

# 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

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.”



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*.

