

Ann de Forest:

## JOEL KATZ IN ROME

Before Joel Katz left for Rome in 2002, he expressed his disappointment that the Vatican had eliminated a position he had always longed for—*advocatus diaboli* or Devil's Advocate, the prosecutor assigned to expose the fraudulence of miracles in claims to sainthood. In Joel's mind this dream job extended well beyond the technicalities of canonization. He imagined himself wrangling with the Pope on all matters of doctrine and belief, his irreverence and skepticism earning him a permanent gig in the Church hierarchy.

When he arrived, however, Joel found that Rome didn't need one more skeptic. The city itself is one big argument, a lively, contentious conversation between the past and present, between believers and scoffers, between the enduring and the ephemeral. The Devil, it seems, has many advocates, and the Church speaks with many voices, not all of them loud or domineering. Sometimes that voice represents order, sometimes it offers absurdity, sometimes beauty, sometimes—when rose petals rain through the oculus of an ancient temple—transcendence.

Rather than take sides, Joel chooses to show the clashes and contradictions and let them speak for themselves. In "Wall Wrap," a delicate Madonna hidden high on a street corner is a whispering contrast to a haughty Versace model, her face looming three stories over the Trevi Fountain. They may subvert each other's message, yet neither cancels the other out. These beauties co-exist, in the collage as they do in Rome, at once arch-rivals and soul sisters

Presented with mystery, Joel doesn't peel away the layers that muffle and obscure the truth. He gives us more layers, so that the elusiveness of the images becomes their truth. On Good Friday, he takes his camera to Sicily, to record the procession of penitents through the city of Enna. He does not argue with the devout or debunk the strange rituals in which grown men dress in hooded robes and little girls don nun's habits. His camera is an instrument of curiosity. In this exhibit's collage, the penitents are a mystical blur of motion and light, while a little nun stands solid and whole at the center (the only complete human figure we see in this exhibit.) Framed by the ordinary blue-jeaned legs of her elders, she seems so incongruous that she might be a vision only the photographer can see. Her gaze is frank, her hand open in a gesture of welcome or benediction. It is that directness that draws us, even more than her odd costume. "Who are you?" Joel asks with his camera. She answers right back: "Who are you?"

### Ann de Forest

writes fiction and non-fiction, and recently completed her first novel. For 25 years, she has written about design, architecture, and the built environment for numerous publications, including *ID Magazine*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer Sunday Magazine*, the *New York Times*, and *USAirways magazine*. She teaches in the graphic design program at the University of the Arts and is currently working on a book of essays about visiting churches in Rome.

### Acknowledgments

Miriam Seidel, *Curator, Gershman Y Galleries*

Rosa Esquenazi, *Chair, Gallery Committee*

John Gibbons, *Exhibit Installation*

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Ann de Forest

Trish Thompson

Mary Torrieri, *Associate, Joel Katz Design Associates*

Bill Severson, *Wren Fellini Gallery*

### Sales

Roma Amor, collages by Randall Couch and Joel Katz: \$5,250, framed. While each piece is by definition unique, there will be an edition of 5, which will vary in the paper and artifacts used in each. The pieces in this show will be 1/5.

*Janus* and *Enna Altarpiece* are priced at \$2,250 each, framed, and will be editioned just as the Roma Amor collages.

*Bar Bodoni*; *Basement of Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala*; *Piazza di San Marco, Palazzo Ducale, Venice 2002*; and *Cloister, San Giovanni in Laterano* are not for sale.

Digital assemblages are priced at \$650 each unframed; edition of 10.

For information, please contact curator Miriam Seidel at [mseidel@gershmany.org](mailto:mseidel@gershmany.org) or 215.446.3001.

### Websites

[www.joelkatzphotography.com](http://www.joelkatzphotography.com)

[www.joelkatzdesign.com](http://www.joelkatzdesign.com)

*The Open Lens Gallery*

**The Gershman Y**

401 South Broad Street

Philadelphia PA 19147

[www.GershmanY.org](http://www.GershmanY.org)

*The Gershman Y*

Laurie Wagman & Irvin J. Borowsky  
Honorary Co-chairs, the Borowsky Gallery

## ROMA Amor



A collaboration with poems by **Randall Couch** and images by **Joel Katz**



**Joel Katz:** Digital assemblages and collages

*The Open Lens Gallery*  
**The Gershman Y**  
401 South Broad Street  
Philadelphia PA 19147

**11 December 2008–  
1 February 2009**  
*Gallery Hours:*  
Sunday–Friday 9 am–5 pm  
Closed Saturday

## Randall Couch & Joel Katz: **ROMA AMOR**

•*Northeast wall (“Open Lens Gallery”), left to right*

### **Winged Victory**

*Cinecittà, Rome*

Form: argument *via negativa*. F.T. Marinetti wrote in the 1909 *Futurist Manifesto*: “a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.”

