

STEFAN STUX GALLERY

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MANABU YAMANAKA

Jyoudo Series

September 6 – October 11, 2003

Yamanaka's *Jyoudo* series takes an unflinching look at the afflicted – people born with various congenital defects, suffering from debilitating diseases, or otherwise crippled and deformed in accidents or mishaps. Posed against a stark, white, seamless backdrop, the physical details of his nude sitters' conditions are revealed with almost clinical clarity in these large black and white photographs. However, the carefully constructed, insistently aesthetic emphasis of these images provides a fundamentally different mode in which to encounter these people – rather than reacting to them by recoiling in horror or responding with condescending pity, we are called to meditate on their fates with detachment, and to see something of them beyond their infirmities.

Manabu Yamanaka approaches photography as a fundamental mode of *knowing*, a way of coming to grips with the people he encounters in the world. It's true that since the medium's invention, its most consistently popular subject has been the portrait, and with good reason – it's a way of encountering others in intimate detail, probing the image with the otherwise inappropriately rapt gaze of a lover, transcending the normal social restrictions that prevent us from staring at someone who is physically present. His reserved photographic style echoes the great portraitists before him, from August Sander to Richard Avedon, who similarly emphasized elegant formal structure while simultaneously presenting deeply insightful windows onto the lives of their sitters.

For Yamanaka, this is a Buddhist exercise in compassionate contemplation, an opportunity for him to recognize “the presence of the Bodhisattva within their bodies.” These images offer an opportunity to experience the unique power of Yamanaka's photographic aesthetic to reveal particularly poignant truths.

-Beth Wilson

Manabu Yamanaka was born in 1959 in Hyogo, Japan, and currently is based in Tokyo. “Jyoudo” marks his fourth one-person show with the Stux Gallery in New York. Most recently Yamanaka has been featured in “How Human: Life in the Post-Genome Era” at the International Center of Photography, New York. Jyoudo is a continuation of his previous series, Gyathei, Doshi, and Arakan all focusing on the Buddha manifested in human form. Yamanaka's work has been collected by German public art institutions and has been exhibited regularly in international exhibitions and museums in Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, Finland, Spain, Chile and Japan. The Gyathei series received worldwide television coverage by CNN.

529 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011

T: 212.352.1600 F: 212.352.0302

www.stuxgallery.com

info@stuxgallery.com

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