



> SHOUTS AND MURMURS: JOSHUA STERN

EXHIBITION DATES: MARCH 19 - APRIL 18, 2004
GALLERY HOURS: FRIDAY TO MONDAY 1 TO 7 PM

The settings that Joshua Stern has created for his most recent photographs of stick figures are by far the most complex to date, directly modeled on the interiors of Vermeer paintings, with carefully orchestrated lighting effects.

This complexity might at first seem at odds with the artist's stated desire to *simplify in order to focus on the intent of the work*. However, by exploiting aspects of Vermeer's formula for amplifying silence in these interiors, Joshua Stern's simple stick figures inhabit them with an unexpectedly powerful presence. In this way, Stern is able to heighten our consciousness of his humble protagonists and of the mundane activities in which they are engaged. The highly simplified and featureless figures become endowed with surprising personality, and this is clearly the arena that interests the artist. Stern speaks of this mechanism as *magnifying the grandness of the insignificant*, and he certainly achieves this when particular figures in his photographs (each one made of a few pieces of dowel) seem to unquestionably be experiencing emotions as diverse as irritation, boredom or inferiority, or perhaps serenity, excitement or even love!

These might sound like inflated claims for a mere stick figure that has no neck or feet, but this is the challenge of these photographs which, by using unassuming imagery and discreet narrative, seem ultimately able to invite contemplation of deeper issues, as cerebral as the human condition itself, and as plebian as the pros and cons of having sex on a table. Here, Stern is more intent than ever on running in the opposite direction of what he refers to as *art that is screaming to be seen and heard*. Indeed, the unpretentiousness of these works is one of their attributes, itself maximizing the potential of other qualities to operate, balancing humor with philosophy, art history with innovation, and craftsmanship with concept.

Joshua Stern has previously exhibited his work in numerous venues including, American Fine Arts, The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, White Columns and Galerie Michel Rein, Paris. His work has been shown regularly at Parker's Box where it was featured in the inaugural exhibition (2000) as well as a previous solo exhibition (2001). Joshua Stern is a director of Plus Ultra Gallery, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.