

Boxing Promoter Don King photographed for Forbes Magazine on March 27, 2006 at fight in Miami, Florida

★ Brian Smith ★ Celebrating Art & the Human Spirit

By Lynne Eodice





A dedicated supporter of the arts, Brian Smith's bold portraits of celebrities, executives and athletes have appeared in hundreds of publications such as *Sports Illustrated*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Time*, *Forbes* and *British GQ*. Five years after graduating from the University of Missouri Smith won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the Olympic games in Los Angeles, and was a finalist for a Pulitzer for his images of Haiti in turmoil. Several members of the Creative Coalition recently took Smith's book *Art & Soul* to Congress and the White House to lobby successfully for increased funding for the arts.

Connecting

While on the swim team in high school Smith noticed that the sports editor of the local paper had to shoot his own photos.

Top: Steve Potolsky; **Bottom:** Triathlete Fashion photographed in Key Biscayne, Florida



"I approached him, showed him some of the stuff I was doing, and he hired me on the spot," Smith recalls.

During his senior year in high school, he heard about an internship at the *Des Moines Register*. "Their chief photographer pulled me aside and said he liked my images, but said if I wanted to be a photojournalist, he told me to go out and photograph 50 people in a way that revealed something about their personalities," he says. "It's probably the greatest learning experience that I've ever had."

Smith soon discovered that he really liked connecting with people one-on-one, opposed to just shooting events with a long telephoto lenses. Today, he shoots a lot of portraiture that combines some action or activity—a kind of "active portrait," as he describes it.

After high school, Smith continued his education as a photojournalism student at the venerable University of Missouri. In addition to learning photography, this well-rounded program included courses in news writing, editing and advertising.

After graduation, Smith went to work for *The Times-Picayune* in New Orleans. Then, one of the people for whom he had interned in college moved on to *The Orange County Register* in California and sent Smith copies of the paper. "It was a photographer's dream newspaper," he recalls. "They ran photos really large and had beautiful color reproduction." He worked



Richard Branson photographed on Necker Island, BVI for a *Virgin Galactic* story in *Time*.

he relates, adding that this past year has been one of many cutbacks in art programs. He and Sony are working toward a book on this project. Smith hopes that it will speak to all people who have children in school who are taking art, "whether it's photography, drama or painting." Says Smith, "We want these programs to continue."

Having completed so many thrilling and high profile projects, one wonders what Smith's favorite photo shoot has been. "I've had a very blessed life," he admits. "I've had so many wonderful experiences through the years." Several that stand out are the two Olympic games he's covered, as well as taking 13 trips to Haiti during the country's governmental changes. He says that his one-on-one portraits include great moments too numerous to mention. "It's hard to top going out on a boat on Christmas Eve morning with Richard Branson for a *Time* magazine story on Virgin Galactic, and photographing Branson wearing a spacesuit in the middle of the Caribbean. Then again, we had a delightful shoot with actress Ann Hathaway, who showed up with cupcakes for the entire crew. So you get the idea why it's hard to choose just one," he says.

"What's so rewarding to me is the opportunity to photograph people from every industry and from all walks of life," says Smith. "We once photographed Chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan in Washington, D.C., then flew out to Miami to photograph rap artist DMX. It gives you a better understanding of humanity than you might get from any other job."

A Slice of Americana

Smith's endeavors include an ongoing project photographing burlesque dancers. "Back in 1994 I was watching CNN, and Dixie Evans came on the screen," he says. "She was known as the Marilyn Monroe of burlesque." She agreed to be photographed, and Smith recalls that he and his wife spent a magical afternoon with this woman. As they were packing up their photo equipment, Dixie said, "It's a shame you can't come back in a month, because all my friends will be here."

Smith has returned many times since to photograph the burlesque dancers and to attend the reunions that Dixie has held. "A

for the *Register* for four years and won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the 1984 summer Olympic games in Los Angeles. Three years later he was again a finalist for a Pulitzer for his images of the turmoil in Haiti shot for *The Miami Herald*. "I spent the first 10 years of my career as a newspaper photographer," he says, "In a way, this was really my graduate studies program."

