

FAHEY / KLEIN GALLERY

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

The School of Los Angeles **Herb Ritts, Greg Gorman, and Matthew Rolston**

October 1 through November 28, 2026
Exhibition Reception: Thursday, October 1st - 7pm to 9pm
Artist Talk: Saturday, October 3rd - 2pm to 4pm

Fahey/Klein Gallery is proud to present **The School of Los Angeles**, an exhibition examining seminal work by photographers **Herb Ritts, Greg Gorman, and Matthew Rolston**, three artists who took root in Southern California in the late 1970s and developed distinct approaches to photographing personalities. Together, they reimagined the traditions of glamour and portraiture and created a visual language that continues to influence how fame, aspiration, identity, and beauty are pictured today.

The School of Los Angeles, a term used by Charlie Churchward, author and former Vanity Fair and Vogue design director, asks whether this shared moment deserves recognition as a distinct artistic movement, one that emerged in the late 1970s and reached its maturity throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Churchward described that “their rise (**Ritts, Gorman, and Rolston**) marked a significant shift in the imaging of celebrity.” What connected the three was not a uniform aesthetic, but a shared place, generation, creative community, and artistic challenge.

Ritts, Gorman, and Rolston inherited an artistic challenge that had existed for centuries: how does an artist transform an individual into an icon?

Throughout history, great portrait makers became sought after not simply for their ability to record a likeness, but for their ability to transform their subjects into something larger than themselves. Religious painters used light, symmetry, scale, and symbolism to communicate divinity. Court painters used costume, setting, posture, and gesture to project authority and power. **Ritts, Gorman, and Rolston** belong to this tradition. At the height of their careers, celebrities sought them out precisely because each photographer offered a distinctive way of being seen.

Los Angeles was more than the setting for this movement; it was the creative environment that made it possible. By the late 1970s, a new generation of actors, musicians, stylists, designers, and image-makers were living and working there. **Ritts, Gorman, and Rolston** knew the emerging stars, the creative collaborators around them, and the extraordinary locations Los Angeles provided. They lived and breathed the culture they photographed.

Their significance lies not simply in whom they photographed, but in the unmistakable authorship they brought to those encounters. Like the great portrait makers who preceded them, their individual visions became part of why their subjects sought them out.

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Together, these artists reveal three complementary approaches to creating the late twentieth-century icon: **Ritts** idealized, **Gorman** revealed, and **Rolston** transformed.

Herb Ritts: Through classical form, sculptural posing, simplified backgrounds, geometry, and California light, Ritts stripped away the ordinary and transformed his subjects into archetypes. Bodies became sculpture, celebrities became symbols, and contemporary figures could appear almost removed from time. His unmistakable vision of strength, sensuality, beauty, and elegance became a language of aspiration unto itself.

Greg Gorman: Through controlled light, closeness, expression, and an unusually intimate relationship with his subjects, Gorman sought the personality beneath the public image. Rather than making the celebrity more distant, he brought the viewer closer, creating portraits in which vulnerability, wit, sexuality, and psychological presence became sources of iconic power.

Matthew Rolston: From a postmodern perspective, Rolston treated the celebrity portrait as a constructed image rather than a transparent record of identity. Through theatrical lighting, costume, cinematic staging, historical references, and fantasy, he combined the visual codes of Hollywood, art history, fashion, and popular culture. Embracing artifice as both subject and method, Rolston transformed glamour into performance and the portrait into a space where identity could be staged, borrowed, and reinvented.

Andy Warhol & *Interview* magazine provided an important bridge to this distinct Southern California artistic movement. As a new generation of stars emerged in Los Angeles, Warhol recognized the potential of the young **Ritts**, **Gorman**, and **Rolston** as icon-makers, seeking them out not only for their access to this world, but for their distinctive abilities to transform its stars into icons. Warhol was fascinated throughout his career with the creation of icons, his *Screen Tests* deconstructed celebrity portraiture, stripping it down to a subject, a camera, and time. Through *Interview* magazine, he reconstructed celebrity through glamour, personality, style, and photography.

Their photographs circulated through magazines, advertising, album covers, music videos, fashion, television, and film, allowing three highly individual artistic visions to become part of a shared visual culture. That economic system has changed dramatically in the digital age, but the visual language has survived. Contemporary photographers, celebrities, influencers, and brands continue to draw upon the idealization, intimacy, glamour, and transformation in visual culture through the images of **Ritts**, **Gorman**, and **Rolston**.

The School of Los Angeles, rather than revisiting three extraordinary careers in isolation, proposes a reconsideration of **Ritts**, **Gorman**, and **Rolston**. They are exceptional artists whose individual practices collectively defined a particular moment in Los Angeles and in the history of photography. They inherited one of art's oldest challenges and gave it a distinctly late twentieth-century Los Angeles form.

Press Photographs & Press Materials Are Available Upon Request.

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