

CAPTURING THE MAGNIFICENT MOMENT

ACCLAIMED PHOTOGRAPHER RODNEY SMITH'S WORK
COMES TO KETCHUM'S GILMAN CONTEMPORARY



STORY **IRENE RAWLINGS** PHOTOS **RODNEY SMITH**

"Saori & Mossimo Holding Hands, Amalfi Italy"
From a fashion shoot in Atrani on the Amalfi Coast, a poetic sort of place where Fellini might have set one his films. >>



The warm white walls of storefront Gilman Contemporary art gallery in Ketchum, Idaho, are lined with the images by renowned photographer Rodney Smith (1947-2016). In his 45-year career, Smith was best known for his exceptional fashion photographs, but to call him simply a fashion photographer misses the point. His unique vision—one in which a calm beauty and order mute the tumult of modern-day life—elevates his photographs into the realm of fine art.

Visitors to the gallery linger in front of the elegant images—witty, lonely, layered, and ambiguous. Each photograph in the show, “Rodney Smith Retrospective: A Leap of Faith,” tells a deeper story, a story that seems to continue outside the frame of the photograph. “When I first saw his

work, I was moved by the beauty, optimism and humor,” says gallerist L’Anne Gilman. “And I was impressed by his ability to take something perfectly ordinary—a teapot, a bowler hat, a sculpted topiary—and turn it into something extraordinary.” Gilman Contemporary has represented Smith since 2011, and so the gallery was the perfect place to launch the first book to focus on the trajectory of his artistic career: *Rodney Smith: A Leap of Faith*, published by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. >>

“Zoe Balancing Teapot on Head, Burden Mansion, New York, New York” Smith selected Zoe (who embodied both elegance and whimsy) for interior designer Barbara Barry’s Waterford Wedgwood ad campaign. The faded elegance of Burden Mansion serves as a backdrop.

“Reed Skiing, Lake Placid, New York” A fashion shoot for Hickey Freeman, featuring model and acrobat Reed Kelly, one of Smith’s favorite models who described working on location with Smith as a wonderful give-and-take of interesting and unconventional ideas. >>





In his introduction to the book, Graydon Carter (former editor in chief of *Vanity Fair* magazine) writes: “Wes Anderson + René Magritte + Federico Fellini + Irving Penn = Rodney Smith.” Carter also notes that Smith was the first to add movement to fashion photography. Smith’s indelible images exude an Edward Hopper-like loneliness, a Shaker simplicity and more than a passing nod to Surrealism. They offer either a pleasing symmetry or an intriguing asymmetry. And there’s always an unexpected juxtaposition. A tiny gossamer-gowned model balances on the wingtip of a seaplane. A couple kisses atop a New York taxi with 30 perfectly lined-up yellow cabs as backdrop. An elegant

young woman sits on the floor surrounded by teacups while nonchalantly balancing a teapot on her head.

Smith shot exclusively on location and worked with bold-type fashion names (Neiman Marcus, Bergdorf Goodman, Ralph Lauren, Paul Stuart) and top-tier publications like *The New York Times*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *W*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. He used only film and light; his dreamy and manicured images are unretouched—no filters, no postproduction. “He was inspired by location and light,” says Leslie Smolan, who had a 30-year collaboration with Smith as >>

“Bernadette in Red Hat with Book, New York Public Library, NYC” The red hat’s shape is reminiscent of the library lamps illuminating every tabletop in the library’s Rose Reading Room.

his creative partner and his wife. “He knew his cameras and film as a medium—inside and out—and how to make them perform ... and he would not push the shutter unless the image was perfect.”

The J. Paul Getty Museum recently acquired 10 prints, selected by Paul Martineau, curator of photographs. Martineau says that although the photographs look extremely well-composed, they were not set up in advance. “Smith chose a location, a model and he had an idea,” he explains, “and, inspired by the light, he developed his idea, doing a ‘kind of dance’ with the camera to find the best angle and the most perfect light.” While researching Smith’s work in preparation for the acquisition, Martineau

realized that “not a single book had captured his entire life and career.” And so the book idea was born. *Rodney Smith: A Leap of Faith* is a deeply personal and definitive record of Smith’s life’s work. It includes essays by Martineau and Smolan as well as Rebecca A. Senf, chief curator at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, Tucson. ○

“Rodney Smith Retrospective: A Leap of Faith” at Gilman Contemporary through July 25. gilmancontemporary.com

“Woman Holding Up Dress Walking Through Vineyard, Napa Valley” Smith’s images were all shot on film and never retouched. He would often use a fog machine to add layering, atmosphere and a certain ethereal quality to his images.



Rodney Smith: A Leap of Faith, a collection of essays and more than 200 photographs (many never before published) chosen by Paul Martineau, is available at Gilman Contemporary and the Getty Museum; \$65.