

LUHRING AUGUSTINE

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For Immediate Release:

Joel Sternfeld
Sweet Earth: Experimental Utopias in America

September 15 - October 22, 2005
(Opening reception September 15th, 6-8 pm)



Luhring Augustine is proud to present an exhibition of new work by Joel Sternfeld entitled *Sweet Earth: Experimental Utopias in America*.

In this new body of work, Sternfeld continues his practice of chronicling the American landscape, rendering a visual history of the disparate and little understood phenomenon of social experimentation in America. Each of the photographs of *Sweet Earth* documents the site of a historic or present-day community that sought an ideal way of living. In the brief text that accompanies each photograph, Sternfeld describes the most salient aspects of the community's mission and success. Cumulatively the 30 photographs in the exhibition and the 62 images in the book *Sweet Earth: Experimental Utopias in America*, simultaneously published by Steidl, call to attention the possibilities of sustainability. In a time in when the continued existence of the Earth as a life-sustaining place may be in question, the idea of living in concert with nature is neither abstract nor theoretical.

No other country in the world has experienced as many social experiments as America. Between 1810 and 1860 there were at least 600 such communities. The theory behind them may have been driven by the early Industrial Revolution in Europe, but it was in the fluid and unshaped environment of young America that these ideas became manifest. A hundred years later in the 1960s, the urge to live collectively and differently than the society at large repeated itself in the form of hundreds of communes, some of which still thrive. Although it has not been generally recognized as such, the current period, with over 75 co-housing communities and several functioning ecovillages may represent the most intensely active communal period of all.

Sweet Earth is the fourth American survey by Joel Sternfeld and represents an important step in his examination of landscape as a social indicator. It makes explicit the Arcadian references in his previous bodies of work; conceptually it is most closely aligned to *On This Site* (Chronicle 1996) in which a putative meaning of the landscape is revealed in an accompanying text—both bodies of work implicitly acknowledge the problematic nature of photographic representation.

Joel Sternfeld's work has been widely celebrated and influential: his pictures of the High Line, the abandoned railroad that travels Manhattan's west side have been pivotal in its transformation into a public park. In 2004 he was the recipient of the Citigroup Prize. His work is collected and exhibited in museums and private collections around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

If you would like to receive further information regarding this exhibition please contact Natalia Mager at (212) 206-9100 or natalia@luhringaugustine.com.