

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Ming Smith

Painting with Light: The Photography of Ming Smith

21 May 2020 - 25 July 2020

Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is delighted to present *Painting with Light: The Photography of Ming Smith*, a survey of New York-based artist, Ming Smith. The presentation will be available via the newly launched Pippy Houldsworth Gallery houldsworth.viewingrooms.com and the Vortic Collect app from 21 May until 25 July 2020.

Containing works from the start of the 1970s to the present day, including a number of never before seen archival prints, the exhibition explores the painterly quality of Ming Smith's photographic work. From photographs taken in the New York neighbourhoods of Coney Island and Harlem, to the cities of Abidjan, Ivory Coast and Gambela, Ethiopia, the exhibition reflects the diversity of Smith's personal experience, the openness of her perspective and her embrace of subjectivity as a fundamental conceptual choice.

Smith's work draws attention to the physical process of shooting film, using double exposure, slow shutter speeds, hand-tinting and, at times, over-painting. In particular, Smith's use of the blur is a characteristic technique as seen in two of her works depicting spiritual activity. *Sunday Morning Service, Harlem* (1990), and *First Sunday I (Grandmother's Pocketbook)* (1980), evoke a transcendent quality through soft hazy strokes of light and dark. Signifying an intentional rejection of her medium as a form of documentation, the blur highlights a dynamic and reciprocal relationship with her subjects. This technique is also used in a number of images of jazz musicians, capturing their skilled improvisations. Building on her painterly photographic language of black and white, at times Smith applies literal strokes of paint – abstract marks made with vibrant colour heighten or transform the emotional resonance of an image. Rhythmic swathes of blue, yellow and white capture the energy of three young boys in *Trio in Gambela* (1972), whilst daubed red pigment evokes a visceral sense of unease in *America Seen Through Stars and Stripes*, painted (1976). In *Manhattan Parallels red* (1976), a bold stripe of red accentuates the lines of high-rise buildings in an abstract study of line and tone.

The works presented affirm the tenderness, respect and wonder with which Smith approaches each of her subjects, whether mourners at the funeral of dancer, Alvin Ailey, or young families enjoying a funfair. *Jump* (1976) captures a young man enjoying the sheer exhilaration of movement, whilst in *Flower Lady* (1996), a woman wears a decadent hat and matching corsage of colourful handmade paper flowers. A rare self-portrait of the artist nursing her baby son articulates the intimacy that gently permeates her work. Community and family, with a particular focus on black family life, is at the heart of Smith's practice that celebrates its beauty and complexity.

Artist Biography

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 joint aim to challenge negative representations of black communities and to develop photography as an artistic practice. In 1975 she was 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.

The artist's work has been presented in exhibitions including *Soul of Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Tate Modern, London (2017), touring to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, (2018); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2018); *The Broad*, Los Angeles (2019); *De Young Museum*, San Francisco (2020); *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2017); *Arthur Jafa: A Series of Utterly Improbably, Yet Extraordinary Renditions*, Serpentine Galleries, London (2017), touring to Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2019); *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010). A comprehensive monograph will be published by Aperture towards the end of the 2020. Smith will be included in *Just Above Midtown*, Museum of Modern Art New York (2022).

Smith's work is held in the collections of Brooklyn Museum, New York; Detroit Institute of Arts; Philadelphia Museum of Art; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, Washington; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, Washington; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Virginia Museum of Fine