

joel-peter witkin

the untold life of the photograph



Joel-Peter Witkin, *Abundance*, Prague, 1997, Contact-sheet © Joel-Peter Witkin

/// opening

Wednesday 12 October 2022 from 6pm to 9pm

exhibition from Thursday 13 October to Saturday 26 November 2022

Part of Photo Days festival from 15 October to 26 November.



The baudoin lebon gallery is pleased to offer an unexpected insight into the peculiar work of Joel Peter Witkin. By presenting for the first time the artist's contact sheets as well as drawings, accessories, and unique prints enhanced with encaustic paint, the exhibition will take you on a journey to discover his creative process. These contact sheets, which were never intended to be published or exhibited, allow the discovery of the moments preceding and following the artist's emblematic shots as well as the notes of the photographer on the framing, the posture, the sets and light... all elements that constitute the image and allow us to decrypt it. Joel Peter Witkin never leaves a thing to chance. His work is the result of tremendous work, of attempts, errors, and more or less successful experiments both during the shooting and in the intimacy of the darkroom. This exhibition pays tribute to the atypical and iconoclast know-how of this extraordinary photographer.

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Joel-Peter Witkin was born in New York in 1939. His Jewish father was an immigrant from Lithuania and his Catholic mother was from Italy. Today, he lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Witkin began his photography career without any official study, first working as a war photographer during the Vietnam War between 1961 and 1964 (with the task of documenting the daily life of regiments based in Europe). After his service, Witkin continued to work as a freelance photographer, becoming the official photographer of City Walls Inc. He later studied sculpture at Columbia University, earning a BFA in 1974, and received his MFA from the University of New Mexico in 1986.

Witkin has often recounted his early research and the way he began to use staged photography and abnormal models, recruited through chance encounters or through classified ads. In particular he talks about his time with a freak show, and making friends with his stars. He subsequently developed a highly individual style of photography and printmaking. He does his own printing, making only a few copies, and takes few photographs.

Witkin's artistic culture is immense, and his knowledge of the plastic vocabulary and themes of great art – classical and modern – transpires in his choices of subjects, staging, and viewing angles. He sometimes reinterprets works by classical painters such as Goya, Courbet, Manet... Whether clearly stated in the titles or merely an underlying presence, this element is a constant in his oeuvre.

Instead, he applies collage effects manually on the final print. The image is thought out beforehand, usually prepared with meticulous pencil or charcoal drawings. The highly individual elaboration of the image, that makes his photographs immediately identifiable, is done during the printing stage. He has developed great skill with a number of very personal procedures (scratching, tearing or standing the negative, inserting filters and various obstacles between the support and the enlarger), and will go to any lengths in his printing methods. He enters the darkroom, and does not stop working until he achieves the perfect print. This is a particularly crucial point, because many photographers delegate this phase of production to a printer: for Witkin the material process of creation is of capital importance. What Witkin exhibits is certainly a "subject", but it is also a very substance of the photograph, an object in itself. What Manet did for painting – that is, demonstrate the importance of the paint and the canvas beyond themes and anecdotes – Witkin does for photography.

His work is recognized as a reference in contemporary photography. It has been featured in several monographs like *Heaven or Hell* (2012) published by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France or *Witkin* (2012) published by Delpire. Moreover, his work is included in the public collections of, among other museums, the Centre Georges Pompidou, of the Victoria and Albert Museum and of the Paul Getty Museum.

Joel Peter Witkin was awarded the title of Commandeur d'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France.

SELECTED SOLO SHOW

2022

Madonnas, Galerie PJ, Metz, France

2021

Le grand atelier de Joel-Peter Witkin, Musée de la Photographie, Charleroi, BE

Joel-Peter Witkin : Journeys of the Soul, Etherton Gallery, Tucson, USA

2019

Mythologies des dieux et des hommes, La Chapelle, Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines, FR

From the Studio, Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, USA

ICON, Paris Photo, Etherton Gallery & baudoin lebon, Grand Palais, Paris, FR

2018

Splendor and Misery, El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe, USA

2017

The Soul Has No Gender I, baudoin lebon, Paris, FR

2016

Witkin & Witkin, Foto Quatro Caminos Museum, Mexico City, MEX

The World is Not Enough, A Gallery for Fine Photography, New Orleans, USA

2013

Il maestro dei suoi maestri, Museo Nazionale Alinari della Fotografia, Florence, IT

Vanitas, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, CL

2012

Enfer ou Ciel, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, FR

Histoire du monde occidental, baudoin lebon, Paris, FR

2011

Bodies, Fotografiska, Stockholm, SE

2010

Counterfactuals, baudoin lebon, Paris, FR

SELECTED GROUP SHOW

2022

Les Choses. Une histoire de la nature morte.

