

**VU'**  
LA GALERIE

**JEFFREY SILVERTHORNE**

*Travel Plans*

1970-2010

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EXHIBITION

September 9 – October 29, 2011 / monday – saturday, 2 pm – 7 pm

Self portrait with Rachel, a document of expectations, 2006



## 40 YEARS OF QUESTIONING

*For the past 40 years Jeffrey Silverthorne has continually explored the subjects of sex and death. In this exhibition, Jeffrey Silverthorne reexamines his work. Travel Plans is an open book of more than 150 photographs, a family photo album for viewers to write and see their own desires.*

Just how to describe the work by Jeffrey Silverthorne displayed here in all its complexity for the first time? Jeffrey Silverthorne has taken a transversal approach to 40 years of photographs and 40 years of questioning, and assumes the inherent risk of an exhibition with no chronological or serial structure. This exhibition relies on our ability to discover a language which draws its inspiration from existing photographic forms and transgresses them.

Jeffrey Silverthorne works with all the uses made possible by photography including collages and photomontage, forging a fresco, a veritable esoteric tableau created by a certain Mr. Lotus, his alter ego, whose writings fill 4 chapters that are part of the exhibition catalogue.

His first pictures date from 1970, at *the morgue* in Rhode Island. They reply to the statement by Diane Arbus, who declared that there was nothing there to photograph. Then come several series where the style evokes the photographer who is one of the very few whose influence Silverthorne even alludes to. In the early '80's staging starts appearing, with the series *Silent Fires* where he plays with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. From there, he goes from a documentary style, with the *Missing and Tex-Mex* series, to a succession of staged scenes, photomontages and collages which incorporate many of the images taken at the morgue, some in color, and add outside elements like post cards, reproductions of paintings or scratches directly on the negative. The way that Silverthorne examines his anxieties, his obsessions, the way he conjures up his demons, makes one think of psychoanalysis or other mental therapies, which bring man to face his suffering rather than avoid it, so as to overcome it. In this way Silverthorne reminds us of Goya with his recurrent ambivalence between celebrating the fact of being alive and the hammered truth of decrepitude and death. And with the sensation of chaos, out of which cynical laughter sometime surfaces.

For Silverthorne "photography is a way to think." In 1988 he stated: "I make images to remember, not the purpose, but my own feelings and reactions."

We discovered the work by Jeffrey Silverthorne in Arles in 2007 thanks to Danish gallery owner and photographer Lars Schwander, and to the little yellow book – *Directions for leaving* – which he published following the exhibit of a partial retrospective in Copenhagen. We were stunned, obviously. That same year, there was a presentation during the Paris Photo show of his series *The Morgue* and *Female impersonators*. Works were immediately acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Fondation Francès and many private collectors. Starting on 9 September, Jeffrey Silverthorne presents the first step in his *Travel Plans* at the Galerie VU'.



The Rape of Eurydice in the Attorney's Office, 1982-84

*"This photo evokes the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. What I find extraordinary is that this myth more than any other reveals the art of photography: Orpheus descends to the underworld to retrieve his wife Eurydice, but in his anxiety he turns around to ensure that she is following and ends up losing her forever. For me, the photographer is a bit like Orpheus – he goes down into the shadow, into the depths, in search of absence. The photograph does not exist without shadow and light – here the shadow is the man dressed in black; the light is the woman"*

Atiq Rahimi  
lexpress.fr

## THE MEANING OF LIFE

*Though at first glance the exhibition suggests highly diverse work, the very core of all the work done by Silverthorne quickly comes across as a fundamentally existential question.*

With time and experience, this question is perceived with different degrees of importance, as each person's relation to life and death evolves, as the individual himself evolves. For Silverthorne, the best images are deeply connected to this, and like the photographer and the viewer, the photographs themselves become more adult over time. Jeffrey Silverthorne's themes and obsessions which comprise the *Travel Plans* exhibit forge an ensemble that is both coherent and inevitable. The images take the viewer through Silverthorne's creation following a very winding yet highly convincing path. The photographer becomes increasingly present and vulnerable - even visible - in his work. Silverthorne himself composes this movement in images in the form of an imaginary character who reveals the artist in a palimpsest.

Monsieur Lotus, the photographer's imaginary alter ego, searches for beauty that he ignores, that he could not recognize if he saw it. He searches for beauty without directions, with no map, yet he is totally and desperately aware of its existence ... where he does not know.

