

Joel-Peter Witkin: Poetic Realism
October 16 – November 15, 2008
Opening: Thursday, October 16th, 6 - 8pm



Silverstein Photography is pleased to announce *Poetic Realism*, an exhibition of new works along with their preliminary sketches from photographer Joel-Peter Witkin.

At first glance, the artistry of Witkin's tableaux seems more painterly than their actual photographic manifestations. From their conception as preparatory sketches to their completion as ornate constructions, Witkin's reference of art history's traditional iconography serves as a backdrop to his subjects as well as a basis to his ideas. However, it is Witkin's chosen subject matter and his benevolent treatment thereof, which further cement the discrepancy between his work and that of accepted photographic representation - utilizing the camera's assumed truth to accentuate the sensational transformation of his subjects.

Witkin's ongoing fascination with mortal sublimation draws him towards his "sitters" who in turn shed light upon the extremities of physical morbidity, deformation, and destruction. It is the context in which his subjects are carefully placed which enforces our own reconsideration of suffering and the misshapen. To this end, Witkin's work questions not only the limits of photography's representation of the real, but our understanding of the very real notion of the malformed and our own inevitable deaths as well.

Beyond the work's confrontation of the cadaverous, Witkin's images beg the question of their own origin. What might remain from the artist's past that brings him to his subject today, compelling him to work so consistently with those that exist beyond the fringe of normality? There is the often-recounted story of the artist's witnessing of a horrific car accident and the resulting death of a young girl in front of his childhood home, as well as his early experiences photographing source material in carnival sideshows on behalf of his brother, a painter. However, despite the moments that poignantly mark the artist's youth, it is their resulting web of thought, emotion, and instinct to which his work's ornate response and rare understanding can be attributed. We shall never be privy to the inner depths of Witkin's unconscious mind, but as we can see from our own dramatic response to his works, there exists a powerful approach to life's most riveting themes; beauty and death.

Joel Peter Witkin's work has been exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada, the Guggenheim Bilbao, the Moscow House of Photography, the Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago, ARCO Madrid, the Israel Museum, and the Whitney Museum among others. His work is included in numerous public and private collections including; the Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the George Eastman House, the Getty Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The artist currently lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Upcoming Exhibition:

ZOE STRAUSS America: We Love Having You Here
November 22, 2008 – January 10, 2009
Opening: Saturday, November 22nd, 6-8pm