

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LUKE SMALLEY RETROSPECTIVE

April 2 – May 9, 2015

Opening reception:
Thursday, April 2, 2015
6.00 – 8.00 p.m.

ClampArt is proud to present a retrospective exhibition of photographs by Luke Smalley (1955-2009). At the age of 53, Smalley passed away far too young, but he left behind three major bodies of work, in addition to four impressive monographs. The show at ClampArt will include examples from Smalley's first black-and-white series, "Gymnasium," in addition to his two color collections—"Exercise at Home" and "Sunday Drive."

All of Luke Smalley's work pairs what has been called "a coolly minimalist aesthetic with a retro nostalgia." Many early images were inspired by yearbooks and fitness manuals from the beginning of the 20th century.



After completing a degree at Pepperdine University—tellingly, in sports medicine—Smalley became increasingly interested in fine art (while earning money from modeling and working as a personal trainer). Ian Hannett writes: "He soon created a short film based on male swimmers, which he took unannounced to [the book publisher] Jack Woody sometime in the early 1980s. Woody's company, Twin Palms Publishers/Twelvetrees Press, then located in Pasadena, had recently printed a monograph for artist Bruce Weber, to which Smalley strongly related and greatly admired. Smalley was a quiet, relaxed individual who was easy to be around, and he and Woody soon struck up a casual friendship. Woody began taking the young artist to various Hollywood parties where he met many celebrities of the day, including people such as Herb Ritts, who also would serve as later inspiration."

It was around the time of the start of his friendship with Jack Woody that Smalley formulated his idea for "Gymnasium," which would take the next fifteen years to hone and complete. A series of black-and-white gelatin silver prints depicting young, male athletes set in an ambiguous time and place, the series was ultimately exhibited in New York City in 2001 to follow the recent release of the monograph from Twin Palms. The book and subsequent show launched the artist's fine art career, and eventually paved the way to numerous editorial and commercial projects for years to come.

British menswear designer Kim Jones was one of those people who took notice of the *Gymnasium* book. First seeing it at the Mercer Hotel in SoHo in New York City, Jones immediately fell in love with Smalley's aesthetic and soon hired him to begin shooting his clothing line. The collaboration ultimately culminated in Smalley's second book in 2004 titled simply *Kim Jones*, which is now a rare and valuable collectible.

Four years later came Smalley's second major fine art series, "Exercise at Home," which was exhibited both on the East and West Coasts to coincide with the release of a second Twin Palms publication—the artist's third book. This marked the artist's initial foray into color, but followed "Gymnasium" in its themes of "adolescent growing pains acted out under the guise of earnest athleticism." Teenagers compete in simple but strange competitions in order to establish their standing within the group. As with the previous black-and-white series, Smalley painstakingly coordinated the creation of the work to the extent of constructing his own athletic equipment and other props, in addition to simple costumes. It was now Smalley's intent to continue publishing artist books in small editions every few years, which could then be coordinated with gallery exhibitions of photographic prints, thus augmenting his ongoing commercial career.

Finally, in 2009 came the completion of Smalley's final body of work, "Sunday Drive." In this highly narrative series, Smalley tells the story of three gorgeous young women who mysteriously primp and preen, often drifting into dramatic episodes of "exaggerated ennui." The threesome eventually piles into a vintage, butter-yellow convertible for a lovely summer drive. It soon becomes clear that the girls are on their way to the state penitentiary to visit their boyfriends—incarcerated for crimes unknown. The second half of "Sunday Drive" consists of photographs of the attractive young men killing time in the slammer waiting for their sweethearts to arrive. Consistent with all his earlier work, Smalley successfully fabricates a world of an ambiguous bygone era. His whimsical and sexy images toy with the intersection of fashion and societal ideals of femininity and masculinity.

The work was again published by Twin Palms, representing Smalley's fourth book. Its release coincided with an exhibition at ClampArt in New York City in the fall of 2009, but sadly the artist passed away in May of that year before seeing the success of his project.

For more information and images please contact Brian Paul Clamp, Director, or see www.clampart.com. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Image: © Luke Smalley/Smalley Partnership, "Push Ball," 2007, Digital C-print.