

**The Museum at FIT FASHION CULTURE Podcast**  
***Rodney Smith: A Leap of Faith***

Event held on September 27, 2023 and edited for this podcast on April 25, 2024.  
For the full conversation with images, watch the [video on demand on YouTube](#).

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*[UPBEAT MUSIC FADES IN]*

**[VALERIE STEELE]**

Hi, I'm Valerie Steele, Director and Chief Curator of The Museum at FIT, the most fashionable museum in New York City.

*[UPBEAT MUSIC CONTINUES]*

**[VALERIE STEELE]**

Welcome to our Fashion Culture Podcast Series, featuring lectures and conversations about fashion.

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**[VALERIE STEELE]**

If you like what you hear, please share your thoughts on social media using the hashtag, #FashionCulture.

*[MUSIC CONTINUES FADES OUT]*

**[TANYA MELENDEZ-ESCALANTE]**

Welcome to The Museum at FIT's Fashion Culture Series. My name is Tanya Melendez-Escalante, and I am Senior Curator of Education and Public Programs. It is my honor to introduce Paul Martineau and David Company who will present the book *Rodney Smith: A Leap of Faith*.

Paul Martineau is curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum. He has organized an array of exhibitions, most notably the international traveling show *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium* for which he won a Lucie and a Global Fine Arts Award. Mr. Martineau has also authored over a dozen books and articles, including *Herb Ritts: L.A. Style* and *Icons of Style: A Century of Fashion Photography*.

David Company is curator at large for the International Center of Photography, New York. His recent exhibitions include *William Klein: YES. Photographs, Paintings, Films 1948-2013, Actual Size! Photography at Life Scale*, and *A Trillion Sunsets: A Century of Image Overload*. All at ICP. His books include *On Photographs*, *A Handful of Dust*, and *Walker Evans: The Magazine Work*.

I ask you to please silence your devices and please join me in welcoming Paul Martineau and David Company.

*[AUDIENCE APPLAUDS]*

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Thank you very much for that generous welcome. And I just wanted to say how pleased I am to be on the stage with David. He's someone that I've looked up to over quite a long time, and he writes excellent books for which he receives very nice awards for.

**[DAVID COMPANY]**

So do you.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU.]**

Oh, thank you. But I haven't won an award yet. Maybe that's to come. Well, before we get started, I wanted to ask who is familiar with Rodney Smith's work? Oh good. And how about people that are familiar with William Klein's work? Alright, we got a lot of fans in the audience. That's excellent.

So what we thought we would do is that I would start off talking a little bit about Rodney Smith and David can talk a little bit about William Klein, and then we'll get into some compare and contrasts for both of these artists.

So the beginnings of Rodney Smith's career in fashion photography. He was coming off of a period in the '80s where he was making corporate portraits of CEOs, environmental portraits that really changed the nature of corporate photography. And the people that were working at the time saw these pictures and realized that he could make fashion pictures, if he could make pictures of men in environmental situations in a landscape then he could do it with fashion.

So a number of the heritage retailers like Brooks Brothers and Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus hired him to start making fashion pictures. And they're very controlled looking, and that's because of his great sense of composition. There's a kind of patriotic feeling to his work in this early period. And there's also the introduction of wit and humor.

And then in 1995, just a couple of years after he got started in fashion, Dennis Freedman, who was the editor of "W" Magazine, decided to hire Smith to illustrate the men's portfolio for the magazine. And they chose, as a location, a historic site where the Shakers had a community. And he made this picture of this gentleman standing in the field of corn. And he has this rigid frontality. It's almost like he's stopped and he's caught in thought, trying to think of a loved one or something else that's very somber. And he has his hat and his hand. And this picture resonates with me in a way. I see paintings like the painting of the *American Gothic* by Grant Wood. It's got that kind of stiff frontality that that painting has as well.

Rodney loved the light and he said the light was the source of his inspiration. The second most important thing was the location, but the first thing was the light.

