



Joel-Peter Witkin: A Retrospective

By Germano Celant

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Few living photographers are as consistently controversial and provocative as Joel-Peter Witkin, whose work elicits hostility and admiration in equal measure. Shocking and compelling, the photographs in this retrospective collection reach to the outer limits of human nature. 100 full-page reproductions, printed in four colors.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

At the age of 6, Joel-Peter Witkin witnessed an automobile accident in which a little girl was decapitated, her head rolling to a stop at his feet. This experience may have had a bearing on his lifelong obsession with the macabre, but does little to prepare the viewer for his bizarre photographs of hermaphrodites and other human grotesqueries. Imagine the fruits of a collaboration between Diane Arbus and Federico Fellini that might be rejected for being a little too extreme. Imagine what Larry Flynt might publish for residents of the *Twilight Zone*. Two of the milder images: the disembodied, almost skeletal heads of two gnarled old men locked in an intimate kiss; and an obese woman in a cone-shaped mask, breast-feeding an eel.

From Library Journal

Best-known for his intricate tableaux blending the sublime and the grotesque, Witkin here presents both the early, relatively simple portraits, heavily marked and altered in processing, as well as the recent allegories, which could be called pristine but for their provocative content. This chronological presentation of more than 100 works from a 20-year period allows the reader both to survey the path of that evolution and to recognize the recurring subjects of his shifting style. The themes of heaven and hell, suffering, beauty, and motherhood are as constant as his portrayal of mutilated and malformed flesh, masks, and the thorns and grapes that refer to Christianity and pagan myth. Brought out to accompany a retrospective that opens next month at New York's Guggenheim Museum, this catalog also contains a comprehensive dissection of Witkin's work by the show's curator and publishes Witkin's 1976 manifesto, "Revolt Against the Mystical." For all libraries with works on contemporary photography. —Eric Bryant, "Library Journal"

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