Musée du Louvre, FR

Canova : Innocence and Sin, The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto, IT

2021

Chimères, baudoin lebon, Paris, FR

La Suite, Fundacion PROA, Buenos Aires, AR

2016

Alexander McQueen - Savage Beauty, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

Botticelli Reimagined, The Victoria & Albert Museum (Londres, UK), Gemälde Galerie (Berlin, DE)

2015

Art & Food, Milano Triennial, IT

Picasso in Contemporary Art, Deichtor Hallen Museum, Hambourg, DE

2013

Lunch with Manet, Yale University Art Museum, USA

2012

Photography as Fiction, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA

2011

Maison européenne de la Photographie, Paris, FR

2010

C'est la vie ! vanités de Pompéi à Damien Hirst, Musée Maillol, Paris, FR

2007

The Nude, The Getty Museum, Los Angeles, USA

2000

Animal, Musée Bourdelle, Paris, FR

Le siècle du corps, Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne, CH

1997

La Photographie Contemporaine En France, Suntory Museum Osaka et Bunkara Museum Tokyo, JP

COLLECTIONS PUBLIQUES ET MUSÉES

Museum & Public collections

Musée Réattu, Arles, FR

Victoria Museum, Melbourne, AU

Moderna Museet, Stockholm, SE

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL

Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA

Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, ES

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, FR

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, FR

Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, FR

Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA

Musée des Beaux-Arts du Nouveau-Mexique, Santa Fe, NM, USA

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, USA

Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, FR

Museo d'arte contemporanea Castello di Rivoli, Turin, IT

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY, USA

Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, JP

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), CA, USA

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA, USA

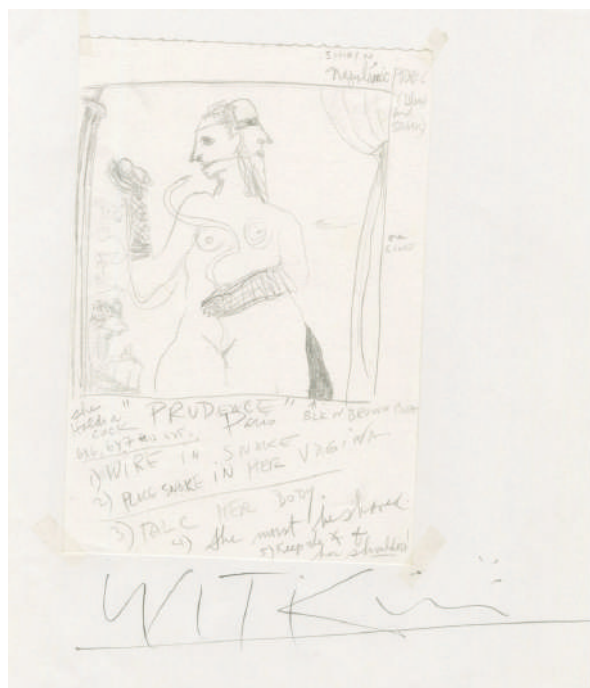
The Whitney Museum, New York, NY, USA

Center for Creative Photography - University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA

AVAILABLE VISUALS



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Idolatri in Vacua: Dolly, Ovary + Gear, 2002
Gelatin silver print, hand painted, encaustic
40 x 50 cm
© Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Prudence, 1995
Preparatory drawing in graphite pencil on paper
23,7 x 15,9 cm
Unique piece, Signed, titled and dated
© Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Idolatri in Vacua: Dolly, Ovary + Gear, 2002
20,3 cm x 25,4 cm, Contact-sheet, Signed, titled and dated
© Bertrand Huet/ Tutti courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Paint palettes
Variable dimensions
© Bertrand Huet/ Tutti courtesy baudoin lebon