One of his favorite female models, named Bernadette.. And when Smith-- he searched for his own models and chose them himself. He avoided famous models or celebrities because he felt like that would steal the narrative away from... from him and his picture. He liked models that were mysterious-looking. That were elegant.

And the male models kind of represent all the things that Smith wished he was as a person. He tended to be slightly afraid of people looking at them in a direct way. He was kind of self-conscious and he really liked--he didn't think he was good looking. And so he really liked handsome models that were courageous and willing and athletic and willing to do feats of daring, like jump off of buildings.

He's trained the camera and focused in on the architecture, not on the figure who's leaping. So he's kind of like this calligraphic flourish that's like kind of going across the sky in the picture where you have all this wonderful detail in the architecture. It's a really fabulous picture. The model will forever be caught between the two buildings in that place where there's nothing but air around his feet. It's magical.

And then of course, as the '90s rolled on, the magazine started to have more money to send people on international travel. If you remember, in the early '90s, there was a recession that made all the budgets tighter, but by this time they started sending Smith to various locations in Europe. And his pictures took on a more European flavor, rather than the original American flavor that they had earlier. And he's photographing for the "W Portfolio" again.

Dennis Freedman was so happy with what he did the first time that he had him reprise his role for the Men's Portfolio. And they did a series of pictures at the Parc de Sceaux just outside of Paris. And at the end of the shoot, Smith saw one of his models coming down the staircase, and he had everything packed up. And he saw this picture and realized it would be good. So he halted everything and made this picture of "Gary Descending Staircase". And this is what a lot of photographers who work for magazines or on commission do, is after they've made the pictures that--or have been commissioned, then they take time to make their own work, separate from the ones that were commissioned.

And of course, being in Europe also helped bring about Smith's interest in Surrealism. The movement that started in the 1920s that had to do with the subconscious, the dream world, the absurd, the idea that machines are gonna take over our lives. It has a kind of menacing aspect.

And all the pictures were black and white. It wasn't until 2002 that Smith decided to try color photography. And part of his resistance had to do with the fact that previously color photographs really were considered the province of commercial photographers. And Smith didn't like the output. He didn't care for the Polaroid or the Chromogenic print, in part, because those pictures,

those kinds of prints aren't lasting. But he also wasn't a big fan of the paper. So the kind of coloration of those printmaking processes.

So it was in 2002 when they received an Epson SureColor printer. And Smith's assistant, Patricia Barrett began to test the printer and show Smith all the ways it could be put to use. The fact that he could decide on his own margins, and own size, and he could choose the type of paper that went in the machine, that he had a lot of options with this printer. And so Smith created a little studio in his garage and invited Bernadette to the garage to make these pictures. And they're very different from the ones that you normally see because I think he thought, "If I'm gonna experiment, I'm gonna go all the way. I'm gonna do something totally different than what I normally do." And these are influenced by the fashion photographer Sarah Moon.

And you know, he didn't restrict himself to just using color pictures after he started using color film. He went back and forth as he saw the need.

And then we can turn over and speak a little bit about Klein.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Thank you, Paul, that was fascinating. Just before I move to that, there's something about all of Rodney Smith's work that has this very suspended sense of time. I always have to check the dates.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And even when I'm looking at the dates, I'm thinking, "Well, that could be 30 years before or 40 years before."

What's your feeling about that with Smith's work, 'cause as we'll see with Klein, they're very much of their moment.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Of their time.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Well, if we go back to the '80s, we remember that that was a period of conspicuous spending and spectacle. And everything was about power lunches, big hair, big shoulders, kind of the look-at-me decade and the '90s, we had the—a recession and we had minimalism taking over fashion. You can think of the slip dress. You can think of the rotation away from very athletic models to waifs like Kate Moss, and the big hair going down to very, very short cuts.

So we have this total change towards something different. And one of the things that started happening, the admixture of drugs, the drug scene, and also the grunge movement in music from the Pacific Northwest is the advent and the rise of heroin chic, where you have rail thin models in sickly makeup, in very disheveled environments. So this was a direction that Smith just—it was opposite of Smith's style completely.