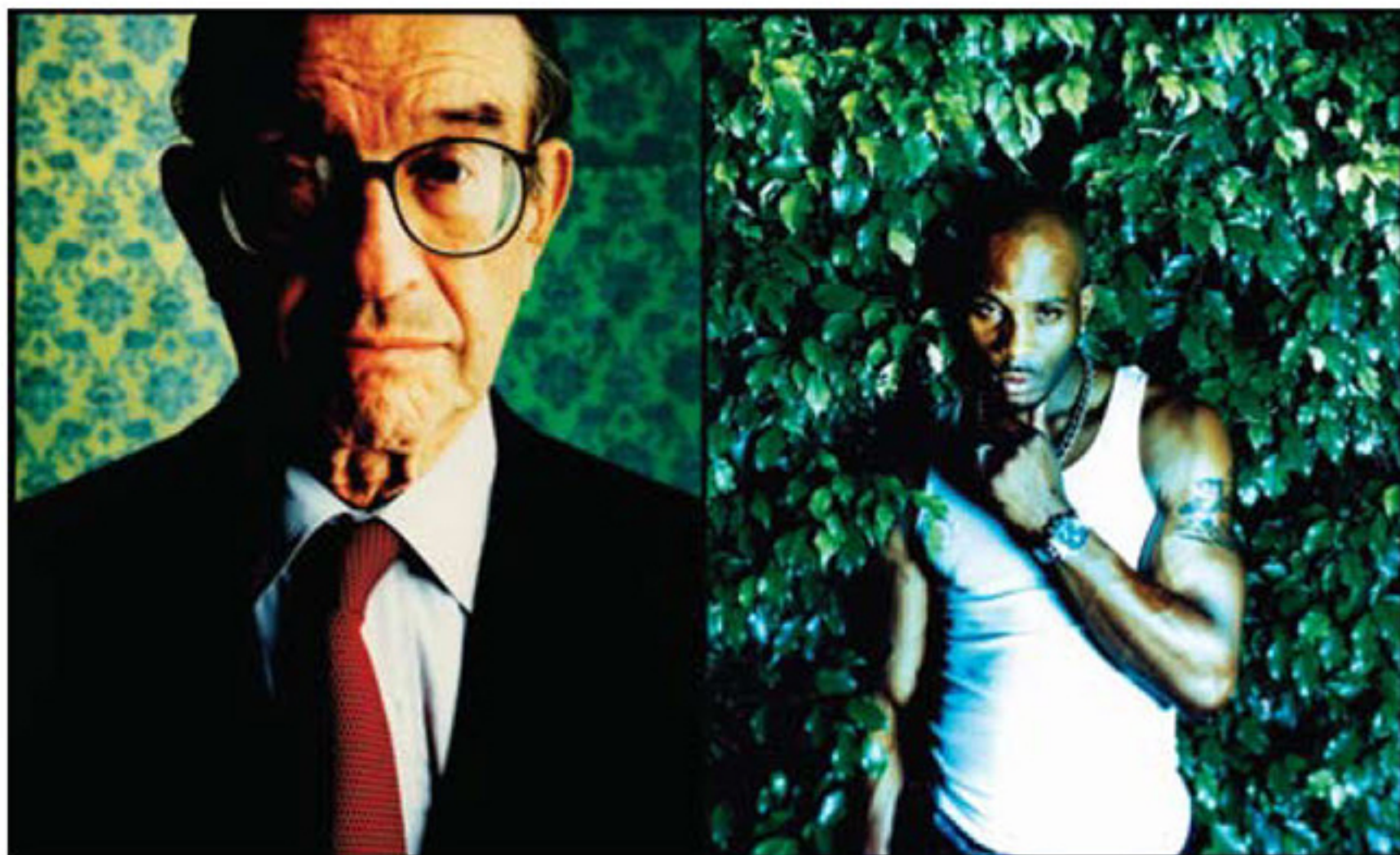
During that time he also began shooting freelance assignments for magazines such as *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, *GQ*, *Fortune* and *Sports Illustrated*. "During my free time and weekends, I would fly to the Bahamas and back, and then work the three to midnight shift at *The Miami Herald*." Although it was a very taxing schedule, he enjoyed the variety for a while. "For magazines, I was shooting mostly portraiture, but for newspapers, I was photographing primarily sports action and covering political turmoil like the unrest in Haiti. It was the best of both worlds."

