

PRESS RELEASE

**MICHAEL BERMAN: "UNDER A DRY MOON"
LASZLO LAYTON: "CABINET OF CURIOSITIES AND PICTORIAL
ZOOLOGY"**

**November 17 – December 30, 2006
Opening reception with the artists, November 17, 6 – 8 pm**

Joseph Bellows Gallery is pleased to announce the October/November exhibitions featuring photographs by Michael Berman and Laszlo Layton.

Sponsored by a fellowship from The Southwest Center at the University of Arizona, Michael Berman began a seven year project photographing the desert along the southwestern Arizona/Mexico border, called El Gran Desierto. "Under A Dry Moon," presents a selection of that work.

Berman's black and white photographs are rooted in the tradition of classic landscape photography, specifically western landscape photography such as that of Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Carleton Watkins. Like these artists, Berman is often inspired by the open, sublime western landscape. Berman's photographs *Predator's View*, *Seedlings*, and *Rosario Wall* offer views of the vast, seemingly untouched desert.

However, the artist also offers a different vision of the desert. He says, "I go to the desert to wander. Photography gives me a reason to go and something to bring back." His photographs show us sites and objects he encounters as he wanders. A broken down car, a coiled wire frame of a mattress, and an armless child's doll all have a subtle beauty as Berman photographs them quietly lying under the desert sun. These photographs have a spirit of discovery. Although we, the viewers, have not spent weeks traversing the desert, we are allowed through these photographs to experience the desert as a wanderer would, happening upon these strange and mysterious places.

He has said of the desert, "It is a landscape most people find barren and drive by. I love looking at these places. They are a kind of puzzle. A landscape of the imagination. They have lost their soil. Humans have churned it, stripped it, and let it wash away. What it could be, what it once was, is a beautiful mystery."

Berman has received fellowships and awards from the Wurlitzer Foundation and the Arizona Commission of the Arts. His work has been widely exhibited throughout the country, and his photographs are in the collections major institutions including of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego, the Tucson Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery, Smith College Museum, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. He currently lives in

Southwest New Mexico.

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We are also pleased to present a selection from Laszlo Layton's series *Cabinet of Curiosities* and *Pictorial Zoology*.

His two series of natural history subjects visually borrow from 17th, 18th, and 19th century illuminated science and zoology books. These books were illustrated with artists' engravings, lithographs, and drawings of the specimens. Layton says, "What these illustrations may have lacked in scientific accuracy they more than made up for in artistic expression." The use of photography to document living creatures makes 20th century natural history books much more scientifically accurate, but Layton is inspired by the romantic charm of the earlier representations.

The artist attempts to recapture these old illustrations by using an old photographic process, vintage soft-focus lenses, and hand coloring. Many of the species Layton photographs are extinct, rare, exotic, and unfamiliar. His beautiful hand coloring illuminates the already beautiful subjects and lends an artistic interpretation of a scientific subject.

Layton's work is included in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and the International Wildlife Museum, Tucson, Arizona. He currently lives in Los Angeles, California.

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