

Time Out New York
October 9-16, 2003

Juergen Teller, “Daddy You’re So Cute”
Lehmann Maupin, through Oct 18 (see Chelsea)
By Martha Schwendener

The fine line between art and fashion photography isn’t so fine with Juergen Teller. Teller is a successful London-based fashion photographer who’s worked with all the big names. But you wouldn’t mistake the photos in his current show for something in *Vogue* or *W*. As Teller explains in a gallery statement, what spawned these works was the revelation that he needed a change, “to photograph someone who doesn’t care at all how they look.” In other words, he needed subjects who were willing to look ugly.

He found his quarry in a handful of famous folks who are accustomed to looking better in photographs than they do here: Kate Moss, Stephanie Seymour, Kristen McMenamy, Samantha Morton, O.J. Simpson. But the main subject is the photographer himself, who appears naked in a variety of buffoonish postures, compromising poses and unglamorous settings.

Ugliness, then, seems to be what distinguishes art from fashion for Teller. Art is expression and freedom; fashion is beauty and tyranny. This would make for a pretty dull thesis if Teller weren’t willing to go the extra mile—photographing himself naked, beer can in hand, at his father’s grave; capturing Kate Moss (who’s forging another career as an artist’s muse for other artists, too) pregnant and without makeup; and spelunking into the hidden world of pornographic-looking stalagmites.

Falling somewhere between Ryan McGinley and Wolfgang Tilmans— between hip domesticity and edgy fashion grotesquery—Teller has two main things going for him: a sense of humor and great social connections. Playfully shot and arranged, these works might not have worked without the added celebrity juice. On the other hand, given Teller’s generous humor and self-deprecation, they just might have.