

ART A TRIP BACK IN TIME

Photographer focuses on classic sense of elegance using techniques of the past

By Julius Lumsden

Rodney Smith's photography draws the viewer into an extraordinary world: a bygone era that is darkly romantic, whimsical yet ironic, surreal yet classically beautiful.

"Rodney Smith is a realist who puts dreams onto paper," says Jiun Ho. The designer, whose gallery and design studio are called Jiun Ho De Jia (the House of Jiun Ho), chose to exhibit Smith's photographs because it's part of the space's mission of "creative expressions from around the world."

"His photographs look as if they were born out of an earlier era, as they are created with techniques from the past," Ho said.

Smith, who earned a master's of divinity degree from Yale in 1973, explores philosophical and theological themes in his work regarding our place in life. Yet he also proclaims himself to be a "closet optimist." There is a subtle irony and beauty to the work that conveys a yearning, a hope for something better for life.

Q: What is the importance of classicism, in regard to structure and balance in your creative process?

A: It represents something the world needs to be in buoyancy, or state of harmony. That the sense of proportion, scale — all those elements are about a certain resonance, when life is in proportion to the environment and the world around us. I think things become discordant, mean-spirited, vulgar when they lose this sense of proportion and graciousness that classicism aspires to. I perceive classicism to be much more about a state of man.

Q: How important is the concept of time and romance in your work?

A: The popular culture and the art that is reflected in that is much more a social statement about the world currently than it is about life, death and what we stand for as humans. I am interested in a sense of grace, real elegance, style, not in fashion modes, not of the moment, but to call forth attributes in men and woman that are long-

standing and that will never go out of fashion.

Q: Would it be true to say that your aesthetic vision possesses an irony, an element of the surreal and a darkness of mood?

A: That is very astute. If you look at my work, what underlies a lot of it is my sense of melancholia. We are very small creatures in a large world. We have a lot of questions and no answers. I am left with this figure who is isolated and alone in the world. If you have that disposition about where you stand in the world and who we are as humans, I think the resolution is that you have a slightly melancholic perception of life. A wiser, more astute observation of human nature than one which is joyful and shallow. I would love the answers, but am like this figure standing on a precipice looking at the other side unable to make a leap of faith.

Q: Do the images of clocks express the transience of life?

A: Time has always been an interest. I like clocks visually and intellectually. Where we are in time makes me reflect about our being.

Q: About fashion — how does this aesthetic apply to that aspect of your work?

A: I am a 65-year-old man, and



Rodney Smith photo:



**Jiun Ho de Jia presents
Rodney Smith:** Through
Jan. 25. Jiun Ho Gallery,
1180 Folsom St., S.F.
<http://jiunhodejia.com>.

the last vestige of a time when women were perceived differently than today. Women had enormous power of allure, a mystery, grace. They were the better sex. They were adored. Men were vulgar in comparison, and crass. Women were on a pedestal. They brought out the best in men. Grace Kelly, Jackie Onassis, Audrey Hepburn, that era of women held their power, not intrinsically, but they had it, unlike men.

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Rodney Smith, above in a self-portrait, says his sense of melancholia underlies much of his photography. Top: "Saori on Sea Plane Wing, Dominican Republic, 2010."