Announcement

*Ming Smith: Feeling the Future*

May 26–October 1, 2023

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.
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
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.”


**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.
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.

*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.

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