

EXTERNAL REFLECTIONS — INTERNAL WARS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOUISE WITKIN-BERG



BRAUER MUSEUM OF ART | AUG. 23 — DEC. 11, 2016

VALPARAISO  UNIVERSITY

ARTIST'S DEDICATION AND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This show is dedicated to the memory of my brother Ira Abel Wolk (April 20, 1946 — July 29, 2009).

To Debbi Dunne — Gemini Molding Inc.

Thank you for everything you brought to this project. I could have never successfully handled this large an undertaking without you.

To John Randolph — Burrell Imaging

Thank you for your talent and extreme patience and for the inordinate amount of time it took to accurately, and sensitively, translate my work.

To Lionel Hochbaum — Burrell Imaging

Thank you for expediting a very complex project always with patience and grace.

To Gregg Hertzlieb — Brauer Museum of Art

Without your help, time, attention, and kindness in a multitude of ways, minor and humungous, this show would not have been possible. Many, many thanks!

This exhibition was made possible through funds provided by the Brauer Museum of Art's Robert and Caroline Collings Endowment, the Brauer Museum of Art's Brauer Endowment, and the Partners for the Brauer Museum of Art.

At its earliest inception photography was thought to be a way to accurately record the external world. But the camera proved to be so much more than that, and maybe it was never able to depict the "real world" but at best only a close, limited reflection.

In 1969 John Szarkowski, then curator of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art, assembled his historical exhibition, "Mirrors and Windows." He put fine art photographers into two distinct groups. Those who used photography to explore the external world were the Windows. Those photographers who used photography for self-expression, to translate their inner ideas, were the Mirrors. I am a Mirror.

I work to give visible tangibility to my inner ideas and feelings.

My images are not polite, nor are the offenses, the abusers, or the carnage left behind. Sometimes my photographs may be difficult to view, but so are the acts I have chosen to make visible.

Unfortunately the content of my work is more current, relevant, and blatant today than it was in the early 1970s when I first made these images. Then the violence was insidious ... beneath the surface currents ... maybe hidden and only sometimes erupting. Today the acts are overt, seen in our society all too often, and privately, brutally affecting so many individuals, no longer able to be quiet by finally needing to confront their truths.

In the late 1960s everything was in a state of flux. Collectively, all our mores, all the archetypes that held us together were cracked open wide. There were no more verities.

The establishment stood by in anger and incomprehension. The family as we knew it splintered, traditionally defined roles

were shifting, and job security was tenuous. We were fighting for rights: racial, educational, for equality and women's rights and against an unjust war. We had no mentors, no road maps, making it up as we went along, and I think in this social upheaval we lost a lot of people: men who could not find jobs, women who tried to pick up the slack they were not prepared for, and especially children left to fend for themselves, "latchkey" kids, as we were trying to navigate our new realities.

At this time, and even earlier, when I was just a child myself, I also insidiously felt abuses that were really just the "tip of the iceberg" of all we know today. With my little friend's sister, I did not understand at age eight but could feel something was not right in their house. My neighbor told me her black eye was from a can that fell, and as more facial bruises came there were less excuses.

Abuses within the family, spousal and child abuse, incest, domestic violence ... Abuse was everywhere, within the institutions and the people we revered: the church, the priesthood, the coach, the teacher, the scoutmaster, the elected representative, the celebrity, the bullies, the gangs, sex trafficking, random abductions, and in some parts of the world intentional vaginal mutilation against young women, and the list goes on.

We are all frayed, sometimes torn, and sometimes elevated too, but all definitely marked by those who come before us



ABOVE:
Louise Witkin-Berg
Three Warring, 1973
Inkjet print on archival paper, 27 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1973 by Louise Witkin-Berg

ON THE COVER:
Louise Witkin-Berg
Praying Hands, 1975
Inkjet print on archival paper, 31 3/4 x 47 1/2 inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1975 by Louise Witkin-Berg

Louise Witkin-Berg
Purple, Red, Rose Women, 1975
Inkjet print on archival paper 27 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1975 by Louise Witkin-Berg



and those around us. Sometimes we are affected by seemingly small but continuous degrading emotional and verbal abuses that destroy the ego and any self-esteem, while other times the weapons used are inconceivable physical and sexual cruelties.

