

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

MING SMITH
A Dream Deferred
18 March – 30 April 2022

In Conversation:
Ming Smith and Hans Ulrich Obrist | 17 March 2022 | 5pm

Private View | 17 March 2022 | 6-8pm



Setting the Stage, Harlem, New York (painted), 1976, c. 2000
oil paint on vintage silver gelatin print, unique, 50.5 x 40.7 cm

Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is pleased to present *A Dream Deferred*, an exhibition of unique vintage prints and rare hand-painted photographs by New York-based artist Ming Smith. This marks the artist's inaugural physical exhibition with the gallery and her first solo show in the UK. Smith's multifaceted practice brings visibility to Black culture through its exploration of the environments and emotional states of her subjects.

The exhibition foregrounds a selection of Smith's previously unseen overpainted photographs. Applying vibrant and energetic marks to the surfaces of her silver gelatin prints, the artist further develops her aesthetic language, imbuing the images with a heightened emotional resonance. In *Pan Pan Lady (Betty)*, 2006, Smith adorns the hat of a wistful elderly woman standing at a diner counter with jewel-like marks, intimately raising her status and further drawing our attention to a life that has not been easily lived. The young man in *Setting the Stage*, 1976, c. 2000, struggles against the elements as he erects a tent for a show. Blue, red and yellow swirls dance atop the print's surface, manifesting the sense of a building storm. In these painted works Smith articulates and extends the lexicon of her photography, using colour to enhance her emotional and universal language.

In dialogue with these works will be a grouping of vintage prints from Smith's *Invisible Man* series (1988–91), the title of which is taken from Ralph Ellison's novel of the same name. Often photographed at night without flash, they are groundbreaking in their experimentations with light, double exposure and blur. Recurring across a series of photographs is the radical Afrobeat artist and multi-instrumentalist Fela Kuti, who energetically dances across the stage with a large ensemble moving behind him as one. The very nature of Kuti's high-tempo performance combined with Smith's slow shutter speed creates images where, at times, her subject is obliterated by light and in others his profile is submerged in shadow. Immortalising this performance with a visual sonority that replicates the freedom of the music being performed, Smith entirely rejects the classical tenet of the photographer's reliance on a still or posing subject. In *Grandmother's Purse*, an African American lady dressed in her 'Sunday Best' tentatively bends down toward two young children, her face in shadow whilst her white lace dress centres the scene. Blurring the boundary between foreground and background, Smith anonymises her subjects, at once shielding them from the white gaze and creating ethereal images that speak to the marginalised experience of African Americans and others from her community.

Other historic photographs from the early 1970s to the late 1990s will also be on view. Amongst them will be portraits of the pioneering photographers Brassai, André Kertész, and James Van Der Zee. Each born in the latter part of the 19th century and a documentarian in his own right, they offered a piercing insight into the

societies in which they lived. Smith's take on them as older men in their own domestic spaces gives a rare and compassionate insight into these three masters.

Capturing Smith's varied experiences from life in Harlem to her travels across America, *A Dream Deferred* exemplifies the artist's ability to intimately record and re-evaluate the collective human experience.

Ends

Notes to Editors

For further press information please contact Hannah Vitos at Rees & Co:
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Ming Smith: A Dream Deferred will be on view Friday 18 March - Saturday 30 April 2022.

Gallery opening hours: Monday-Friday, 10 am-6pm, Saturday 11am-6pm

About Ming Smith

Born in Detroit, Michigan, Ming Smith grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and moved to New York in the early 1970s. There she worked with a wide network of fellow artists, musicians and dancers. She was the first, and for many years the only, woman member of the Kamoinge Workshop, a collective of African American photographers based in New York. The group formed with the aim of challenging negative representations of black communities and to develop photography as an artistic practice. In 1975 she became the first African American woman photographer to have work acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Throughout her career she has travelled extensively, capturing life in America, Africa, Europe and East Asia.

A major survey of Smith's work, *Ming Smith: Feeling the Future*, is currently being organised by the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. Smith will also be included in the forthcoming exhibition, *Just Above Midtown: 1974 to the Present* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Smith was part of *Working Together: The Photographers of the Kamoinge Workshop* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2020-21); *Soul of Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Tate Modern, London (2017); *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2017); *Arthur Jafa: A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions*, Serpentine Galleries, London (2017); *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography*, MoMA, New York (2010).

Ming Smith: An Aperture Monograph, the first comprehensive publication dedicated to Smith, was published in 2020, featuring essays and interviews by Arthur Jafa, Greg Tate, Namwali Serpell and Hans Ulrich Obrist. Last year, Smith was included in the Tate publication *Photography Now: Fifty Pioneers Defining Photography for the Twenty-First Century* by Charlotte Jansen.

Smith's work is held in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Detroit Institute of Arts; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham NC; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, Washington DC; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, Washington DC; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Baltimore Museum of Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.