

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
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Press Release

Announcement

Ming Smith: Feeling the Future

May 26–October 1, 2023



Ming Smith, *Red Hot Jazz I*, 1979. Archival pigment print, 24 x 36 inches. Image and work courtesy Ming Smith Studio.

HOUSTON, TX (March 26, 2023) — Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is excited to announce the upcoming exhibition, *Ming Smith: Feeling the Future*, exploring artist Ming Smith’s unparalleled and under-recognized career. *Feeling the Future* is Smith’s first solo exhibition at a major institution to survey her work from the early 1970s through the present. The exhibition highlights Smith’s improvisational and experimental approach to photography, which is grounded in portraiture, and amplifies the heartbeat of Black life in the United States.

Drawn from the full complexity of Smith’s oeuvre, *Feeling the Future* places works from the artist’s five-decades of creation in conversation with one another, and the cultural movements she witnessed and participated in. Exploring themes such as Afrofuturism, Black cultural expression, representation, and social examination, the exhibition offers a glimpse into unperceived moments of life as captured by one of the most profoundly gifted artists of her generation.

#MingSmith
#FeelingtheFuture
#atCAMH

Press Contact

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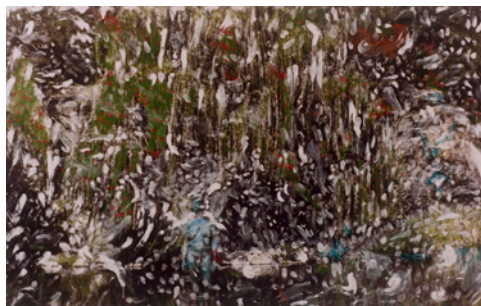
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Ming Smith, *Amen Corner Sisters (Harlem, New York)*, 1977. Archival pigment print, 24 x 26 inches. Image and work courtesy Ming Smith Studio.



Ming Smith, *“Transcendence, Turiya and Ramakrishna,” for Alice Coltrane*, 2006. Archival pigment print, 36 x 46 inches. Image and work courtesy Ming Smith Studio.

Smith’s reflexive approach to photography has been described as elusive, a poetic blurring, which can be seen in the ways she imbues her images with a sense of vibrancy and expression. She describes her practice as a “search for the cosmic by following the light.” For example, long exposures trace light and movement within the frame, causing the picture to become abstracted. And by superimposing images, whether in color or black-and-white, she collapses time, distance, and perspective, referencing existence beyond a single dimension. Exhibition curator James E. Bartlett recognizes these formal and conceptual characteristics as tapping into “root emotions” or individual expressions that connect us to each other.

The exhibition showcases Smith’s expansive use of lens-based media and features her street photography, figurative imagery, portraiture, and abstractions, plus new commissions in experimental film, sound, and installation.

Feeling the Future includes Smith’s most iconic photographs as well as her more recent work. Smith’s early images vibrate with the energy of her subjects—in carefully composed images, often developed or processed using techniques such as frame masking, hand-tinting, and superimposition, she blurs boundaries between the ethereal, tangible, and routine. Smith’s work uniquely embraces her subjects aesthetically and intellectually, through a style that is technically experimental and pointedly focused.

Ming Smith: Feeling the Future is organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and curated by James E. Bartlett. The exhibition was conceived by Janice Bond.

About the Artist

Harlem-based, Detroit-born, Ming Smith attended the famous Howard University, Washington, DC. Smith became a photographer when she was given a camera, and was the first female member to join Kamoinge Workshop, a collective of Black photographers in New York in the 1960s. Smith would go on to be the first Black woman photographer to be included in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art.

Smith initially focused on black-and-white street photography, a format she describes as having the “capacity to catch a moment that would never ever return again, and do it justice.” She has often characterized her work as “celebrating the struggle, the survival and to find grace in it.” Many of Smith’s subjects are well-known Black cultural figures including Nina Simone, Grace Jones, and Alice Coltrane, who all lived in her Harlem neighborhood. Smith cites

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Ming Smith, *Circular Breathing, Hart Leroy Bibbs (Paris)*, 1980. Archival pigment print, 24 x 26 inches. Image and work courtesy Ming Smith Studio.

music, specifically jazz, as being a primary influence on her work. She also likens her work to the blues, saying, “in the art of photography, I’m dealing with light, I’m dealing with all these elements, getting that precise moment. Getting the feeling—to put it simply, these pieces are like the blues.”

As an artist, full recognition for Smith’s work only arrived recently in response to several high-profile exhibitions. She was included in The Museum of Modern Art’s 2010 landmark exhibition, *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography*. She featured prominently in *Working Together: The Photographers of the Kamoinge Workshop*, organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond) and presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, New York) in 2020. Smith was more recently included in *Soul of a Nation* at Tate Modern in London, England (2017), which traveled to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2020). Smith’s work is included in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, New York), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond), the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York, New York), and the National Museum of African American History and Culture (Washington, D.C.).



Ming Smith, *Acid Rain ("Mercy, Mercy Me," Marvin Gaye)*, 1977. Archival pigment print, 24 x 26 inches. Image and work courtesy Ming Smith Studio.

About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally. Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH’s mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH’s programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists’ essential role in society.

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Ming Smith, *Harlem Gardens (Purple)*, 2022. Archival pigment print, 40 x 60 inches. Image and work courtesy Ming Smith Studio.

Support

Major support for *Ming Smith: Feeling the Future* is provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support is provided by Art Dealers Association of America Foundation.

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Andy Warhol

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

Ming Smith: Feeling the Future has been made possible by the patrons, benefactors, and donors to CAMH's Major Exhibition Fund: Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Sissy and Denny Kempner, Dillon Kyle and Sam Lasseter, MD Anderson Foundation, Rea Charitable Trust, The Sarofim Foundation, The Stolbun Family, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is funded in part by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance.



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Free admission for all is generously supported by Mara and Erick Calderon.

CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

General Information

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, in the heart of Houston's Museum District.

Hours

Wed 11AM-6PM
Thu 11AM-9PM
Fri 11AM-6PM
Sat 11AM-6PM
Sun 11AM-6PM

Admission is always free. For more information, visit CAMH.ORG or call 713.284.8250.