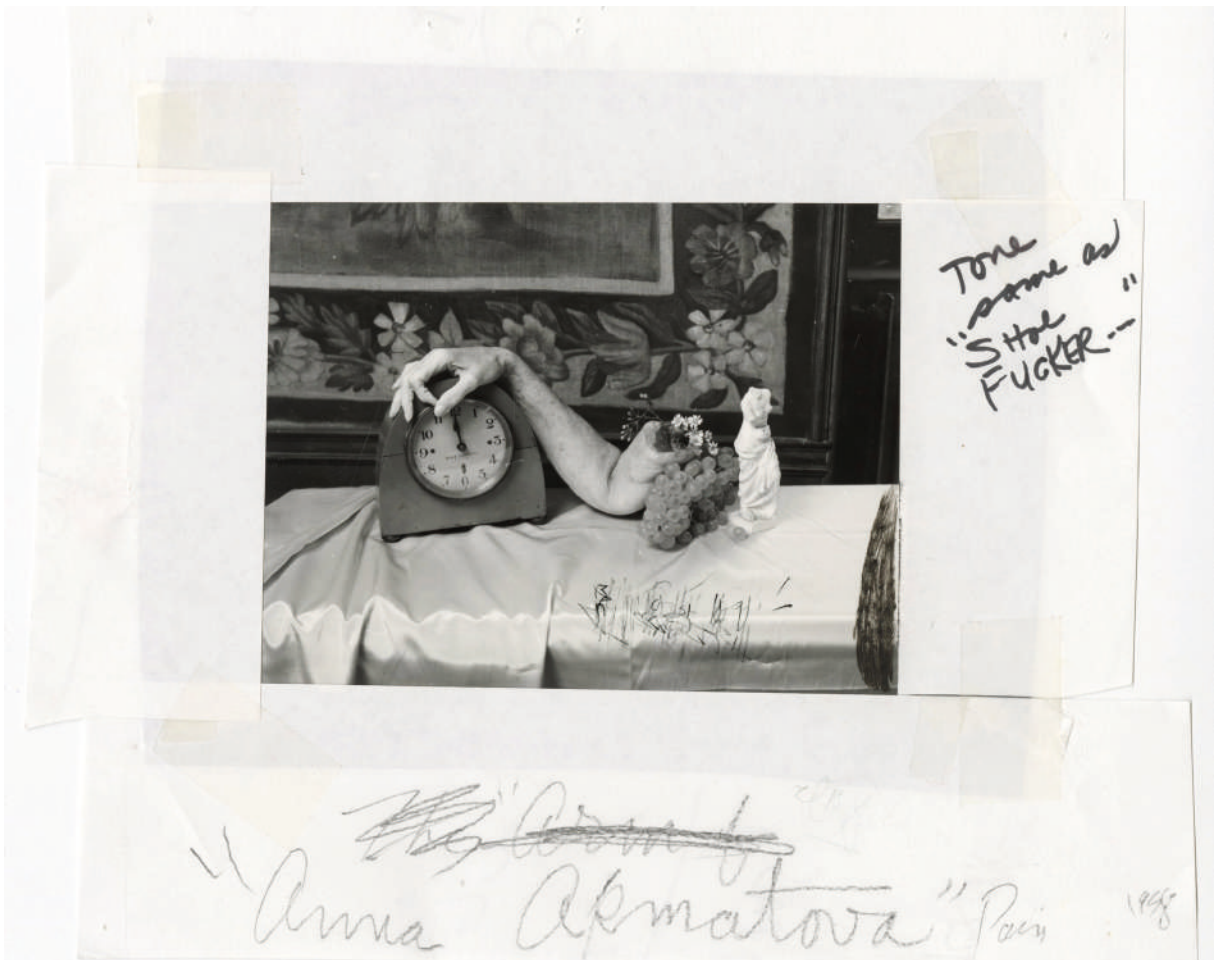
Joel-Peter WITKIN
Prudence, 1995 - 2021
Gelatin silver print, hand painted, encaustic
40,6 x 35,6 cm
© Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Harvest, 2022
 Preparatory drawing in graphite pencil on paper
 45 x 33 cm, Unique piece, Signed, titled and dated
 © Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



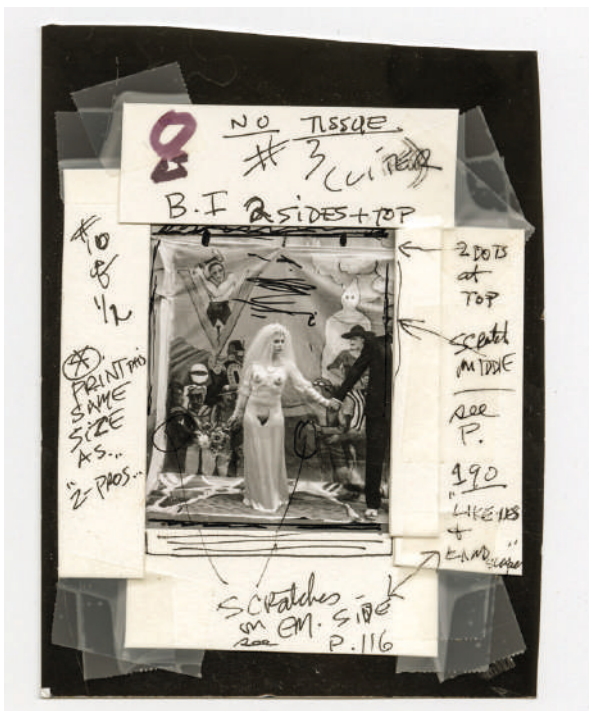
Joel-Peter WITKIN
Botte en cuir, 2001
 52 x 50 cm, Unique piece
 © Bertrand Huet/Tutti courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Anna Akhmatova, Paris, 1998
 Preparatory drawing in graphite pencil on paper, Unique piece, Signed, titled and dated
 © Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Studio of the Painter, 1990
 Contact-sheet, Signed, titled and dated
 © Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Marriage, Bogota, 2009
 Contact-sheet, 25,4 x 20,3 cm, Unique piece, signed, titled and dated
 © Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon



Joel-Peter WITKIN
Abundance, Prague, 1997
 Contact-sheet, 25,4 x 20,3 cm, Unique, signed, titled and dated
 © Joel-Peter Witkin courtesy baudoin lebon