It was also the opposite of these heritage brands. So there was a return to the past and there was a kind of sentimentalism for past styles. So that's what you see in those early pictures from the 90s.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I like this pairing... because there's a different disposition about Klein, a different sensibility somehow. I wouldn't say he was a kind of a bad boy of fashion or any cliché like that, but he was definitely a rule breaker and bender. He'd seen that models in Vogue were—I think it was John Szarkowski from Museum of Modern Art who said that the models in Vogue in the '50s looked like ballet dancers who had retired early and married well.

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Kind of cruel, but a little bit true.

And that was the kind of background that Klein inherited, yeah. Like Smith, Klein was not particularly happy in the studio. Just like the energy and the spontaneity of being outside had never really intended to be a fashion photographer.

In fact, it was in Paris actually—He was born on the edge of Harlem, 1926, but really wanted to go to Paris and was there from 1948, was an abstract painter and an abstract darkroom artist.

Not using negatives, just using light on paper. Had an exhibition of these in 1954 in Paris that was seen by Alexander Lieberman, art director of Vogue USA, who was an artist himself. He was there to see the fashion shows. Met Klein and said, "Come back to New York and work at—for me at Vogue."

Klein said, "What am I gonna do? I've never even thought about being a fashion photographer."

And Lieberman said, "You'll pick it up. You have a kind of graphic sensibility, you'll learn how to do it."

And Klein said, "I'll do it if you give me a little account at the local photography store, and I can make pictures on the street at the same time." So Klein is not exclusively a fashion photographer by any means. He's switching between that and shooting out on the streets.

And actually Klein tells the story of just being very bored in the studio with the models and says, "Let's go up on the roof, bring the changing mirrors and we'll improvise." So he was often involving the models in coming up with poses. There's often a kind of irony or something slightly mocking of the whole business going on in his work.

Klein saw himself as a sort of inventor and problem solver, problem inventor in a way. Set yourself a little challenge. He got bored very easily and was often looking for some kind of difficulty or some kind of invention that might keep him interested.

Klein would often come up with an idea and would propose it to Lieberman. And sometimes Lieberman would say yes, and sometimes he would say no. And it took Klein a while to figure it out. And what he figured out was, as long as he showed the texture and the line of the garment, it really didn't matter what else was going on in the shot.

*[DAVID CHUCKLES]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

So through all of this kind of restless invention, just keep an eye on the garment. It's Vogue, right? You've got to do that. And Lieberman didn't mind, you know, whatever pyrotechnics or reinventions were going on within the shot as long as the garments were shown. But it's interesting to think about—I don't, I really don't think fashion photography is ever completely separate from other kinds of photography.

And often the energy or the interest comes in the overlaps between them. He's photographing facades of buildings in Paris, printing those facades large, bringing them into the studio and then having the models pose in front of them. So the models are out of scale with the backgrounds, but still the same thing. The line and the texture of the garments are really well shown.

Nice to look at the layouts because of course it's the bane of photographers' lives. You know, they make these beautiful compositions in their...through the viewfinder or on the ground glass screen. And then they are not the art directors of the magazines. They're not doing the layout. So they're often getting cropped in one way or another. Klein always made a point, if he ever exhibited or published a print, to show it in full frame.

Klein always wished that he worked with Alexey Brodovitch at Harper's Bazaar, who was actually a much more inventive graphic designer and art director. I don't think that would've actually served Klein. There's so much energy going on in his pictures I think he needs quite a sober page layout to balance that.

That's my view, not his.

He moved out of fashion photography, really at the end of the '60s, concentrated much more on filmmaking, making books of his documentary pictures and was lured back later in life.

So at this point he's, well, he is born in...

*[DAVID MUMBLES]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I'm just doing the maths quickly. So he's 83 at this point and still shooting with the energy of a, you know, 25-year-old.

