

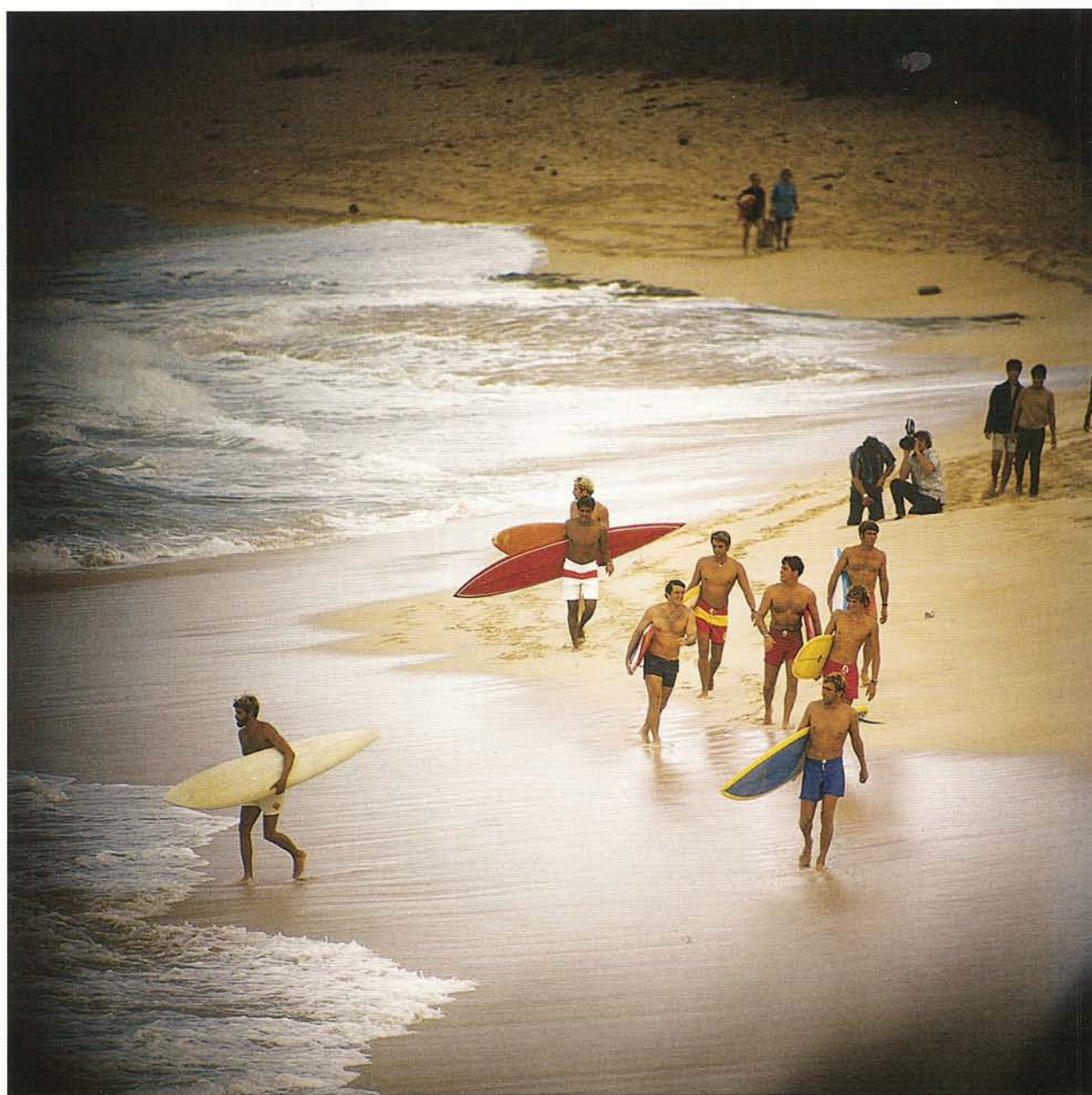
THE COLLECTOR

Investing in art and design

Endless Summer

Waxing nostalgic with vintage surf photography

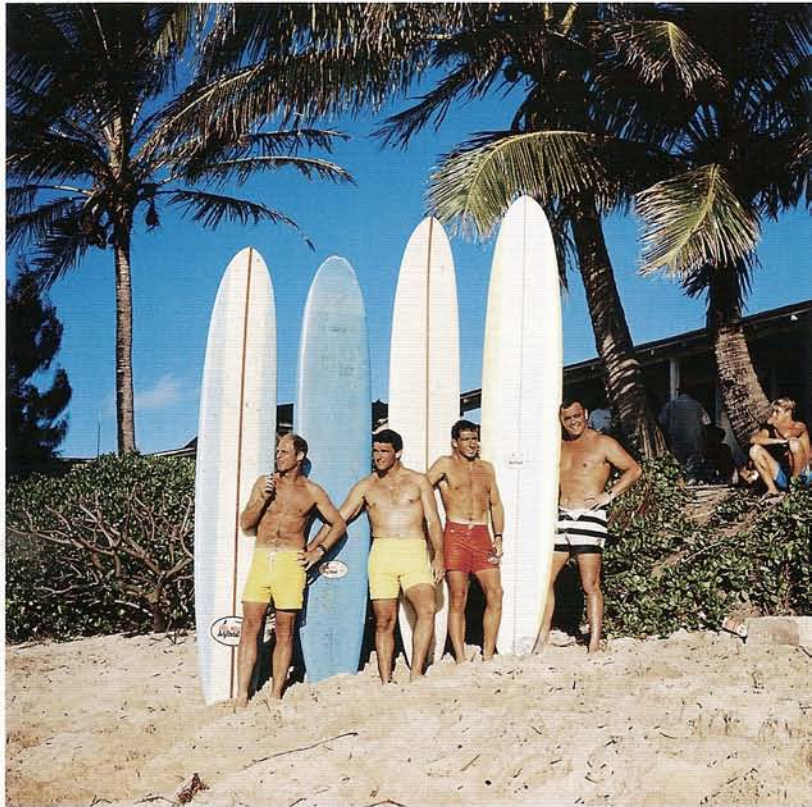
By Samantha Brooks



REGARDLESS OF your interest or skill in surfing, the lure of surf photography is universal—it is not about a sport, it is about a lifestyle. When Jim Heimann, an editor at Taschen, put together a book on the photographs of LeRoy Grannis, one of the preeminent surfing photographers from the 1960s, the work elevated the genre from documentation to fine art. Once regarded as crude and amateurish, surfing images have enjoyed a reevaluation as a legitimate art. “Just a few years ago, surf photography was an unclaimed market,” says Shannon Richardson, associate director of the Los Angeles gallery M+B, which began representing Grannis just over a year ago on Heimann’s recommendation (Heimann is a friend of the gallery’s owner, Benjamin Trigano). “However, when we had the show last summer, everyone from surfers in board shorts to men in business suits were lining up outside the gallery waiting to get in. People who weren’t normally photography collectors were buying them. It’s something everyone wants a piece of.”

The photographs, mostly taken during the 1960s in Southern California, coincide with the birth of the surfing movement. “LeRoy started photographing surfers the year after *Gidget* came out. It had suddenly become this huge trend, but he was pretty much the only one who caught images like this,” says Heimann. Unlike other photographers in that era—of which there are few—instead of just capturing generic wave after wave, Grannis photographed the lifestyle on the shore, too. “Luckily, I had enough sense to turn the camera around and shoot the surfers and the businesses,” says the self-taught Grannis, who estimates that he took between 29,000 and 39,000 images during the 1960s and ’70s. “At the time, I wasn’t thinking that this was something that was going to make me any money. It was just a hobby. Occasionally I sold photographs to *Surfer Magazine* or to the surfers themselves, but not for a lot of money—my biggest year was in 1968 when I made about \$7,000.”