### **Ephemera**

*EUR (site of Mussolini’s planned Universal Roman Exposition)*

Form: permutation by progressive subtraction.

•*Southeast wall (“Roma Amor”), left to right*

### **Wall Wrap**

*Trevi Fountain, Rome; Prati, Rome*

Form: double *belle espionne* on the name Versace. A variation on the OULiPo constraint called the *belle absente, a belle espionne* (beautiful spy), requires each line to use all the letters of a given name except the letter in the position corresponding to the line number (first, second, etc.).

### **Roma Amor**

*Passeggiatta del Gianicolo, Rome*

Form: word palindromes. The words in each line of a couplet mirror those in the other. The Passeggiata del Gianicolo meanders from the Fontana dell’Acqua Paola, near the highest point within the city walls, down to the Vatican. The upper part is lined with a hundred weathered busts of Italian patriots, followers of Giuseppe Garibaldi, that look out on evening strollers, who look back.

Lauro De Bosis was a political activist and aviator whose plane was presumed lost at sea in 1931 after he flew over Rome dropping anti-Mussolini leaflets. He had an extended relationship with the American monologist Ruth Draper. Following the Second World War, his bust was added to those of the Garibaldini along the Passeggiata, where it has several times been vandalized.

### **Oculus: Pentecost**

*Pantheon (now consecrated as the Church of Santa Maria dei Martiri), Rome*

Form: interpenetrating texts (vertical text from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians). The Christian feast of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit to inspire the disciples of Jesus after his resurrection and ascension—the supernatural suffusing the natural world. Rose petals are dropped from the oculus of the dome at the conclusion of the Pentecost service.

### **Two Feet**

*Rome*

Form: parody, in iambic dimeter, of Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo.”

•*Northwest wall, right*

### **Knockoff**

*Trevi Fountain, Rome; Piccolomini Library, Siena*

Form: snowball and melting snowball. Each line contains a single word, increasing or decreasing in length by one letter from the previous line.

### **Poet’s statement**

I’ve known and admired Joel’s work for years. I became particularly intrigued by an exhibition of images made during his Rome Prize residency. They resonated with several of my poetic concerns: the way perception mediates the boundary between self and world; the use of formal devices to bind contradictory perceptions in a single created object; the exploitation of layered, simultaneous effects to suggest the nonlinear way we actually experience time. When I shared my responses with him, Joel said, “It’s funny you should say that. I’ve been thinking that these need words.”

Thus we embarked on what has become a tremendously exciting collaboration. We envision RomaAmor, when complete, as a collaborative artists’ book or portfolio of perhaps forty pieces. Out of thousands of photographs, often already juxtaposed in pairs by Joel, I look for images that arrest my attention and suggest both a formal and thematic approach for a text. Rather than being mere captions or examples of ekphrasis, these poems derive their formal constraints and compositional principles from ones found in the images themselves. Likewise, the “subjects” of the poems exist in dialogue with the interpretation of the visual components.

Joel responds to my texts by feeding them back into the images—revising and adding elements, choosing strategies to typeset or inscribe the words—in ways that strengthen the impact of both, and more tightly integrate them into a single experience. Then we meet to discuss, evaluate, and experiment so that each piece evolves through several drafts. While they vary widely in tone, intellectual thrust, and emotional color, the completed works—if we are successful—are not quickly exhausted, but reveal new correspondences with each repeated encounter.

