

ROE ETHRIDGE

Sensible Shoes

November 14, 2025 – Decemebr 10, 2026

In *Sensible Shoes*, American artist Roe Ethridge (b. 1969, Miami, FL) turns his lens toward the slippery overlap between the ordinary and the staged, the intimate and the commercial. Known for dissolving the boundaries between fine art and editorial photography, Ethridge presents his forth solo exhibition at Mai 36 Galerie, a new body of work that unfolds as a quietly humorous yet incisive reflection on contemporary image culture.

Born in Miami, Ethridge received a BFA from the Atlanta College of Art in 1995 and moved to New York City two years later where he began working as a commercial photographer. Over the past two decades, Ethridge has developed a practice that operates simultaneously inside and outside the worlds of advertising, fashion, and art. His images, ranging from still lifes and portraits to casual snapshots and polished magazine commissions, are continually recycled and re-contextualized, blurring distinctions between professional assignment and personal archive. The result is a visual language that feels at once familiar and strangely off-kilter: glossy yet tender, ironic yet sincere.

The title of the show originates from a line Ethridge wrote in a sketchbook in 1998–99: *Best foot forward in a sensible shoe*. “It wasn’t a colloquial saying I’d heard or something my mother used to say,” he recalls, “but it sounded like one.” The phrase captures a peculiar tone, “a feeling,” as Ethridge recalls, “that made me feel both proud and embarrassed for being middle class and suburban.” This tension, between pride and awkwardness, between aspiration, persistence and banality, runs through the works on view.

Many works in *Sensible Shoes* began in commercial settings, where accident and art direction meet. A self-portrait emerged when a scheduled model canceled and Ethridge stepped in; others, like the Hermès Kelly, originated from a meticulously planned shoot for Palmer magazine. ...However because it was shot at a thrift store in Palm Beach the juxtaposition of a cheap yellow beanbag with a the luxury hand bag was a spontaneous, unplanned gesture.

Across these shifting contexts, Ethridge’s ability to move fluidly between impulse and construction, lies at the heart of his practice. Putting one foot in front of the other, he continues his investigation into the way photographs move through the world: how they accrue, shed, and re-acquire meaning as they circulate. Everyday objects and gestures appear alongside fragments of editorial work, producing unexpected encounters between beauty and mundanity. Each image seems to hover between authenticity and performance, revealing the constructed nature of both commercial imagery and private life.

Ethridge’s work has been exhibited internationally, among others at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Tate Modern (London) as well as Le Consortium (Dijon) and has been featured in the Whitney Biennial (2008) and New Photography 2010 at MoMA. His 2022 monograph *American Polychronic* (MACK) consolidated his position as one of the most influential contemporary photographers bridging the worlds of art and commerce.

Sensible Shoes situates Ethridge’s new photographs within this ongoing dialogue, offering a meditation on the everyday visual noise that defines our time, and sometimes wants to be escaped. His images remind us that in an age of constant self-presentation, sincerity and irony often walk in the same pair of shoes.

Ethridge’s work is held in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Museum of Modern Art, New York, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, S.M.A.K., Ghent, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Tate Modern, London, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.