

For over thirty years, video/performance/installation artist Michael Smith has built an extensive body of work based on two performance personae: Mike, a hopeful innocent who continually falls victim to trends and fashions outside his reach, and Baby Ikki, an ambiguously aged toddler who follows his impulses down unsupervised and often precipitous paths. Both characters are convenient narrative vehicles for Smith to engage the tragicomic aspects of contemporary culture, teasing out facets of loneliness, consumerism, success and failure, as Mike and Baby Ikki strike out on their next unclear mission.

The quest for youth is a recurring theme in Smith's work that, over the years, has generated many junkets and various attempts to recapture the dreams, ambitions, and firmness of a past time. In his first exhibition with Richard Telles, Smith addresses the pursuit of self-improvement and its unexpected results, intertwining fact and fiction, in a series of works observed from two possible paths of enlightenment: the halls of education and the elusive "Fountain of Youth."

In the main gallery, 53 photographs from Smith's series *Sears Class Portraits* (1999 – present), depict an amalgam of the everyman persona Mike, together with Smith the Artist and Smith the Professor, joined by generations of art students from nearly two decades of teaching. Fitting right in while looking comically out of place in his avuncular role as a mentor of youth, the series chronicles the passage of time in Smith's subtle physical changes, juxtaposed against the perpetual youth of his students. Accompanying the class photos, Smith's video, *Portal Excursion* (2005 – 2007) depicts Mike's own experience as a student, as he attempts to reboot his stagnant life through distance learning: an immersive crash course in Internet surfing, involving the memorization of words and information on every imaginable subject— a Sisyphean search with tantalizing spoils that shift from one terminus to the next.

In the adjoining gallery, Smith's video ballet, *Excuse Me!?!...I'm looking for the "Fountain of Youth"* (2015) offers a more allegorical reflection on the subject of aging. The three-act ballet follows Mike's quest through different times and locales as he searches for the "Fountain of Youth." A tapestry woven after Smith's drawings (some of which are sampled from his actual childhood output) serves as a visual legend and map of the ballet, featuring classical motifs, various fauna, and the story's characters, mirroring the long, circuitous routes of Mike's quest for an improved and youthful self.

Smith has exhibited widely at fine art and popular venues, including museums, galleries, theaters, festivals, nightclubs, children's parties, on television, online, and in the street. His work has been shown internationally at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art,

Museum of Modern Art, New Museum, and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; Glasgow International; Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead; The Tate, South London Gallery, and Hales Gallery, London; Dan Gunn Gallery, Berlin; Ellen De Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam; Le Magasin, Grenoble; Pompidou Center, Paris and Mumok, Vienna; Blanton Museum, Austin and ICA, Philadelphia among others. This summer, Smith will be included in the 2017 Skulptur Projekte Münster. Smith lives and works in Austin and New York

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