





At 88, LeRoy Grannis is getting a second wind. Not only was there a major solo exhibition of his photographs in Los Angeles last spring, his work is also on the cover of Taschen's *Surfing: Vintage Surfing Graphics*. In fact, next summer, Taschen will publish a 400-page Grannis monograph, the first it has ever devoted to a surf photographer.

Grannis, or *Granny*, as he's known in the surf community, has a unique, grainy visual style that manages to convey a sense of nostalgia, even for those who weren't there. Helmet-haired women in the sand, surfboards providing spikes of color on a bland beach, the uniformity in skin color of the surfers' bodies, the gush of adrenalin expressed in a freeze-framed face, painted and patched vans, the geometry of stacked boards in a shady shed. More than just sport-oriented, Grannis's eye manages to capture architectural poses, elegance, the simple grandeur of light and shade, the things so rarely associated with modern surfing and its clichéd "dude" mentality.

Fellow photographer Tony Friedkin writing in *The Surfer's Journal* (which published a book of Grannis's work in 1998) called him the "Henri Cartier-Bresson of surf photography." It's true that a similar talent is shared with the late French photographer — capturing non-specific moments of everyday life with an artist's eye for detail and composition.

Grannis, born in Hermosa Beach, CA, in 1917, took up surf photography as a hobby in 1960 at the suggestion of a family doctor. An auspicious start, it happened to coincide with the golden era of surfing, the 60s and 70s, a time before technologically innovative wetsuits and corporate sponsorship killed the inherently romantic, rebellious, and typically Californian thrill. Tutored in his craft by "Doc" Ball, a trail-blazing surf photographer of the 30s and 40s, Grannis's work soon appeared in magazines, and he became the sport's leading documentarian. His impact is highlighted by the fact that after only six years, he was included into the International Surfing Hall of Fame in 1966.

Grannis's pre-eminent place in the history of surfing was highlighted by the inclusion of his work in Stacy Peralta's acclaimed 2004 documentary *Riding Giants*. Last July in Paris, Los Angeles-based designer Shawn Collins presented his surf-inspired clothing alongside a selection of Grannis's photographs. As for *Granny*, he may have had to give up surfing two years ago after hip surgery, but he's still working. And judging from the turnout in Los Angeles for the opening of MB Fine Art's *Birth of a Culture: 60s & 70s Surf Photography by LeRoy Grannis*, one thing is sure: his surf is up. *Karl Treacy*