At M+B, Grannis’ prints—which have been resized to a large scale of 36-by-36 inches—now fetch between \$3,000 and \$9,000 for



LeRoy Grannis is considered the preeminent surf photographer. Opposite: *Duke Kahanamoku Invitational Finalists, Sunset Beach, 1968*. “This was the biggest surfing contest of its time, and everyone in the photo was surfing’s *crème de la crème*,” says Shannon Richardson of M+B gallery, which represents Grannis. “All nine prints sold out within five months.” Above: *Greg Noll Surf Team at the Duke Kahanamoku Invitational, Sunset Beach, 1966*, was acquired by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Below: *Club Surfing Contest, San Onofre, 1963*.



LEROY GRANNIS/COURTESY M+B



Jeff Divine captured much surf culture in the '70s. Above: *Wind 'n Sea*, 1972. "This is David Rullo in La Jolla, Calif.," Divine says. "He was known for his style. Every time he went out, you knew he would do something creative with the wave." Above right: *Peace*, 1979. Below: *V Land*, 1974. "This photo epitomizes the slang of the '70s. It's like a bull's-eye shot of what that era was about," says Divine.



the 36 different shots, which are limited to editions of just nine. The 2006 Taschen book *LeRoy Grannis: Surf Photography of the 1960s and 1970s* is also running in a limited edition—only 600 copies will be available in the U.S.—and is priced at \$400. "As soon as I saw LeRoy's work, I knew there was potential," says Heimann, who came across Grannis' work when a friend was putting together a surf music compilation for Rhino Records. "This isn't your run-of-the-mill stuff. It's like looking at a time capsule."

Coming of age in the 1970s, Jeff Divine—



who is also represented by M+B and has a show in July—joins Grannis as one of the few photographers to capture the culture associated with the era. “Back then the surfing world was full of rebels, people on the cutting edge,” says Divine, who has long worked as a photographer and photo editor for publications such as *Surfer Magazine* and *Surfer’s Journal*. “Now it’s a multibillion-dollar industry—anyone from anywhere can come out and take a lesson. But back then, you had to have skills and an attitude in order to be accepted on the beach.” Beyond documenting a trend, Divine’s work evokes memories for the viewers, taking them back to a time of long hair, puka-shell necklaces and psychedelic-print surfboards.

Whereas Grannis’ work has innocence, Divine’s has attitude. One of his most well-known shots, which also graces the cover of his book *Surfing Photographs from the Seventies Taken By Jeff Divine*, depicts a surfer giving

the peace sign. “He had just dropped in on another surfer and stolen his wave,” says Divine. “He knew it was a lousy thing to do, but he wanted to show off.” While Divine’s book is priced at \$40, a fraction of Grannis’, his prints at M+B will also start around \$3,000.

Art Brewer complements Grannis and Divine with his strong archive of 1970s photographs. Another surfer who started taking pictures of his friends at the beach as a hobby, Brewer went on to apprentice with photographers and took workshops with Ansel Adams—something that has given his work a kind of landscape quality. Brewer still photographs surfers and shows his work in galleries, but he has also explored other genres, too, such as travel photography and portraiture. “The surfing world has changed a lot since I started out 35 years ago. Back then, it wasn’t about being a pro—competitions were more like a group of friends getting together on a Sunday afternoon,” says

Brewer. “Now, it’s about having your face on the cover of a magazine. Everything is contest-driven. Before, things were sponsored by board manufacturers—now you see beer and car companies taking over the events.”

With most of surfing’s innocence lost, modern surf photography captures a different point of view. As surfing has gained popularity—essentially transforming from a hobby into a sport—the photography of it has evolved as well. While there is undoubtedly a market for money shots of Laird Hamilton and Kelly Slater, there is a now-thicker line that divides sports photography and fine-art photography. Formally trained at the Pratt Institute, Michael Dweck—whose work focuses on the Montauk area of New York from the late 1980s to 2002—has never had his work featured in a surfing magazine. Instead of capturing big names on big waves, Dweck has immortalized a different kind of experience. “Surfing hit the East Coast later



Gerry Lopez at Pipeline, 1973, by Art Brewer. “This image was taken at the beginning of Lopez’s reign as the undisputed best surfer at one of the most treacherous waves on Earth,” Brewer says. “A lot of people are drawn to the photograph for its beauty, but they also appreciate the historical context.”



