



Enrique Metinides

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Anton Kern Gallery, through Jan 13
(see Chelsea)



Untitled, 1979

Since 1948, Enrique Metinides has chased death and disaster as a Mexican photojournalist. Recently “discovered” by the art world, the 72-year-old makes his NYC debut with a remarkable body of work that positions him as the heir apparent to Weegee.

“There is nothing more beautiful than the death of a beautiful woman,” wrote Edgar Allen Poe, and one of Metinides’s best-known pictures bears out the observation. A color image from 1979, it shows the corpse of movie star Adela Legarreta Rivas

at the scene of a car accident, exposing the horror of death and the fragility of life. Her arm is slung like a rag doll’s around a pole, the bridge of her perfect nose intersected by a single line of blood. Disturbing yet undeniably gorgeous, the composition is so icily still that it almost looks staged. The same is true of a black-and-white image from 1965, depicting a young woman being carried by rescue workers (her eyes are closed and it’s unclear whether she is passed out or dead). Her frilly white dress is lifted to expose matching panties underneath.

Metinides’s photos might sink to the level of base sensationalism, were it not for their raw power and aesthetic pleasures. If they pose an ethical question—how is it possible to enjoy such horrific imagery?—they join the ranks of Goya’s “Disasters of War” and Warhol’s “Death and Disaster” series in the process. These images of civilian catastrophes may directly confront our morbid fascination with death, but they also deliver a blast of the sublime.—*Adam E. Mendelsohn*