Although my work is not polite and sometimes difficult, so is the scabbing of devastating emotion scarring, most times forever, never fully healed, while others abused become the new perpetrators.

My work is to move the viewer hopefully to renewed empathy, to see the inhumanness of all abuses, the violence inflicted upon

less powerful children, little boys and girls, women and men, groups of people who are rendered defenseless against more powerful violators.

In conclusion, I believe the younger generation today has integrated what has been tirelessly fought for, their hearts open to all our differences. Progress is being made, and reconciliation, from what is real to the ideal world we all hope for, is slowly happening.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Brauer Museum of Art presents "External Reflections — Internal Wars," a retrospective exhibition of photographs by Louise Witkin-Berg. An established fine art and commercial photographer, as well as a successful interior designer, Witkin-Berg holds a master's degree in photography from Governors State University and was part of the Visiting Artist Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for many years. She has taught and lectured throughout the Chicagoland area and had her own commercial studio. In this exhibition, viewers can admire her early black and white images, some narrative and some nonobjective, as well as her complex color works that deal with themes and struggles every bit as powerful and relevant in the present day as they were when she initially created the images back in the 1970s.

Witkin-Berg began photographing in 1968, bringing her keen sense of design to the medium and offering viewers careful compositions that were occasionally warmed by human presences. She gradually became fascinated by the interplay of black, white, and gray tones in the context of abstractions drawn from close up views of water patterns, leaves, and plants, as exemplified by the work titled "Three Warring." While the shift from a more documentary style to an abstract one related to an interest in formal considerations, these organic abstractions allowed Witkin-Berg to explore more fully the potent notion of metaphor, with water drops and writhing plant forms standing in for states of mind or being. Dramatic and elegant tones presented subjects emerging, transforming, displaying sharp points and contours in fantasy fields that lured viewers into a controlled chaos. These striking and enigmatic views of nature endure as especially fascinating images in her body of work at the same time that they serve as an introduction to her later color pieces.

Of these figurative color works, Witkin-Berg describes them as arising from her work done directly in the camera and darkroom, using three enlargers and Cibachrome chemistry. She posed her human subjects and lit them using natural light and sometimes colored gels and then combined the various exposures so that the result would be writhing masses of figures existing in a realm of unreality, in their existence speaking to a constant violence that enchants and at the same time, it fills the heart with fear. "Purple, Red, Rose Women" shows amidst a sea of black a number of contorted figures or portions of figures that perhaps become apparitions of skulls and creatures, and that in their abstractions become less about literal representations and more about essences of torment and unease. The image is hallucinatory, foreboding, and seductively beautiful in its truthful presentation of human struggle, brought into high awareness by artful distortions. It is unbearable in its forceful display and yet fascinating in its convincing portrayal.

Louise Witkin-Berg
Caught in Blue, 1975
Inkjet print on archival paper 36 x 36 inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1975 by Louise Witkin-Berg



Continued from page 3

“Caught in Blue” uses a cooler palette of grays and purple tones to define the composite figures. A hand, a foot, a thumb becomes evident as viewers’ eyes scan and survey the picture, but the primary focus is on the more generalized state of the figure folding, breaking, shattering along lines and edges created by overlaps and intersections of layered images. Witkin-Berg uses figures and bodily forms as gestural passages to provide glimpses of human states, human concerns, built from and composed of humans through a type of technical wizardry.

Witkin-Berg’s goal for her art, however, is not simply or merely the capturing of such remarkable results for solely aesthetic purposes. The exhibition title, “External Reflections — Internal Wars,” is instructive in fully understanding the artist’s work, because the words in their meanings give fullness and context to the pieces, particularly the color works. Witkin-Berg sees the bodies of her subjects as external reflections, as carriers of the pain and torment that occupy her attention and drive her commentary. The resulting works of art in addition are themselves external reflections, since they are manifestations to be shared of her thoughts about human life in contexts of danger and violence. As a feeling human being, she lives through and experiences her own internal wars, as well as the internal wars of others. Public and private connect in a visceral relationship, where bodily markings, bodily poses, and bodily violations give insight into conflicts deep inside, where subjects, viewers, and the artist try to comprehend the effects and meanings of suffering.

