

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Witkin Brothers Human and Grotesque

Peter Frank · Wednesday, June 4th, 2014

Those of us who have followed the oeuvres of Joel-Peter and Jerome Witkin for the last well-nigh-into-forty years have been waiting almost from the start for the siblings' parallel careers to converge.

It has long been apparent that, despite their disparate media and imagery, they were indeed brothers under as well as over the skin. They both display a superficial taste for grotesquerie which turns out not to mask but to bespeak the intense humanity driving their respective visions. And substantiating this propensity for hallucination in turn is their deep devotion to and knowledge of the technique and history of their crafts. Beyond their focus on the human figure (more or less), the Witkin brothers – all but estranged for their entire professional lives – propose vastly different worlds and focus on these worlds in vastly different ways.

Jerome, the painter based in upstate New York, concerns himself with the private and public histories of human cruelty and redemption. He starts with the mundane realities of small-city streets and weathered interiors and inhabits these sad, quotidian spaces with noble and desperate people, many of them haunted by real and imagined demons.

Photographer Joel-Peter, working in New Mexico, proposes environments that are at once more brightly lit and more sepulchral, using these as stages for hybrid, even mutant figures that could be the demons spooking his brother's subjects. But, as their mythological and religious attributes come forward to dispel their initial perverseness, these humanoids close the distance between us, displaying a brooding dignity and provoking tender empathy.

They are as human and credible as are their painted cousins – and as are we.



JOEL-PETER WITKIN, LAS MENINAS, 1987, Gelatin Silver Print, 30 x 40 inches



JEROME WITKIN, A JEW IN A RUIN, 1990, Oil on Canvas, 71 x 88 inches



JOEL-PETER WITKIN, FACE OF A WOMAN, 2004, Gelatin Silver Print, 26 3/4 x 36 3/4 inches

TWIN VISIONS: Jerome Witkin & Joel-Peter Witkin, at Jack Rutberg Fine Arts through August 31, 2014. Information: <http://www.jackrutbergfinearts.com/>

Top image: JEROME WITKIN, VINCENT AND HIS DEMONS II, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 16 x 28 inches. All images are courtesy of [Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles](#).

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