

GREENE NAFTALI

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Michael Smith

Excuse me?!...I'm looking for the "Fountain of Youth"

June 25 – August 14, 2015

Greene Naftali is pleased to announce its first solo exhibition of new work by Michael Smith, a seminal video, performance, and installation artist.

For over 35 years, Smith has developed an incisive practice that engages the tragicomic aspects of American culture and the art world, teasing out facets of loneliness, consumerism, and the personal measures of success and failure in each. Smith traverses these subjects through the lens of his performance personae Mike, the quintessential Everyman who continually falls victim to trends outside his grasp, and Baby Ikki, an impetuous toddler with a five o'clock shadow.

In an exhibition centered on an age-old theme, Smith chronicles Mike and Baby Ikki's latest exploits as they embark on a quest for the Fountain of Youth. After having experienced a range of milestone events—from his earliest existence as a lone figure in underwear, to becoming an aspiring entrepreneur, to hosting his own TV show—Mike now dreams of retirement, with its promise of new hobbies, travel, and self-improvement. A range of media details this journey, including video, sculpture, photos, drawings, and a tapestry. The gallery is additionally transformed into a faux-medieval foyer flanked by Sudoku-patterned pennons and monitors that depict Mike as he searches his pockets for glasses, keys, and ear buds, actions resembling a one-man lost-and-found rather than guards at attention.

Smith also debuts *Excuse Me?!...I'm looking for the "Fountain of Youth,"* a ballet choreographed by Stephen Mills and performed by Ballet Austin apprentices, with music by Mayo Thompson. The story is similar to one told around the office water cooler, with Mike's younger coworkers representing the beginning and he the end, but everyone meeting in the Middle Ages for a refill at the Fountain of Youth. Smith's instinct for popular genres dovetails with Mike's slightly out-of-date tastes in his first foray into ballet, as he makes an honest effort to keep up with the art world's *au courant* experimentation in dance. Additional chapters of Mike's quest continue in two related photo series that document his junkets to the Old and New Worlds: the Fountain of Youth Archeological Park in Florida, and KidZania, a theme park where kids can step into the roles of adults. Also on view is a quiet tableau that appears through a transparent scrim as a timeline of projected dates count up from 1951, the year of Smith's birth, and a lone disco ball spins over pools of colored light—a coda to the theme of aging.

Michael Smith lives and works in Brooklyn, New York and Austin, Texas. Recent solo exhibitions include *Nuit Blanche*, Toronto (2014); *Tramway*, Glasgow International (2014); *Art Basel Parcours*, Basel (2013); *Hales Gallery*, London (2013); *Dan Gunn Gallery*, Berlin (2012); *Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art*, Gateshead, UK (2011); *Ellen de Bruijn Projects*, Amsterdam (2010); *SculptureCenter*, Long Island City (2009); *Galleria Emi Fontana*, Milan (2009); *ICA*, Philadelphia (2008); and *Blanton Museum of Art*, Austin (2007). His work has been exhibited in numerous group shows, including *Toys Redux – On Play and Critique*, Migros Museum, Zurich (2015); *The Radiants*, Bortolami Gallery, New York (2015); *Performing Franklin Furnace*, Participant Inc., New York (2015); *Rituals of Rented Island*, Whitney Museum, New York (2013); *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009); *2008 Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum (2008); and *Standby: No Technical Difficulties*, MoMA, New York (2004). His work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Paley Center for Media in New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Centro de Arte Contemporânea Inhotim, Brazil.