Silverthorne introduces post cards into his images of cadavers and prostitutes; he writes in the gelatin of the print or superimposes erotic photographs that he has found onto his previous images. The generic principle is that of collage, the technique and mindset which incorporates miscellaneous additions and creates a new reality. The unrealness of Jeffrey Silverthorne's scenes performs the same transgressive function as his collages. Inspired by mythological and biblical tales and biblical, these scenes are not literal; they are freely interpreted and extrapolated by the artist. In the more recent color scenes, and in some portraits, the fantasy in *Silent Fires* seems to have given way to the grotesque. Self-portraits are frequent. Influenced by Rembrandt and Beckmann, the self-portraits reflect on the time and the place of the artist. Silverthorne portrays his own aging body in strange, sometimes questionable situations. In the company of nude young women, often with curlers in their hair.



Collage, 2003



Bob and Margaret,  
The Detroit Negatives,  
1991

In *Boystwon, The Perfume of desire* 2009 :

*"... Silverthorne subtly transposes pictorial sources, mythological stories in photographs, asks questions in the manner of a philosopher or an esthetician, rather than an ethnologist, he dialogue more easily with Georges Bataille, Goya and Charles Baudelaire, than with Keynes and Levi-Strauss ...."*

Anne Biroleau

General Curator Department of Prints and Photography.

Bibliothèque nationale de France

# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MONSIEUR LOTUS <sup>1/2</sup>

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Rosa with Lipstick, 1993



Woman with lace #1, Nuevo Laredo 1990



Sarah, 1983

Mr. Lotus leaves homes with raw determinations and a self confidence of youth to explore and be a witness of new worlds that will bring new experiences. From his curiosity and persistence the energy of these new circumstances will give a formidable strength and an authority to his seeing. His resolve, with a world that he sees as culturally corrupt and socially pornographic, is to live in ways to make directly beautiful things that reveal the underlying beauty, fear and weight of morality.

With Experiences of hardship, sadness, defeat as well as a growing numbers of tragedies of his own making, Mr.Lotus comes to understand that it is best to be a contribution to world much larger and much more interesting than he is, than to believe that he is the center of any birthing. For the first time he begins to accept living on life's terms and understands that he is not the world. Mr.Lotus now realizes that he must experience his own death, briefly but fully mourn while appreciating this death, and then bury his old self if we wants to live beyond his once exciting but now stale repertoire of possibilities. Only if he takes these steps can he gain something more, possibly a conscience and a spiritual understanding of living.



Couple, Detroit Motel, 1992

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MONSIEUR LOTUS 2/2

Mr.Lotus comes to realize that to make and to live beyond the accepted social roles takes constant vigilance and is focused work, much more work than he had anticipated. He finds that his own curiosity to physically and visually satisfy himself is not enough and that he must relate his desires to an objective world. For his witnessing, he is beginning to pay in personal sacrifices. His youthful ideas and expectations are often assaulted by the outside world as being uncivilized, rude, even brutal, and from within he begins to question his self-worth. Up to now his self-will and motivation have been enough to fertilize and nurture his determination, to keep it alive and thriving, but an emotional and spiritual malaise is gaining root. Mr.Lotus senses that history is not a continuity of culture as much as it is a chronology of haphazard curiosities and upheavals, and he begins to feel ill at ease with the odor of his thoughts.



Denise, Hustling, 1972

*« Jeffrey is not a photographer. Not just a photographer I mean. He builds a personal opus drawing from many different disciplines: poetry, painting, collage... He calls upon every one of our senses, and provides viewers with many different doors into his work. In this exhibition, he is showing several different series - all ways to go back over the very evolution of his work. Don't think you are going to get it right off the bat. He opens the door and invites you to come in. He continues on and we follow. »*

Freddy Denaës  
Collector, Editor Éditions de l'Œil

Methods of living a new and productively unreasonable life are learned and put in to action. Living and making, not without intuition, are first thinking experiences. Transgression, once an active act of unconscious defiance, is now a tool for transformation to be used carefully and valued for the new insights it can offer. Acceptance of the sweet and the sour within the same experience, a simultaneity of contradictions, now come to form and perfume every full experience. Mr.Lotus lives the reality that he can only travel as far outside of himself as he is able to go inside himself, and that a superficial application of manners and methods is more than false security, it is a betrayal and savaging of his value and identity. Now Mr.Lotus owns his responsibilities, and his memories.



Beating Victim, 1972



Woman who died in her sleep, 1972

## THE BOOK

**TRAVEL PLANS**

Editor : Éditions de l'Œil (2011)  
 in collaboration with Noorderlicht  
 96 pages  
 24 x 29 cm  
 30 euros

On sale at Galerie VU'



## VU'WORKSHOPS BY JEFFREY SILVERTHORNE

### *Undressing the Mind*

FRIDAY 9, SATURDAY 10 & SUNDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2011

On the occasion of his first solo exhibition at Galerie VU' entitled *Travel Plans* Jeffrey Silverthorne will be hosting the 4th VU' Workshop *Undressing the Mind, between desire and censorship* (Entre désir et censure, l'esprit mis à nu).