And maybe here we can start talking about what we build to talk about that. I think the title was "What Makes a Fashion Photo Art."

*[DAVID CHUCKLES]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I don't have any answer to that, but it's an interesting question and I'm prepared to have a go at it, but I don't have any answer in the last instance. But yes, Paul, what does make a fashion photo art?

*[PAUL CHUCKLES]*

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Well, we can eliminate a lot of pictures.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Hmm.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

It's just like when you look at paintings, there are only a certain number of them, and it's a small number of them, that are masterpieces. It's the same thing with fashion photography, that you have to look at a lot of fashion pictures to find the ones that are artistic. The ones that have legs.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

The ones that resonate with you over and over again and have a certain timeless quality about them.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah, I was thinking about the timeless thing 'cause I asked you about that in relation to Rodney's work. I always... there's a remark that—good god, I'm gonna get pretentious now,

Baudelaire, Charles Baudelaire often talked about the idea of the modern—art in the modern era would be a combination of the ephemeral and the eternal somehow together...

*[DAVID SCOFFS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Easier said than done. But photography obviously has a certain kind of access to, you know, the immediacy of the present. But then there may be a sensibility that wants to somehow transcend that or somehow extend the life of the image, hopefully. You know, I mean, fashion is ephemeral. So the idea of a fashion photograph being art, and we think of art as something that maybe lasts.

I like your point about we can eliminate, eliminate a lot of things because most photography in any field is mediocre. Like by definition...

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

It's average.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

But the interesting thing is fashion photography has had enough of a population of people that wanted to make work that was better than the context or the assignment demanded.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Somehow.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

That there was, and you know, sometimes it has to do with the power of the photographer themselves, that they have a certain amount of power to resist what the editor is asking them to do. So they can do exactly what they want to do and get it published. But that only comes for the people at the top.



**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

After they become famous.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes, yeah. It's a difficult place to make art from.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

You could say, but you have to pay the bills and, you know, it's only been possible to be an Art Photographer, capital A, capital P for the last generation or so, and for not very many.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And so, anyone with an artistic ambition in photography was either independently wealthy to begin with...

*[DAVID CHUCKLES]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

or they were working in some kind of applied field with a certain ambition.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Or making things on the side while, tell me about, tell me about Rodney. You mentioned him, like he's doing one for the commission and then one for himself.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Well, that was just one example of him doing what a lot of photographers do is when the commission is done, then you have the location, you have the models, you have the dresses, you have the makeup people, you might as well make a few on the side.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Right. Yeah, yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Herb Ritts used to do that a lot too.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes. The Klein ones are, the Klein images that he ended up having in his own of that are in his books and in his exhibitions are often very slight variance because, you know, Vogue was often, or still is, quite tenacious about holding on—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...to the material that makes it to the pages. So often when I was doing my research on Klein, I'd noticed that the one in the magazine and the one in Klein's own books are slightly different somehow. Not always, but a lot of the time. How do you feel about just seeing fashion image make that transition from page to wall and in frames? What do you—I mean, I think it can just still be art on the page.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I'd like to see it on the page as well as on the wall.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Right.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

But there's something about a finely made photographic image. It's image and it's object at the same time. So there's a way to appreciate that, that's different from the photo mechanical reproduction that you see in a magazine.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]** Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

And you really do have to see it in the real to appreciate all that goes into that.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

The craft of making a print.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah. It's interesting in relation to someone like Guy Bourdin, French photographer who did work a lot in America and in France for Vogue and other fashion-related commissions. He found

the page was enough. I mean, he had enormous artistic ambition, but no great desire to come off the page and onto the wall. You know, never did a book in his own time.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

If he had exhibitions, they were actually of his paintings. They weren't of his photos. There's something quite honorable about--

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...that, somehow.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

He was happy to stay in his own lane.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

And he made the switch very early from black and white to color photography.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes, maybe that put him off making the print for exhibitions.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Maybe.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I mean, I think they were so well designed for the page, his pictures that maybe that was just enough. But it's true that if the fashion magazine is a lane, then it's--well apart from people who look like you and I who are interested in old magazines, most of the time they get thrown away. Which means a lot of the great culture gets thrown away.

