

Press Release

Museum Folkwang

Joel Sternfeld – Color Photographs Since 1970 Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany 16 July to 23 October 2011

Press Preview: 14 July 2011, 11 a.m.

May 2011 – The Museum Folkwang, Essen, is dedicating a first European retrospective to the American photographer Joel Sternfeld (*1944, New York) from 16 July 2011, with around 130 works from over three decades. Entitled *Joel Sternfeld – Color Photographs since 1970* eleven projects in total are being shown. One emphasis comes with 60 photographs from his never before published early work, which extends from 1969 to the late 1970s. Sternfeld's gaze has always been directed at his home country of America, with its particularities, its people and its own landscapes.

Together with Stephan Shore, Joel Sternfeld is one of the most important representatives of New Color Photography, which discovered color for art photography in the 1970s. Influenced by Bauhaus theories of color, its use became his most important agency of style. Sternfeld studied at Dartmouth College and met the pioneer of color art photography, William Eggleston, at Harvard. It was with his exhibition at the MoMA in 1976 that color photography first gained attention as an artistic form of expression.

In 1978 Sternfeld began a trip through the USA in a VW bus in order to ascertain the social topography of his country. Out of this "Odyssee" arose the series *American Prospects*, which gained him international recognition in 1978. The hand-held small format camera that he had used for his early series *Rockaway Beach*, *Street Works* and *New Jersey Malls* in the tradition of the inconspicuous observer gave way to by a 8x10 inch large format camera for this project in order to achieve the sharpness of detail he desired.

In his following project, *Stranger Passing* (1987–2000) his gaze concentrated on people. In doing so he produced a portrait of society which recalls the depictions of the *Deutschen* by August Sander in the 1920s. The series *On This Site* (1993–1996) showed places that were at first glance unexceptional. Only the accompanying text indicates that these were scenes of crimes. In *Sweet Earth – Experimental Utopias in America* (1993–2005) Sternfeld explored social utopias.

The American landscape and its characteristic places are essential for Sternfeld's work, but go beyond the sublime and picturesque traditional depiction of landscape. In *Walking the High Line* (2000–2001), Sternfeld approaches a disused rail line in New York, where nature had reconquered its refuges and there are only occasional reminders of the once busy train traffic on Manhattan's West Side. *Oxbow Archive* (2005–2007) is a photographic long-term observation of East Meadows, Northampton and shows the uniqueness of the seasons and the effects of human intervention in nature.

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The global theme of climate change is the focus of the two projects *Treading on Kings* (2001) and *When it Changed* (2005) on the protests at the G-8 summit in Genoa and at the Climate Conference in Montreal. Sternfeld's distanced gaze at the phenomena and particularities of his home country and its people creates penetrating images, showing an America between utopia and dystopia.

From the beginning of his photographic work, the book has been the most important form of presentation for Joel Sternfeld. In the last 20 years he has brought out 11 photo books on his projects. Accompanying the exhibition is a book on Sternfeld's early, to date unpublished works by Edition Folkwang/Steidl.

The exhibition, curated by Ute Eskildsen, will be leaving on tour after its presentation in the Museum Folkwang with stops in Amsterdam, Berlin and Vienna.

The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive communication program (information to follow on the press preview).

Supported by the Sparkasse Essen.

Imagery can be downloaded at www.museum-folkwang.de

Opening Hours Tue to Sun 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Fri 10 a.m. to 10.30 p.m., closed Mon

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