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HUNG & DRAWN

ART NEWS EDITED BY NICK HACKWORTH ADDITIONAL TEXT IPHGENIA BAAL

Picture imperfect: JOE DUGGAN



Winter Kill, 2004.

Although relatively unknown in his own country, Limerick born photographer, Joe Duggan, has found fame among Belgian art lovers.

"Tender cruelty" was a phrase coined to describe the work of legendary American photographer Walker Evans, and it's a label that fits 31-year-old, Limerick born photographer, Joe Duggan perfectly. His caustic vision of the ideal modern family, translated into hyper-real, staged scenes in which Duggan impersonated a father figure with a mannequin family, captured imaginations at his graduation show at the RCA in 2002. It was followed by a London solo show and inclusion in group shows at the Museum of Modern Art in Washington and the Photo Museum, Antwerp alongside the work of Jeff Wall and Gregory Crewdson. Dazed caught up with Joe in the run up to his solo show at Koraalberg Gallery, Antwerp.

Dazed & Confused: What's it like being big in Belgium? Joe Duggan: Nearly as good as being big in Japan. D&C: What's in the new show?

JD: A series of still lifes. Set-up scenes with painted backdrops and kitschy objects in the foreground. They are basically jumbled up landscapes. I guess I use landscape as a metaphor to comment on society.

D&C: What made you start making such staged and theatrical images?

JD: When I first came to London in September 2000 everyone was photographing empty spaces. Trying to capture that urban distressed look. I could have been crudely 'real' but I wanted to create beautiful images.

that seduced people into seeing a darker truth. I picked on the family as a subject, as I was fascinated about my role in society as a man and potential father. I used to see all these apparently perfect families walking about in Islington and then catch the father eyeing up some girl on the street, which just blew the whole mirage. Cartier-Bresson talked about photos capturing the perfect moment, but in mine the perfection of those moments are shattered.

D&C: Why have you recently abandoned putting people and mannequins in your pictures?

JD: By paring the images down, they become stronger and more poetic. They tap into the history of the landscape. Recently I've been interested in forgotten places in the city and use them to evoke sadness and desolation. In 'Winter Kill', I used an old school yard, now gone to seed, to create a mood that was haunting, a fusion of things, yet full of contradictions. In it, the owl, which normally people don't see as a hunter, but as a noble and elegant creature, preys on a rat, generally considered vile, so the vile becomes the victim. The abandoned toys make it look as if some children have just left for their dinner. Play and innocence are gone and the savagery of reality has kicked in. NH

JOE DUGGAN IS SHOWING AT KORAALBERG ART, MARCH 24 - APRIL 30.
HOFSTRAAT 2, 2000 ANTWERP, BELGIUM, WWW.KORAALBERG.BE.

200 DAZED & CONFUSED