And I think a lot of photographers wanted, if they wanted any kind of posterity, even in a less than pompous sense, I think they knew they had to get off the magazine page.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And if it wasn't onto the wall, maybe into a book of their own work or something like that.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

'Cause, wasn't it Avedon that said that fashion was the F word of the museum...

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Environment?

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Something like that.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And or magazines maybe.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yeah.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I mean the interest I always think of—I mean we still live in a culture, don't we? That's very hierarchical that puts...

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yeah.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...that puts museums up here and, you know, galleries here and books here and magazines here and the internet is like the,

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

the mud of culture. But we know that good photography gets made in seriously, it gets made seriously in any of those—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Contexts.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And this was something that museums have had to contend with around photography. That it has to look beyond work that's made for the museum.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And so you won't see a—you'll hardly see a fashion exhibition now that doesn't also include the magazines or the books or some signal that the museum wasn't the primary context for the work. And the work has made that journey to the museum from somewhere else. Same with documentary photography or photojournalism, you know, museums now know that they have to show, you know, where—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Life Magazine.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Life Magazine.

*[PAUL LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...where the pictures were first published, which is all to the good I think. 'cause it just...

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Oh yes,

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

It does deepen the understanding of the life of pictures.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

And how they get out and how they circulate.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah, yes, yeah. Having done the book, Paul, of Rodney Smith's work books have a way of feeling quite definitive. So, were you forming the Smith canon in the making of that book? Is that a burden that falls upon you when you do a book like that?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

It does and I think I was reacting to the books that had been done before. That there seemed to be a certain group of pictures that were occurring over and over in the books. And I wanted to expand on that and create some new favorite pictures for people. Also just to expand the, you know, what people could learn or see in the work as well. Different aspects of Smith that hadn't been really touched upon previously. And one of the things was also making it more accessible to a wider audience.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

So that was part of the goal, telling the whole story. It had never been really told in a book in it from start to finish.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

So that's kind of what I saw as my goal.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I'm often frustrated by the fact that photographers— oh, we've got questions from you. I'll just ask one last one to Paul,

*[PAUL CHUCKLES]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...then we get onto the real questions. I notice very often that photographers get reduced to a small number of images, almost like a kind of greatest hits, which often serves them very poorly. That there's...there's much more to their work

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And it often happens just after a photographer has died. So Smith died in twenty...?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Sixteen.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

2016, yeah. And I noticed immediately when Klein died last year, that the obituaries and the tributes were carrying the same few photos. And I think that's probably inevitable. But there, I think there's a certain obligation on people like you and I to kind of keep that door open and keep a sense of the work—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...wide, if it is wide.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Because it doesn't really serve us very well to just have it reduced to the six or seven.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right. A recent project that I did on Imogen Cunningham, I was really happy because one of my colleagues in the museum said, "Wow, you really expanded the way I think about Imogen and her work."

So that's, you know, one of the greatest compliments that I had received because we always think of, you know, the Magnolia Blossom and there's a few other pictures, the Tulip and that's it.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I'm curious, what do you have in your lap?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Oh, okay.

*[PAPER RUSTLES]*

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Is there still much pushback against fashion photography as art? What do you think?

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes, I would hope so. My feeling is that photography is always going to have an unresolved relation to art. And that's where the energy is. I know there are great defenders and champions

of the medium as Art, capital A and I understand that. But sometimes I think be careful what you wish for.

If it was just unproblematically art, I think a certain kind of energy and frisson would be lost. Most photographs that people see, the overwhelming number don't have much to do with art. They have a kind of aesthetic charge 'cause they're images. So all images do. But my feeling is that it's always going to be a kind of in/out, unresolved question. And I'm okay with that.

