

# Keitelman Gallery

## JOEL-PETER WITKIN

### LOVE AND OTHER REASONS

24.01.2014 – 29.03.2014

Opening (6-9pm) Thursday 23.01.14  
Tuesday to Saturday 12 to 6pm  
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Keitelman Gallery is proud to present a remarkable exhibition of the work of the celebrated American photographer and artist Joel-Peter Witkin, who was born in Brooklyn in 1939 and today lives and works in New Mexico.

Joel-Peter Witkin is one of the leading lights in a specific area of contemporary photography, that of the staged and theatrically composed photograph. His pictures owe nothing to the chance shot or the to the split-second chance circumstance of a particular moment. His work is the antithesis of the critical moment as insisted upon by Cartier-Bresson; his critical moment is arrived at by thoroughly artificial means. Like Duane Michals or Jan Saudek, Joel Peter Witkin creates his images, whether in the studio or out of doors, as though he were in a studio. He frequently brings in models whose bodies he scrutinizes closely, showing us both their sublime beauty and their inevitable decay. He develops these images in gelatine silver, sometimes reworking them with wax to create encaustic highlights.

Witkin's photographs assert themselves through a form of saturation: a saturation of the codes that they describe, the scenes that they portray, the time lapse that is condensed within the images (images of warfare, contemporary scenes, pictures from the history of Western art, old photographs in the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). They are powerfully aesthetic images. They are aesthetic to the point of excess, to the point where we understand that Witkin's originality resides in his ability to take this aestheticism and turn it into a weapon, into a powerful utterance.

An utterance about the frequently ambiguous relationship in religious thought between suffering and beauty, between martyrdom and beauty.

An utterance about the way art is instrumentalized, whether to aesthetic or to ethical ends.

An utterance about the vanity that lies in wait for us, to which art is both witness and accessory.

In this exhibition at the Keitelman Gallery, Brussels, Joel-Peter Witkin is showing pictures from different periods, largely drawn from the last fifteen years of his career.

Various places appear and reappear in the titles of these pictures, indicating not only the imaginary or real location of the photograph, but also the atmosphere of these cities, which include Paris and Bogota. These cities provide the backdrops for these photographs, with the appearance of certain elements that lead the imagination in an instant down into the maze of the Catacombs in the City of Light, or into the slums of the Colombian capital, with its prostitutes, its tales of cheating lovers, and its daredevils.

As well as these places there are also historical and mythological characters who appear in these pictures like ghosts. There is Friedrich Nietzsche, a lost soldier who has drifted in from a Hieronymus Bosch painting, an emaciated muse who seems to have come straight out of a Picasso, Leda and her Swan; even Frida Kahlo whose ghost must surely be wandering around somewhere. Just like in our collective imagination these characters roam Witkin's universe like spirits in pain. These leitmotifs are a crucial part of the incisive and endlessly re-rehearsed universe of Witkin's photographs, a crucial part of their powerful impact.