

## For Immediate Release

### Joel Sternfeld

#### *American Prospects and Before*

January 10 - February 7, 2004

opening reception: January 9, 6-8pm



Luhring Augustine is proud to present its first solo exhibition of photographs by Joel Sternfeld. The exhibition will include early urban street photographs and large works from the landmark series *American Prospects*.

Shot in 1976, the street photographs were made with a small camera and daytime flash during the New York rush hour. The use of an open flash isolates the vernacular gestures of individuals who appear troubled and alienated. These photographs of the cinematic in ordinary life are filled with a sense of urban angst in that somber bicentennial year. San Francisco MOMA first exhibited this work in 1980 and this is the first time they have been shown since that exhibition.

Sternfeld received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1978 to continue this series, but the award and its possibilities encouraged a change in his work. He set out with a large format camera to record the American landscape in ways that it had not been previously documented.

The photographs of *American Prospects* changed the course of photographic practice in significant ways. Sternfeld experimented with color theories conceived originally in reference to architecture or painting and applied them to photography. He brought irony to the centuries-old tradition of landscape painting calling forth a new, postmodern conception of landscape. Moving high above and back from his subjects, Sternfeld presented the contingencies of human and natural events in the form of narrative tableaux.

The work from that initial year of activity and two subsequent years of work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984 in a show entitled *Three Americans*. The work was published in 1987 as *American Prospects*.

For the past 3 ½ years, working with new printing techniques that have permitted far greater control, Sternfeld has perfected 42 x 52 inch prints that retain all the qualities of his exacting printing standards but permit a scale that allows fine detail and deep focus. All previous editions of his work have been closed and a new edition of 10 large format prints will be available for every image in the book *American Prospects*. Of the 12 photographs in the exhibition 7 have never previously been exhibited or published. This show is timed to coincide with the reprinting of *American Prospects* by DAP (January 2004) with a new introductory essay by Kerry Brougher, Chief Curator at the Hirshhorn Museum.

The exhibition of these pivotal works permit assessment of a photographer whose contribution to photographic art is profound and far-reaching. As Brougher states in the closing of his essay *Corrupting Photography*:

“If the contamination of paradise has often been Sternfeld’s subject, he has likewise tainted the purity of photography in order to capture the condition of America. His shift from spontaneous snapshot to pre-determined picture-making helped open the gates for a new type of photography now practiced by Rineke Dijkstra, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, and Jeff Wall, among many others. Since the publication of *American Prospects*, photography has largely displaced painting; energized by increased scale, luminosity, color, detail, and narrative implications, it is arguably the most vital form in contemporary art. By corrupting the purity of photography, Sternfeld played a pivotal role in moving the medium forward. “

Sternfeld’s work can also be seen at Kennedy Boesky Photographs on 22<sup>nd</sup> street during the month of January. Additionally, Sternfeld has been short listed for the Citigroup Photography Prize 2004; the four short-listed artists will be exhibited at The Photographers’ Gallery in London from January 27 to March 28, 2004.

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