In “The Rape,” Witkin-Berg confronts such powerful themes head on in order to understand violence through its rendering

in a surreal and gripping image. Visual textures appeal strongly to viewers’ sense of touch, as contorted and fragmentary body parts emerge from the darkness into the sharp and unnatural colored light. Viewers witness both a technically sophisticated work of art, satisfying in its confident handling of pictorial elements, at the same time that they see the chaotic, disjointed, disconnected figures as approximations of aspects of a terrifying event. “The Rape” arises from a configuration of specific forms here, but it uses the recognizable to create something general that feels true in its visualization of a splintered and violated state. The piece moves from the literal to the abstract, which in turn moves its meaning from the specific to the universal.

In “Dante,” Witkin-Berg’s investigations of inhumanity move into allusion, with the writhing figures directly relating to a hellish existence. Dante’s “Inferno” is presented here as the next logical step in thinking about and feeling intense violation. People can only conceive of such suffering through earthly terms and can only begin to comprehend such a realm through an earthly vocabulary, and the artist’s multiply exposed tableaux give the perfect approach for picturing such a vastness. On the one hand, Witkin-Berg and Dante attempt to bring into concrete terms a glimpse of Hell. In addition, though, Witkin-Berg situates the Inferno in the awareness of those who have felt their bodies abused, tortured, separated from their own safety and control.

The largest piece in the exhibition, “Praying Hands,” is abstract, monumental, not as deeply layered, fragmented, or shattered, as so many of the works in the exhibition. Perhaps the praying hands off to the side have healed this personage



Continued from page 5

so it now can wear its wounds and display its scars. Perhaps the body has moved beyond the chaos and trauma to now appear in grandeur as one who has survived, and who can point to painful passages as reminders of past violence and the potential for new to arise at any moment. Witkin-Berg's works are unflinching, uncompromising, but they are not gratuitous — and their lovely presences offer hope in the face of violence. She has conquered her challenges by confidently engaging them, even though each work is a tale of caution and elegy for the hurt.

For this retrospective exhibition, Witkin-Berg realized that some of the turbulent social conditions have changed from the 1970s, but the presence of unrest and domination has escalated. Acts of violence and abuse in the past were insidious, and now they are overt and constant.

The newly printed images for this exhibition, reflecting extreme care in reproducing the originals, now also have a subtle added dimension from the inks on the 100 percent archival cotton rag

paper. This dimension adds both sensuality and sensitivity to these photographs, as well as a richness and vibrancy unique to the archival pigmentations of the inks. They give these images a freshness and immediacy, leading the viewer to realize that while particular events happened decades ago, their effects are alive and important today. While the struggles are poignant and heart rendering, attention to such struggle is life affirming and necessary. Witkin-Berg's images deliver a truth artfully, and what viewers gain is the strength to see tragedy and beauty simultaneously in images that in their stillness miraculously live and grow.

GREGG HERTZLIEB, DIRECTOR/CURATOR
Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University

LEFT:
Louise Witkin-Berg
The Rape (detail), 1975
Inkjet print on archival paper 31 3/4 x 47 1/2 inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1975 by Louise Witkin-Berg



Louise Witkin-Berg
Dante, 1973-2011
Inkjet print on archival paper 27 ¼ x 51 inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1973 by Louise Witkin-Berg



Louise Witkin-Berg
Praying Hands, 1975
Inkjet print on archival paper 31 ¾ x 47 ½ inches
Collection of the Artist
Copyright © 1975 by Louise Witkin-Berg

ARTIST'S TECHNICAL STATEMENT

All the color images, and some black and white, were printed many years before imaging software for a computer was available. Photoshop was not available to the consumer until 1990, 17 years after I first began printing my color images. Instead, I used every aspect that is unique to the camera, film, and darkroom. I created my own techniques. No prototype or guide existed except for my own vision and imagination.

