

**For Immediate Release:**

Joel Sternfeld  
*Oxbow Archive*  
September 6 – October 4, 2008  
(Opening reception September 5th, 6-8 pm)



Luhring Augustine announces an exhibition of new work by Joel Sternfeld entitled *Oxbow Archive*. In these large-scale (5' x 7') photographic prints Sternfeld documents weather and atmospheric effects in a field in central Massachusetts over the course of a cycle of seasons.

Sternfeld's new work represents a break with painterly notions of the Picturesque and the Sublime; his field is flat, average and indistinguishable from thousands like it. He does not take the view from nearby Mount Holyoke as the Hudson River School painter Thomas Cole did in 1833 and look down on the Oxbow of the Connecticut River, the "grandest prospect in North America." A single field that appears in Cole's now iconic painting is of ample interest for Sternfeld's attentive eye.

This work represents a departure from archetypal photographic depictions of nature; grandiloquent mountain views and dramatized skies are eschewed, as are ideal specimens of flora. Anthropomorphization of "perfect form in nature" does not occur; the geometric is not valorized. The photographs are not meant to be metaphoric equivalents of anything else. Rather, the images present themselves without pretense as a systematic index of seasonal progression.

The photographs are identified by date and operate cumulatively as a contemporary book of hours. Time is represented by a single year with an implication that the meanings of these pictures will be released over the course of continued time.

The choice of a mile-square river bottom field offers an eloquent emptiness; the punctuation provided by the Holyoke range permits an examination of bordered Space and the sense of visual freedom engendered by a deep horizon. The idea of Place, long a second fiddle to Time in Western thinking, comes to the fore in this deep reading of a hidden but culturally resonant patch of earth.

*Oxbow Archive* represents a continuation of Sternfeld's interest in utopic/distopic possibilities as seen in his previous works *On This Site*, *Sweet Earth* and *When It Changed*. Unlike Sternfeld's *American Prospects*, which was noted for the irony seen in many of its pictures, an overarching conceptual irony surrounds the pictures of *Oxbow Archive*. When Thomas Cole painted the Oxbow, he meant it to be a warning about "progress" in the form of clearing of wilderness for farms and factories. Two hundred years later climate change may prove Cole's concerns valid – and the seasons may never manifest themselves the same way in this field again.

This exhibition coincides with the publication of *Oxbow Archive* by Steidl in which the full body of work is presented. For further information regarding this exhibition please contact Natalia Sacasa at (212) 206-9100 or natalia@luhringaugustine.com.