Above left: A pair of sepia snapshots by prewar photographer Don James, 1937 Palos Verdes and Jack Quigg at San Onofre on a Weekend Camp-out, date unknown. Above right: David and Pam in *Their Caddy*, 2002, by Michael Dweck. Below: Dweck's *Spidey and His Best Friend Joe*, 2002.



than it did the West Coast. There was still a kind of untouched purity in Montauk's surf community when I started out—it's the kind of place where everyone has a tab at the grocery store that they pay for at the end of the summer and your phone number is only four digits long because everyone has the same prefix," says Dweck, whose book, *The End*, includes 280 images of the community. "But at the same time, I saw all of that coming to an inevitable end." The title of Dweck's book refers to Montauk being located at the end of Long Island, but it also refers to an end of an era. Nearly all of the images are shot in black and white, giving everything an ageless feel. "Not much has changed there over the years. A swimsuit is a swimsuit, and a lot of the kids there choose to drive older cars," says Dweck. "It's hard to date a lot of the images. This kind of youth is timeless."

More thought out and less spontaneous than the work of Grannis, Divine and Brewer, Dweck's images are not as raw or candid. Ironically, Dweck cites inspiration from photographer Don James, who mostly shot in the 1930s and '40s. "James was basically taking pictures of his friends having fun on the beach and surfing before it became



Resources

LeRoy Grannis

760.438.5284

www.photosgrannis.com

Represented by M+B

310.550.0050, www.mbfala.com

Jeff Divine

Represented by M+B

310.550.0050

Art Brewer

949.661.8930

www.artbrewer.com

Represented by Jean Gardner

323.464.2492, www.jgaonline.com

Michael Dweck

212.898.0136

www.michaeldweck.com

Represented by Staley Wise Gallery

212.966.6223, www.staleywise.com

and Fahey/Klein, 323.934.2250

www.faheykleingallery.com

Don James

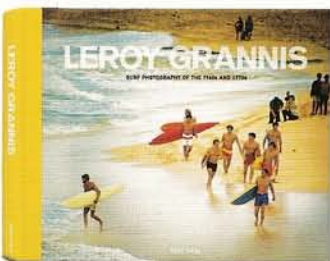
Represented by Fahey/Klein

323.934.2250

www.faheykleingallery.com

and Danziger Gallery, 212.629.6778

www.danzigerprojects.com



Above left: LeRoy Grannis' *Midget Farrelly Surfing Shore Break, Makaha, 1968*. "All nine of these sold out the first night of the show," says Richardson. Above: *Surfing, 2002*, by Michael Dweck. Below left: The cover of Taschen's book, *LeRoy Grannis: Surf Photography of the 1960s and 1970s*.

hip. It's like looking at a scrapbook—it's very sweet," says James Gilbert, gallery manager at Fahey/Klein Gallery in Los Angeles, which represents both James and Dweck. "Both photographers have captured a kind of energetic youthfulness, but where James' photos imply nostalgia, Dweck's imply a kind of sexiness. Oddly enough though, they pretty much attract the same kind of buyer."

James' work, which is priced from \$800 to \$3,000, is kept mostly in small proportions, like snapshots. Instead of being printed from negatives, the photographs are scans from

the originals, a common practice with older images. Because of their age, they aren't as crisp or professional looking, but the imperfections are half of their charm.

In contrast, Dweck's images require a kind of choreography that in turn leads to a more polished look—a method that has awarded him shows at Sotheby's and the Louvre. "While there is definitely a range in the kind of surfing photography available now, people are all attracted to it for the same reason—it's a fantasy," says Dweck. "Everyone wants to live the life of the carefree surfer." 