

# pdn

MAY 2006

## BLURRING FICTION AND REALITY: PAOLO VENTURA

Tom Hunter and his elaborate conceptual recreations of Old Master paintings combined with modern-day headlines are part of a broad stream in contemporary art photography, represented by Gregory Crewdson, Jeff Wall, Anna Gaskell and other photographers who fabricate tableaux in front of their cameras. Another newcomer getting a lot of attention with his fictional images this year is Paolo Ventura, whose complex photographs recreate fictional scenes from World War II. Ventura's work is featured in *War Souvenir*, a publication released this spring by one of our 2006 PDN Players, book publisher Contrasto.

"Since the first moment I saw the images by Paolo, I was totally fascinated," says Contrasto director Roberto Koch. "He works on the real memory of true events, and he reconstructs them in a narrative environment that he creates with his hands, only in order to give us back a photograph full of details. The traditional power of photography as the privileged medium to provide evidence is now brought, with Paolo's art, to a different status: it's indeed through his photographs that we can now remember something, even if we have never seen it before."

The Italian-born Ventura produces his images using miniature figurines and sophisticated sets. The photographs range from gruesome events—with set-ups displaying hangings, suicides, bullet-ridden rooms and deceased soldiers buried in mud—to nostalgic scenarios showcasing couples kissing in low-lit bistros and soldiers relaxing at theatrical performances. The images focusing on the fallen soldiers encased in soil are especially gripping. Glancing at them, viewers could easily imagine that the subjects were genuine combatants depicted through the lens of Robert Capa as he traversed the war-torn European continent.

Ventura, who now splits his time between New York and Anghiari, Italy, has had his work published in a number of magazines, including *Aperture*, *The New Yorker* and *Harper's Magazine*. His "War Souvenir" project will be exhibited at the Hasted Hunt Gallery in New York City, along with images by photojournalist Eugene Richards. The show runs through May 20th.

"Ventura has a unique, childlike and dark view of a special world—Italy in the late 1930's and 40's," says Bill Hunt of the Hasted Hunt Gallery. "We have only known about this through movies and old black-and-white photographs. The artist takes us on a strange tour of period, place and people. These photographs are his imagined forensic evidences. This is wonderfully well-done, dramatic, tragic and funny story telling. Pairing him with the ultimate in reportage, Eugene Richards, seems like some sort of divine and curious marriage."

To see more of Paolo Ventura's work, visit his Web site: <[www.paolovertura.com](http://www.paolovertura.com)>.



© PAOLO VENTURA/HASTED HUNT GALLERY/CONTRASTO

—Anthony LaSala