

from the RODNEY SMITH *archive*



Pamela With Pearls, Snedens Landing, New York, 1991, 20" x 20", Archival Print

Don't Go Breaking My Heart

Sam Pettengill, Rodney's printer and assistant in the 1990's, talks about the relentless pursuit of craft.

Rodney and I were put together by his publisher Nan Talese because I was friends with her daughter, Pamela, in college.

He knew I'd worked for an offset printer in Connecticut that used this antiquated method called dry-trap printing, where you put down one color over another and build it up into many layers. That sense of craft was something we shared.

He understood right away that there was a kindred spirit, but working out how to get there—getting things right for him—that took some time.

When I came to his house for the interview it was under construction. The plans for the darkroom were ready to go, but the sink wasn't installed and the plumbing still needed to be done, so it was a while before I was actually printing.

But once the darkroom was finished it was brutal.

I would put in long, long days. And at the end of the day, he would just tear up the prints that weren't up to snuff. That happened for a good long time. I needed to make things over and over and over again to figure out how to make them look a particular way.


He never complained a bit about the materials I was going through. I'm really grateful for that, because I learned about actively making prints the way they should be made.

Any artist knows if you can make it look effortless, then you've done your job. Everything is in balance and nothing needs to be changed. It took a couple of years until I felt like I was there, but it was a very gratifying feeling of

accomplishment to earn that trust.

It tears your heart out when it's happening, but that was the real gift he gave me in the end.

To listen to curator Paul Martineau's analysis of this photo, click [here](#).



A SMALL
PART *of a*
LONG
STORY

A collection of oral histories from the Rodney Smith archive