One lesson he learned was the importance of putting the same effort into all jobs, whether it was for a newspaper or *Rolling Stone*. "You should treat every job as though it's your dream job or dream client," Smith remarks. "Make the most of every opportunity that you've got!" He built a great body of work during this time and emphasizes, "I really think this is how you move on to the next level."

Documenting the Arts

Today, Smith shoots a lot of editorial and advertising work, and his remarkable images appear in several books. He's currently working with The Creative Coalition on *Art & Soul*, a celebrity advocacy project that's supported by Sony. So far, he's photographed over 200 celebrities, who are also writing their thoughts about how the entertainment industry has impacted their lives in a meaningful way. "It gives them a voice in telling how the arts are important in our society,"





Top: Alan Greenspan and DMX

Bottom: Legendary Burlesque dancer Dixie Evans, known as the "Marilyn Monroe of Burlesque" photographed at "Exotic World" the strippers museum she runs in Helendale, California on March 20, 1993

lot of the legendary dancers were in their 60s and 70s," he says. "I was looking at some of their early publicity shots and wondered why nobody else was documenting these women." He also wanted to capture a bit of Americana that was disappearing. A couple of years ago, Dixie moved to Las Vegas, and so did the reunions. "I discovered that burlesque hasn't died out," he observes. "There were young performers that were very faithful to the acts that the women from the '40s, '50s and '60s were doing." Smith says that this has been one of the most rewarding and fun projects he's worked on. As with *Art & Soul*, he's hoping to do a book of his burlesque images. "In many ways, both projects are a celebration of the arts."

With a Little Help From His Friends

For the past five years, Smith has served as the president of Editorial Photographers, an organization of 2000 top magazine photographers and newspaper photojournalists. Smith describes EP as "some of the first voices in the industry pushing for increased rates for editorial photography." The group has also awarded student grants to emerging college photographers. Although people get into photography for its creativity, Smith emphasizes the importance of staying commercially viable, giving a lot of credit to the Sony Artisan in Imagery program, which is run by Kayla Lindquist.

But Smith doesn't need to look too far from home to recognize his most important collaborator: "Most of all, I couldn't do what I'm doing today without being fortunate to have the greatest wife in the world,"

he says of Fazia, who has worked with him for nearly 19 years as a stylist and makeup artist. "She always brings a great, aesthetic eye to the shoots."

Whether they're celebrities or the common man in front of his lens, Brian Smith works well with all of them. His enthusiasm for photographing people from all walks of life and his love of the arts shines through in

his imagery. As he's previously stated, he's got the greatest job in the world. "My worst days as a photographer might be the greatest days in the lives of many people."

See more of Brian Smith's work at www.briansmith.com



Formerly the features editor for Petersen's PHOTO-graphic magazine, Lynne is a frequent contributor to various imaging publications. She is the author of a how-to photography book titled *Photos That Inspire* Photoworkshop and currently teaches an online course for BetterPhoto.com called "Learning to Shoot Inspiring Images." Learn more about Lynne at www.eodiceimages.com.

Brian Smith's Camera Bag:

- Two Sony Alpha 900 DSLR bodies
 - Sony Zeiss 24-70mm f/2.8, 85mm f/1.4, 135mm f/1.8, 16-35mm f/2.8, Sony 100mm Macro and 70-400mm G lenses
 - Profoto 7A & 7B, Profoto Acute 2400R, 1200R and 600B strobes.
- "I light everything that I shoot. More often than not, it's with a single strobe combined with ambient light."



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