

RODNEY SMITH.

Photography between real and surreal

Rovigo, Palazzo Roverella

3/10/2025 - 1/2/2026

Press kit and images: <https://studioesseci.net/>

The exhibition is promoted by the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo, in collaboration with diChroma photography, produced by Silvana Editoriale. Curated by Anne Morin.

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'I go out into the world, to breathe its notoriety and humor,
to be able to see clearer, to look for understanding and purpose,
to open up, and reach exuberantly and unforgivingly for the light.'

Rodney Smith

For the first time in Italy, a major monographic exhibition will celebrate the work of acclaimed New York photographer Rodney Smith (1947-2016), opening at Palazzo Roverella.

This expansive retrospective, featuring over one hundred of Smith's evocative works, is promoted by the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo, in collaboration with diChroma photography, the Municipality of Rovigo and the Accademia dei Concordi, with the support of Intesa Sanpaolo and produced by Silvana Editoriale. Curated by Anne Morin, the exhibition will be on view from 4 October 2025 to 1 February 2026.

The exhibition introduces Italian audiences to a master photographer known for his unmistakable aesthetic: a refined blend of classical elegance, rigorous composition, and a subtle, surreal irony that has drawn comparisons to the works of the painter René Magritte. Long acclaimed for his iconic black and white images that merge portraiture and landscape, Rodney Smith created enchanting visual worlds full of subtle contradictions and surprises. Working exclusively with film and natural light, his dreamlike images, never retouched, are characterised by meticulous craftsmanship and exceptional formal precision.

A student of Walker Evans, influenced by Ansel Adams, and inspired by the work of Margaret Bourke-White, Henri Cartier-Bresson and William Eugene Smith, his photographs have appeared in leading publications, including *TIME*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, and many others. He also gained recognition for his fashion photography, collaborating with renowned brands including Ralph Lauren, Neiman Marcus, and Bergdorf Goodman...

Smith's aesthetic also parallels cinematic traditions, with clear connections to the work of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Terrence Malick, and Wes Anderson, as well as silent film legends such as Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Harold Lloyd.

Rodney Smith, a cultivated man and a scholar of theology and philosophy, was driven by a lifelong search for meaning. It was photography that offered him a language through which to express himself.

Describing himself as an 'anxious loner', Smith found comfort in capturing images as a way to 'reconcile the mundane with the ideal', a way to translate his emotions into form, and to shift from being an observer to a participant.

His iconic images capture the world with humour, grace, and optimism. Through his distinctive style, he sharpened perception, bringing order to chaos.

Rodney Smith's photographs astonish, fascinate, and intrigue, leading the observer into poetic realms of reflection. Serene, imaginary places evoke a sense of well-being, inviting viewers to smile and soften, and in that openness, to encounter awe and admiration.

This is how curator Anne Morin describes Rodney Smith's work:

'Every image that Smith produces, with the meticulous precision of a silversmith, is a constantly renewed attempt to recreate that divine harmony and to reach a higher state, if only for a fraction of a second. Every image is ethereal and ecstatic in its workmanship.

(...) Wherever the eye rests on the image, it is immediately seduced by the grace, the refinement, the exquisite blending of forms and counter-forms, the diversity of materials, and the narrative richness that excels in its restraint, its economy and its silence.'

The exhibition is divided into six thematic sections: *La divina proporzione* [*The Divine Proportion*], *Gravità* [*Gravity*], *Spazi eterei* [*Ethereal Spaces*], *Attraverso lo specchio* [*Through the Looking-Glass*], *Il tempo, la luce e la permanenza* [*Time, Light and Permanence*], *Passaggi* [*Passages*].

Most of the works on display are in black and white, reflecting the fact that Smith only began working with colour in 2002.

As he explains it: '45 years and thousands of rolls of film later, I still have this unwavering love for black-and-white film. Although, just as most who knew me thought I never would, I reconsidered, and started some 8 years ago to shoot color as well. It serves a different function for me, and I will talk about this later, but there is nothing to me like the blackness and luxuriant intensity of the black-and-white. It is an abstraction by addition. You see, there is more color in black-and-white than there is in color.'

Yet, once Smith embraced colour and large-format photography, the results were striking.

Rodney Smith's works are now exhibited in museums, galleries, and major private collections around the world.

The upcoming monographic exhibition at Palazzo Roverella, opening on 3 October 2025, offers Italian audiences a rare opportunity to be transported into the enchanted world of Rodney Smith and to discover more about this photographer, an undisputed master of timeless elegance.

A catalogue published by Silvana Editoriale, edited by Anne Morin, with texts by international curators Anne Morin and Susan Bright, and Estate Executive Director Leslie Smolan, accompanies the exhibition.

ANNE MORIN

A graduate of the National School of Photography in Arles and the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Montpellier, she is the director of diChroma photography, a company specialising in international touring exhibitions of photography. She also develops and realises cultural projects in collaboration with prestigious museums and institutions, including Fundación Canal (Madrid), Martin-Gropius-Bau (Berlin), Pushkin National Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow), Musée du Luxembourg, Jeu de Paume (Paris), and Palazzo Ducale (Genoa). Driven by great passion and enthusiasm, Anne Morin works to rediscover artists and photographers. She has curated numerous exhibitions of prestigious photographers and artists, including Berenice Abbott, Antonio Lopez, Vivian Maier, Robert Doisneau, Jessica Lange, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Sandro Miller, Pentti Sammallahti and Margaret Watkins. In 2022, she received the Photo Curator of the Year award at the Lucie Awards (Carnegie Hall, New York) for her work on the Vivian Maier exhibition, *Unseen*, at the Musée du Luxembourg.

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