What do you think about that one?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU, *SCOFFING*]**

I think that it's really about choosing.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Right.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

The right pictures to be in and then everything else can be out.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I don't mind choosing.

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

No choosing is important and there is no, it sounds kind of old fashioned to say, but there is no art without judgment.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And we can argue what the judgments would need to be and they change, the criteria change, but they never the idea of judgment of saying this one and not that one—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

But I'm...



**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

...never really goes away.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Have you seen museums that just do not collect fashion photography because they think that none of it's art? I have seen some departments that are like that. Or, you know, refusal to have a fashion photography show 'cause they don't think it's art.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I think I'd argue it, I think I can picture myself arguing it both ways.

So if a museum didn't collect it on the basis that it wouldn't art, I'd get offended by that and I'd be pushing for it. But somehow at the same time, yeah I do feel it's conflicted. And that is the source of what makes it interesting. I mean there are certain photographers that definitely operate in the field of art and only in the field of art and might quote or relate to fashion photography in the kind of commercial applied sense. And there it gets interesting. But I think that's, I think all photography in art has a relation to photography outside of art. If you're a painter, art is your only context pretty much. Unless you're, I dunno, a set decorator or something like that. Which-

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Or you're Thomas Kinkade.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah. Yeah.

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Okay. But generally, but with photography, that's not the case. It's messier.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes. Let's see, let's –

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Should I read some while you're?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Okay.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

We can divide them 'cause there's so many.

*[DAVID CHUCKLES]*

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Do you think that Klein or Smith had a period when they were most creative?

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Klein is unusual in being good over a long period of time. I think the years that he was really making the work, fashion work, at Vogue were from around '56 to '67. And I think it's extraordinary. But I think he put that same energy into other things. I think if he kept going with fashion, they'd have maybe been just as good. I don't think he tapered off.

Other people might have other views about that. It's a really interesting question. John Szarkowski who was Head of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, talked about photographers often having a hot streak when they were great. You know, that their best work may be made in a very short period of time and may be made when they're quite young, which is chilling

*[DAVID LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

for anyone who's a photographer. It's not entirely—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Well, there is Julia Margaret Cameron.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Who didn't start working until she was 48.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

But, but Szarkowski would say she's, she does her best work when she's young to the medium.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I don't necessarily mean young in years.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Right.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

But young to the medium.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Can I read one?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes, go ahead.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

In the highly competitive fashion world, what can you recommend for a new photographer?

Be better than anyone else.

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

And I would recommend that the person look to the past and learn what has been done in the past so that they don't think they're inventing something new when they're not.

Offentimes we have people come to our study room and they show us their work and they say, "Oh, this is the first time anyone's ever done this."

And I'm like, "No, they were doing that in the 1860s."

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

I take the opposite view of that. I, as a teacher, I ask myself a lot what photographers should know. And I know that a lot of the great work, particularly in the 20th century, was made by photographers who hadn't seen much photography. They'd seen a few things. They'd not seen much. And you could say that about artists, generally. You know, all those -isms moved so fast because they were largely ignorant of what was going on. Now we can't escape the sheer volume of the past of the arts.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

It's true, there are huge volume of pictures to look at.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah, but I still think really good work can be made without looking, without knowing a great deal. If you have a really interesting disposition towards the world and to other people and you have an affection for appearance— it's a Jeff Wall phrase, which I like, "Affection for appearance"

good things can happen. I don't know that you need to know all those things. I take your point. But it's—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I like the idea of having a big visual vocabulary and it might not be conscious.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

But that there's unconscious things that you see out in the world and it rings a bell and then you find a picture based on that happenstance. Which is your favorite or top three favorites of Mr. Smith's photographs?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

That's a hard question to answer. Certainly any of the ones I put on view today

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

...would be among my favorites. 'cause I had to choose them from the book of, you know, a hundred-fifty pictures.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

There's a part two to this question.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Oh, go ahead.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Do you prefer his black and white work or his color?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I like both...I like both.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Why did Rodney start doing workshops? Did he learn from them? Which was his favorite model to work with?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Well, I think he wanted to have an impact on his students, the students that he was teaching. And he became quite celebrated as a teacher actually, that he has lots of students that still follow his work and are probably in the audience at least, you know, if not physically, but virtually, you know, watching this discussion, I did have the opportunity to talk to some of them.