It is also interesting to note that most of my images were photographed on 35mm film and printed into very fine resolution 16 x 20 inch Cibachrome prints. They were then accurately enlarged via high-resolution scans from my original Cibachrome prints into the large images seen here. It's amazing that all this was possible from such a small piece of film!

For the color images, I used only two models. I photographed all the film in 1973–1974, resulting in thousands of sheets of film that I am still working with today. I photographed the color images on a large black paper scrim using only natural light.

All my early work, seen in the Brauer's Education Room, arose simply from collecting images with my camera that I connected to emotionally. I photographed my black and white macro lens work on a black velvet background. They were all photographed using natural light, supplemented with small mirrors to reflect light into darker areas of each subject. I developed and carefully printed the film to retain the feeling I saw in each image.

I extensively exploited to the maximum limit the unique photographic technique of multiple exposure. To do this you shoot one photograph but do not advance your film. By using

the film release button on the bottom of 35mm analog cameras, you can recock the shutter, allowing the lens to reopen for another exposure without moving the first exposed image. This process can result in many images being photographed on one piece of film. I could do three exposures this way, sometimes by varying the exposure settings or letting less light in, depending on how I wanted to use these images in a final print. I might be able to do four multiple exposures. Mainly I used color slide film, typical slide film such as Kodachrome and Ektachrome you could purchase from your local drugstore, and my 35mm Pentax camera. I did also use, but not typically as I liked working faster, a two and one-fourths inch Hasselblad, an old 4 x 5 inch Calumet, and a few times my 8 x 10 inch Deardorff.

I also worked extensively on making color multiple exposures using an old Polaroid camera. "Blue Guernica" is the only one of these images that appears in the exhibition. I then assembled the individual multiply exposed Polaroids into triptychs and rephotographed these images making various size enlargements. Due to the large grain in this film, the images could not be enlarged as much as I had originally wanted.

When photographing I sometimes put objects on light stands at various distances from my lens to use selective depth of field and control the focus; this is another technical aspect that is unique to the camera and each photographic lens. This effect can be seen in images 26 and 27, "Beyond the Pale," which are examples of "in camera" photographs with out of focus subjects close to the lens and selective depth of field rendering the figures sharper.

I used a 35mm slide copier to further make new images by copying previously photographed slides. I put the older slide, which was also sometimes a multiple exposure, into a small, lighted film carrier on the base of the stand. At the top of the stand, was a place where you mounted your camera. You could then, again, photograph many images by multiply exposing selected slides onto one frame of the new slide film.

Before printing my images, I lay sometimes as many as three different slides on top of each other. This technique was called sandwiching. Due to the multiple exposure of the original film, the film was very thin and transparent, produced by light hitting the film many times. Therefore you could see and print many images together just by putting them on top of each other into one sandwich. I sometimes printed these alone and sometimes did extensive printing composites using many enlargers.

I used simple darkroom printing techniques such as burning, dodging, feathering, masking out certain areas on the film using liquid Maskoid, or masking part of the photographic paper leaving unexposed areas to be printed on later. I printed the black and white images on Ilford graded paper and printed my color photographs using the Cibachrome process and materials. Sometimes I used various films to print on, such as high contrast Kodalith black and white film, and not photographic paper. I used this film if I wanted higher contrast and density, as in my plexiglass boxes. I also used this material in "Blue and Black Kodalith."

Using three enlargers, and sometimes making up to six exposures on one piece of Cibachrome paper, I could vary the scale in each print, as seen in "Red Terror" and many of my other

photographs, which I could not do successfully at the time of photographing. This approach also enabled me to first draw a layout of the final photograph. I previsualized these and then just moved the paper easel from one preset enlarger to the next, unless I had to change the negative carriers in order to print more than three images on one sheet of paper. I then put the paper into a 16 x 20 inch light tight paper safe and reloaded the negative carrier to resume the printing process.

