



Rodney Smith, “Reed Floating Above Giant Top Hat With Umbrella, Amenia, New York,” 2014. Rodney Smith, via Staley-Wise, New York

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in September

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Want to see new art in New York this weekend? Check out Jane Dickson’s Times Square scenes at the East Village or defiant portraits of aging women in Chelsea. And don’t miss Rodney Smith’s fashion photography in SoHo.

SOHO

Rodney Smith

Through Nov. 4. Staley-Wise Gallery, 100 Crosby Street, Manhattan; 212 966-6223, staleywise.com.

Top hats, walking umbrellas, topiary hedges, lorgnettes: These were a few of Rodney Smith’s favorite things. Reflecting his upper-crust background and aesthetic preference for striking geometric forms, they appear repeatedly in his witty, elegant fashion photography.

Showcased at [Staley-Wise Gallery](#) in beautiful large posthumous prints and in a sumptuous new [monograph](#) supervised by Paul Martineau, curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, Smith’s fashion pictures, most of them taken in the ’90s and aughts, offered an alternative to the sex-and-violence sensationalism that juiced fashion photography at that time.

Instead of drawing inspiration from soft-core pornography, Smith found it in classics of cinema (a shot of a man chasing or being chased by a biplane is a quote from Hitchcock’s “North by Northwest”) and painting (a rear view of a nude woman who has taken off the white gown that is the putative focal point of the fashion shot is a riff on Ingres’s “Grande Odalisque”).

Smith, who died in 2016, ensured that every detail was to his liking. The placement of an umbrella-toting man between the gap of the World Trade towers in the distance, the architecture of a model’s wide-brimmed hat and flared skirt against a line of conically pruned conifers — it was all perfect. His greatest inspiration was the wistful whimsy of Magritte. A man wearing a top hat and floating in air above a giant top hat (made of wood and black fabric) in an Italianate topiary garden is worthy of the Surrealist master. *ARTHUR LUBOW*