And we had really interesting discussions about his teaching methods. That he made a safe place for people to explore their inner issues in order to really make pictures that had something authentic about themselves in them. Pictures that really mattered to them, rather than ones that were just kind of, "Oh, you should stand this far back and you should make sure everything ends up in the frame and use this kind of filter." Ones that were from the emotional depths.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

This is a multi-part. This is a multi-part question. All of Rodney Smith's photographs seem to have a sense of perfection about them. Was he a perfectionist?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Oh yes.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

And how much planning time did he spend on each photograph?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Without question.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Wait, wait, wait.

**[PAUL CHUCKLES]**

How many photographs in his archives are unseen? How involved was he in the details of styling each photograph? Leave the archive one aside, but let's talk about him as a perfectionist and the—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Oh, super perfectionist. And his favorite word was "no." Whereas Klein's favorite word was, "yes."

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

It's true.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Rodney Smith's favorite word was "no." And it was because he didn't want to do anything that he didn't feel measured up to this perfectionist stripe that he had.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

So in the book, it's really fascinating, you do see some of the contact sheets.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Yes, And you do see variance of things.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes. But was it really actually clear to him which was the one? Which was the best?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I don't think he took a long—I don't think he had a problem choosing the one that he wanted. I think he did that. Sometimes he would run to his printer and say, "Oh, this isn't good enough."

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

"I thought I was doing a great job at the shoot and now it's all shit." You know, "It's not good. It's a—" you know, having these doubts afterward. But once the print was made, then he could see that he had done a good job. And he had chosen the right print.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Just to finish up. The other part of that was how many photographs in his archives are unseen?

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I think there's a lot of photographs there that are unseen. I had to, because I did this book during COVID, I had to do it remotely. And the archive was very good about sending me all the information that I needed, all the research, all the images, they're extremely organized and they had a good running start because Smith was very organized and perfectionistic about how he kept his things. But there are numbers of pictures that are on contact sheets that were never printed because they weren't his selects. And there were also selects that were printed that just no one has seen yet for whatever reason.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah, related to that, just to finish up, there's an interesting question about what happens to a photographer posthumously, because often the official— there's often not such a thing as an official body of work. Like what's a work and what isn't? There's just all the negatives and all the files or whatever. And often subsequent people come along and they choose other things. They may choose things that maybe the photographer wouldn't have chosen or were overlooked at the time. What, what do you feel about this issue about—

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

It depends—

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

... the work being shaped posthumously.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

I think it depends. Some artists have, you know, taken action in order to prevent that from happening. Like Brett Weston burned all his negatives so that no one else could print them. And

it's very interesting to note that he printed his own father's negatives before and after he died. So then to burn your own is sending a message: I don't even want my son to be printing my work.

And in other cases, like with Mapplethorpe, the estate continues to make prints as long as they're fulfilling the additions that were never fulfilled. And they use a match print that was approved during Mapplethorpe's lifetime to make the modern print. So it's almost like every case is its own...

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yeah.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

situation.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Yes. We've reached cocktail hour. Everybody, I don't suppose there are cocktails, but there will be a signing. Paul will sign his book for you if you buy it.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

And I always say, if you buy it, I'll sign it, so...

*[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]*

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

It's good that it's that way.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Even if I'm here til midnight, I'll keep on signing.

**[DAVID CAMPANY]**

Great, thanks Paul. Thanks everyone for coming.

**[PAUL MARTINEAU]**

Thank you so much, David.

**[TANYA MELENDEZ-ESCALANTE]**

Thank you.

*[AUDIENCE APPLAUDS]*

*[MODERN MUSIC FADES IN AND THEN OUT]*