### **Randall Couch**

*edited and translated* Madwomen: The *Locas mujeres* Poems of Gabriela Mistral (University of Chicago Press, 2008). *He is a regular panelist on the podcast series PoemTalk sponsored by the Poetry Foundation, PennSound, and Kelly Writers House. His poems have appeared in numerous journals and have been anthologized in Best New Poets 2005 and Xconnect: Writers of the Information Age VIII. In 2000 and 2008 he was awarded fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He is an administrator at the University of Pennsylvania and teaches poetry writing and poetics at Arcadia University*

## Joel Katz: **DIGITAL ASSEMBLAGES** and **COLLAGES**

•*South wall, top to bottom, left to right*

**Nuns at the Vatican**, *Rome 2003*; **T-shirt seller**, *Venice 2002*; **Corso Vittorio Emmanuele II**, *Rome 2004*

**Shop windows**, *Rome and Venice 2002*

**Hotel Sicilia; Street scene, Good Friday**, *Enna, Sicily, 2003*

**Alley shrine; Church**, *Naples 2005*

**Blue screen, Cinecittà**

*Rome, 2003*

**Site artwork by Alberto Burri**

*Gibellina, Sicily, 2003*

Destroyed by an earthquake in 1968, the ruins of Gibellina were left untouched. Burri covered them in concrete, preserving the shape of the buildings and the street plan.

**Cimitero acattolico (“Non-Catholic Cemetery”), known as the Protestant Cemetery**, *Rome 2002*

Keats and Shelley are buried here.

**Number 3 tram**, *Rome 2003*

**Via dei Coronari; Piazza Navona**, *Rome 2002*

**Cimitero di Staglieno** *Genoa, 2003*

**Piazza del Duomo**, *Spoleto 2005*

**Reflection; Food truck**, *Roman Forum 2004*

**Children’s section of town cemetery**, *Solfagnano, Umbria 1998*; **Christmas tree with photographs of children born during the year**, *Spoleto 2008*

**Cimitero di Campo Verano**, *Rome 2007*

•*Southwest wall, left to right*

**Bar Bodoni**, *Via Giambattista Bodoni, Rome 2003*

**Basement of Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala**, *Siena 2002*

**Piazza di San Marco; Palazzo Ducale**, *Venice 2002*

**Cloister, San Giovanni in Laterano**, *Rome 2003*

•*Northwest wall, left to center*

**Good Friday**; *Enna, Sicily, 2003*

**Janus**, *Cimitero di Staglieno, Genoa; Rome 2003*

### **Artist’s statement**

I’ve been putting photographs together in pairs for about eight years, possibly a legacy of my decades of designing print: one aspect of bound print pieces, unless you defy the laws of physics and the conventions of binding, is that a bound spread has two sides. So it has always seemed natural to me to put two images next to each other.

I began assembling images digitally in 2002, when I was a Fellow at the American Academy in Rome, where all the photographs, assemblages, and collages in this show began. Four collages (framed in black) and some of the digital assemblages date from this time. Going back to Rome every year since then, most recently for three months, have added to my collection of images, in dealing with which I am way behind.

Italy is about sex, religion, and death (not necessarily in that order). And, like photography, about time, as you would expect from a country in which “modern” history begins in 1600. Italians’ attitude about these subjects is, to say the least, ambivalent and complicated, and it is this ambivalence that intrigues me and that I have tried to capture by juxtaposing images that reveal the ambiguities, contradictions, and contrasts in Italian life and culture. Italian preoccupations to a great extent mirror my own.

I was delighted when Randall approached me with the project that we are calling Roma Amor, also the name of this exhibition, also the name of one of the seven collages completed so far. In addition to respecting Randall and his poetry, I correctly suspected that it would add a new dimension to my own work, challenge me, lead me in new directions, and give me an opportunity to collaborate on original works that were not mine alone.

What the process has done for me is to help me conquer my fear of getting my hands involved in shaping the collage. The computer can be a shield as much as it can be a doorway, as for that matter can the camera. Working on this project with Randall has given me a greater appreciation for the relationships among my own images as well as the new dimension added by Randall’s words and perceptions. The process has provided me an opportunity to deepen and expand the meanings that reside within the photographs.

### **Joel Katz**

*has been a photographer since 1964, when he spent six weeks in Mississippi during “Freedom Summer.” He won the Rome prize from the American Academy in Rome in 2002 and has most recently exhibited his photography at Moore College of Art and Design and Temple University in Rome. Katz is the principal of Joel Katz Design Associates, an information and wayfinding design office in Philadelphia. Locally, JKDA is the designer of Walk!Philadelphia, the city’s pedestrian wayfinding system; Ride!Philadelphia, bus maps and interpretive panels in Center City’s transit shelters; and signage for the portals that access rail transit in Center City. Katz teaches at Philadelphia University and the University of the Arts. He was elected an AIGA Philadelphia Fellow in 2002.*