



Matthew Rolston at Fahey/Klein Gallery

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp says Oscar week is an ideal time to appreciate celebrity portraiture of Rolston's Hollywood Royale

It is a cliché that L.A. does indeed have seasons: fires, floods, earthquakes and the Academy Awards. We are in that last season this week and one art gallery in particular has made note.



Madonna as Marlene, Los Angeles, 1986.
© Matthew Rolston. Courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery

Fahey/Klein Gallery in Hollywood, known for its long-term support of photographers associated with glamour, beauty and celebrity, is showing a survey of pictures by Matthew Rolston.

The show reveals an artist inspired initially by George Hurrell who, in the 1920s and 1930s, used strategic lighting to emphasize the lustrous skin and high cheekbones of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio's biggest stars.

Rolston, however, carefully honed a contemporary edge in his pictures, borrowing from the past to enliven the present. For instance, he posed Madonna in clothing and set design based on Josef von Sternberg's earlier portrait of Marlene Dietrich from the Paramount film *Morocco*. By playing with the history of glamour photography, Rolston knowingly operates in our post-modern realm, quoting from familiar or obscure sources to build an image that operates on multiple layers.

An L.A. native, Rolston came of age at a time when glamour photography was on the wane. He remembers Hollywood hotspots like Chasen's and Perino's but coming of age in the 1970s, after graduating from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Rolston looked for work in New York. Andy Warhol gave him his first assignment. He photographed young director Stephen Spielberg for *Interview* in 1977, which turned out to be a launching pad. One of his most supportive early subjects was Michael Jackson, who commissioned a regal portrait of himself as the King of Pop.



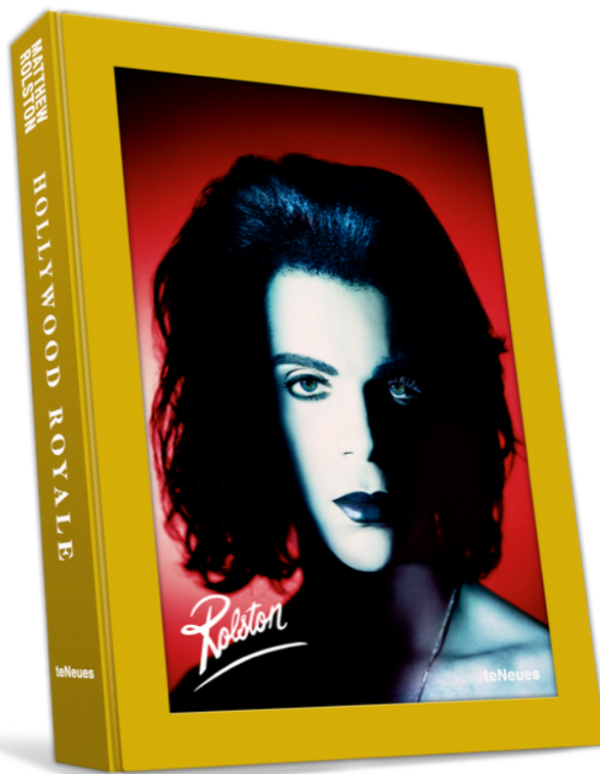
Michael Jackson, *King*, Los Angeles, 1985.
© Matthew Rolston. Courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery

Gender fluidity is a buzzy term these days but there is little doubt that Rolston was playing with sexual identity from the outset. Though known for enhancing beauty and sexuality — Cybill Shepherd lounging in a white bathing suit, Anna Nicole Smith in a white fur with a white kitten, Sly Stallone outfitted for the polo field — Rolston staged exacting pictures of Madonna and Drew Barrymore in men's garb, Prince as a long-haired psychedelic deity in lipstick and eyeliner.



Drew Barrymore, *Portrait as a Boy*, Los Angeles, 1985.
© Matthew Rolston. Courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery

That portrait of Prince is the cover of Rolston's lavish new monograph, *Hollywood Royale: Out of the School of Los Angeles*, a compendium of his greatest hits from the 1980's published by teNeues. hollywoodroyale.com. The book examines Rolston's sophisticated but not slavish appreciation of celebrity photography in the distant and recent past. It also provides an opportunity to spend more time with the pictures, which anyone would relish.



Hollywood Royale: Out of the School of Los Angeles