality, occult traditions, and systems of hidden knowledge. Describing himself as a “shaman in residence,” Smith approached art-making as a form of inquiry, mapping correspondences between sound, image, and cosmology.

This exhibition brings together a wide-ranging selection of Smith’s work, from early experiments in visualizing sound to a rare 1954 four-color silkscreen of the Kabbalistic *Tree of Life*. Also on view are string figure constructions, materials related to the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, photographs, and rarely seen films and audio works. Archival footage—including documentation of Smith’s rooms at the Chelsea Hotel and Naropa Institute—offers an intimate view into the environments that shaped his thinking.

Both rigorous and idiosyncratic, *Brain Drawings* presents Smith’s practice as a sustained exploration of pattern, transformation, and meaning—an invitation to encounter a body of work that resists easy categorization and rewards close attention.

This exhibition is curated by Rani Singh, Director at Harry Smith Archives in collaboration with PRS.

Exhibition
MAY 7 - 31, 2026

Opening Reception
Thursday, May 7, 2026
5:00-7:00pm

Gallery Hours:
Tuesdays-Saturdays 12-6pm
and by appointment
(info@prs.org)

The Hansell Gallery
3910 Los Feliz Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90027
prs.org/exhibitions
harrysmitharchives.com
Free and Open to the Public





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Opening Reception Panel Presentation:
Mind Maps: Exploring Harry Smith's Hermetic Allusions
Thursday May 7, 2026

7:30-9:00pm in the PRS Auditorium
with David Orr, Rani Singh, William Kiesel,
Jessica Hundley, and Charles Stein

To celebrate the opening of *Brain Drawings: The Art of Harry Smith*, the Philosophical Research Society and the Harry Smith Archives are pleased to present a multimedia presentation and panel exploring the esoteric aspects of Harry Smith's visual art and creative practice. Joining the conversation will be Director of the Harry Smith Archives, Rani Singh; occult scholar and Director of Ouroboros Press, William Kiesel; writer and Editor of Taschen's Library of Esoterica book series, Jessica Hundley; and (via satellite) poet, artist, and classicist Chuck Stein. Artist and founder of PRS' Hansell Gallery, David Orr, will guide our panel through various works from Smith's career and the on-site *Brain Drawings* exhibition, offering them up for inquiry within the context of Smith's guiding interests in esoteric prima materia and dedication to outsider anthropology.

Harry Smith was one of the most complex figures of twentieth century American culture, a brilliant polymath who made major contributions to the fields of sound recording, independent filmmaking, the visual arts, hermetic philosophy, and what might be termed "outsider anthropology."

Harry Smith was born May 29, 1923, in Portland, Oregon to a family active in freemasonry and occultism. By the age of 15, Harry had spent time recording many songs and rituals of the Lummi and Samish peoples. It was in San Francisco that Smith began to build a reputation as one of the leading American experimental filmmakers. Smith developed his own methods of animation, using both stop motion collage techniques and hand-painting directly on film. Smith's films have been interpreted as investigations of conscious and unconscious mental processes. At times, Smith spoke of his films in terms of synaesthesia, the search for correspondences between color and sound and sound and movement.

His 1952 *Anthology of American Folk Music*, released on Moe Asch's *Folkways Records* triggered both the folk music revival and the maturation of rock and roll. The *Anthology* continues to serve as a uniquely profound introduction to some of America's greatest musical traditions.

Smith's broad range of interests resulted in a number of collections. He was a collector of Seminole textiles, paper airplanes and Ukrainian Easter Eggs. At the heart of his endeavors Smith was an alchemist interested in the correspondences and fundamental truths between all things. He was a gnostic bishop in the Gnostic Catholic Church of the Ordo Templi Orientis.

Smith spent his last years (1988-1991) as "shaman in residence" at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. In 1991 he received a Chairman's Merit Award at the Grammy Awards ceremony for his contribution to American Folk Music. Upon receiving the award, he proclaimed, "I'm glad to say my dreams came true. I saw America changed by music."

Harry Everett Smith died at the Chelsea Hotel on November 27, 1991.



Image left: Harry Smith, *Tree Of Life*, 1954





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Jimbo's Bop City, 1950, photograph by Hy Hirsh

The Philosophical Research Society is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit institution founded in 1934 as a repository of multicultural wisdom sources and a center of arts and learning. The mission of PRS is to study, conserve, teach, and publish knowledge of the principles of philosophy, religion, science and art, from all cultures and throughout history, in a universal and nonsectarian way. We provide an educational center, an art gallery and public art and performance space, publications, and an esoteric philosophical research library to benefit all who seek the wisdom to live in harmony with themselves, their communities, and the wider world.

Parking and Contact:

We encourage attendees to consider carpooling, walking or biking to events if possible, and please be considerate of our Los Feliz neighbors when parking. Street parking is available on Griffith Park Blvd. and (after 7 PM) on Los Feliz Blvd. Limited parking is available onsite at PRS in the front lot (entry from Los Feliz Blvd. when heading east). For ADA assistance, please reach out to us in advance via email (events@prs.org) or phone (323.663.2167) and provide an email or number we can contact you at.

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