The purpose of this workshop is to consider the social guidelines of the good image, the authentic photograph, and to make pictures that confront the photographer's individuality and that measure their relationship to society.

So, two lenses of seeing and positioning are being used simultaneously. Presentation of images and readings, discussions and critiques, are integral to the exploration of ideas. The human figure will be a significant reference and model will be available. Any content matter, any way of working ie: street work, still life, mise-en-scene, may be used.

« *Undressing the Mind, between desire and censure. How does an artist put into pictures ideas that demand to be made? Ideas that are the same as reasons necessary for living. When these ideas challenge guidelines of socially acceptable behavior /imagery what happens to the courage of desire and the convenience of self censoring? While these may seem to be two separate concerns most of the time they are intricately interwoven and over time strongly influence the artist's work.* »

Jeffrey Silverthorne



Diane, the Detroit Negatives, 1992



Note to my Daughter, Letters from the dead House, 1988

# BIOGRAPHY

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Born in Honolulu in 1946. Lives and works in Cranston, Rhode Island.

In 1996 his work was awarded the University of Louisiana prize. Portions of Jeffrey Silverthorne's work have been seen in France during the 2008 Rencontres d'Arles, at the exhibit of the DJÂN collective at the Galerie VU' in 2009 and in the Seventies exhibition: the Impact of American photography displayed at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France 29 October 2008 to 25 January 2009.

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## SOLO SHOWS (Selection since 2004)

### 2011

Fotografie Noorderlicht, Groningen, Hollande  
 Galerie VU', Paris, France  
 Galerie Tom Christoffersen, Copenhagen, Danemark  
 Photographs Do Not Bend Gallery, Dallas, Texas  
*Collecting my Kisses*, La Quinzaine Photographique Nantaise, Nantes, France

### 2010

Photon Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovénie

### 2008

Photographs Do Not Bend Gallery, Dallas, Texas  
 Galerie VU', Rencontres d'Arles, France

### 2007

Fotografisk Gallery, Copenhague, Danemark

### 2005

Ahorn-Grieneisen Gallery, Berlin, Allemagne

### 2004

Loomis Chaffee Art Gallery, Windsor, Royaume-Uni

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## GROUP SHOWS (Selection since 2004)

### 2010

Paris Photo, Galerie VU', Paris, France  
 Galleria Dora Bassi, Gorizia, Italie  
 PhotoFest, Photon Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovénie  
 Galerie VU' / Le Capitole, Rencontres d'Arles, France  
 Photographs Do Not Bend, Dallas, Texas

### 2009

Paris Photo, Galerie VU', Paris, France  
 Galerie VU' / Le Capitole, Rencontres d'Arles, France  
 Galerie Kunstagenten, Berlin, Allemagne  
 Photographs Do Not Bend, Dallas, Texas

### 2008

Paris Photo, Galerie VU', Paris, France  
 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France  
 Maison d'art Bernard Anthonioz, Nogent-sur-Marne, France

### 2007

Paris Photo, Galerie VU', Paris, France  
 Gallery Z, Providence, Rhode Island  
 Photographs Do Not Bend, Dallas, Texas

### 2006

Rogue Artists Studios, Manchester, Royaume-Uni  
 Impression 2006, Grafisch Centrum HogeDrukgebied, Hollande

### 2005

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, États-Unis  
 Photographs Do Not Bend, Dallas, Texas

### 2004

L.A. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, États-Unis

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## EDITIONS

*Travel Plans*, Noorderlicht, NL + Les Éditions de l'Œil, France, 2011

*Traverses*, Actes Sud, Arles, France, 2010

*Boystown, Perfume of Desire*, Galerie Wolfsen, Alborg, Danemark, introduction de Anne Biroleau-Lemagny, Commissaire Générale, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2009

*Private mag. #46, Mental Geography*, St-Brisson, France, 2009

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## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (SELECTION)

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France

Museum of Modern Art, New York, États-Unis

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, États-Unis

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, États-Unis

Fondation Frances, Senlis, France

Museum of Fine Arts Boston, États-Unis

International Museum of Photography at George Eastman

House, Rochester, États-Unis

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, États-Unis

New Orleans Museum of Art, États-Unis

Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Suisse

Rhode Island School of Design Museum, États-Unis

Museum for Photography, Antwerp, Belgique

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, Texas

Musée de l'Élysée Lausanne, Lausanne, Suisse

Lars Schwander, Copenhague, Danemark

# IMAGES FOR PRESS

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Woman with lace #1, Nuevo Laredo 1990



Sarah, 1983



Couple, Detroit Motel, 1992



Bob and Margaret, The Detroit Negatives, 1991



Woman who died in her sleep, 1972



Self portrait with Rachel, a document of expectations 2006



# VU'

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