Again, the photographic paper and chemicals I used for my color images was Cibachrome. It was taken off the market for individual use as the chemicals were highly toxic. When it came to reprinting all my images, I decided to use archival dye transfer inks on 100 percent cotton archival paper rather than have a commercial lab reprint them using the still commercially available Cibachrome material. I had come to feel that the extreme blacks in the Cibachrome paper, although essential to the multiple prints I did, were too cold in their aesthetics and intense color range. I feel that the dye transfer prints and their sensual, softer tones are much more responsive now to the feelings I want my photographs to convey.

I photographed and originally printed my black and white images, as well as the film used in my plexi boxes, between 1968 and 1973. I shot the color film and Polaroids during a two-year period, from 1973 to 1974. I then made prints from these films from 1973 through 1981 and more recently from January 2011 through April 2016. The specific dates listed with the titles refer to the original date each photograph was printed. These photographs, unless otherwise noted, have all been printed using archival ink on 100 percent archival rag paper.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

(1968–present) **Fine art photographer**

(2013) Published book, “Internal War” — photography and text

(1989–2011) Founder and Owner of ID Associates, an interior design firm

Clients in Chicago, the North Shore and suburbs; Napa, California; Boca Raton, Florida; Southwestern Michigan and New Buffalo; and Portland, Oregon

Featured in Chicago Home and Garden (cover plus 10-page article)

June 2009-IDA Project: Architecture/Interior Designer Home distinguished by Heartland Alliance Home Tour 2009

(1976–1988) Owner/Manager/Photographer of L. Witkin Photography, Commercial studio specializing in special effects, illustration, and “table top” product photography

(1972–1988) **Instructor/Lecturer**

Visiting artist: January — May, 1980

Workshops — March 1981, May 1981, September 1981

Classes in Color and Experimental Color Photography

Lecture/class: Women’s Issues Explored Through Photography, 1982

Slide Lecture about my work: 1982

Chicago Academy of Fine Art, Chicago

Full Time Faculty. Taught Beginning B&W Photography,

History of Photography, Advanced Experimental Photography

Organized National Summer Workshop Program

Colorado Mountain College: Breckenridge, Colo.

National Teaching Program

Studio Lighting, Color Photography, Experimental Color Photography

Vail-Aspen Colorado — Branch Teaching Centers Colorado Mountain College

Color and Experimental Color Photography

First National Color Symposium, Colorado Mountain College, Breckenridge, Colo.

Columbia College, Chicago (requested to teach commercial photography)

Jane Adams Center, Chicago

Harold Washington College, Chicago

EDUCATION:

(1989–1991) Harrington Institute of Interior Design

(1990) University of Illinois at Chicago, Masters in Architecture Program

(1975–1976) Governors State University, Full Talent Scholarship in Photography, Master of Fine Arts degree

(1974–1975) School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Master of Fine Arts Program

(1972) School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Student at Large

(1969) Columbia College, Chicago

(1958–1963) Roosevelt University, Chicago, Theatre Arts, B.A.

EXHIBITIONS, COLLECTIONS,

AND PUBLICATIONS:

Underground Galley, New York City, 1972

Bergman Galley, Chicago, Juried Show, “The Family of Man,” 1969

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Juried Group Show and Traveling Exhibition, 1970

Burpee Museum of Fine Art, Juried Group Show, 1970

Maine Photographic Workshop, Lockport, Maine, Group Exhibit

Presentation/Lecture of Work

Breckenridge Colorado Mountain College, One Person Show, 1976

Aperion, Millerton, New York — Prints in Aperture Publications

Camera Arts Magazine

Photographic Collection of Exchange National Bank, Chicago, 1975

Photographic Collection of Kemper Insurance, Chicago, 1975

Photographic Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Gilbert

Photographic Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David Ruttenberg,

Chicago, 1977

Columbia College — Invitational Show — Grant Park

Columbia College Permanent Collection

* only promoted work 1972–1977



BRAUER MUSEUM OF ART

1709 Chapel Drive | Valparaiso, IN 46383

valpo.edu/brauer-museum-of-art