

HP Garcia Gallery is pleased to announce the solo exhibition "Horst Stein: Photography", opening on Wednesday, September 10, 2008 from 6- 9 PM.

Karen Peters: "How do you not fall into the trap of reproducing voyeuristic cliché by using pornographic elements while attempting to reflect the powerful relationship of subject and object?"  
Horst Stein: "One could say that I am not using pornographic elements, because we look at nudes that are taking pictures of themselves, their self-portraits. Yes, I work with means of voyeurism. I am not interested in distanced or detached critique of it all, but in involving the recipient. I want them to feel touched and to play an active part in the process, to be in it themselves. I can only achieve that through visual experience and not by sparing pornographic depictions. I don't judge pornography, if I take the position of the other myself. L'autre, c'est moi."

Stein's second solo exhibition in New York features new provocatively bemusing photographs, depicting seemingly unsophisticated onlookers as models posing in front of the artist's paintings. The artist produces meticulous oil on paper works in ever changing styles that solely function as props for his formally constructed photographs. Stein's seductive images dissect voyeurism and pornography exploring new possibilities of portraiture. With his three new photography series showing at HP Garcia Gallery the Viennese sculptor-trained artist has intensified his incessant quest to analyze the complex relationship between the viewer and the object on the one hand while undermining its hermetic nature on the other. Not coincidentally, in the cradle of Psychoanalysis and at the home to Viennese Actionism, Stein's photography projects integrate strong performative aspects such as destroying or handling parts of the photographed artworks. The artist's photography captures scenes of action between model and artwork that could be simulated or staged.

In "**Couple-Gun**," a series of five 25"x25" C-prints, a worker in his 50s, is proudly holding on to a bricolaged bazooka contraption. As if claiming his hunting trophy he stands next to paintings placed on an easel depicting young nude couples at a beach. At the place of their genitals remain physical bullet holes that he apparently has shot. The paintings are rendered in impressionistic style exuding flair of intact and innocent nature. However, the couples are involved in everyday interaction that is quite charged with gender specific content, i.e. it is the man who shows the woman a found object and she who attentively receives information from him. Contrary to the obvious focus on nudity and its taboo, Stein layers into his work the subtle aspects of relationships, those that fall under the radar of today's debates of equality and quota.

Stein uses photography as a medium for process. The artist stages the photo shoots in the courtyard of his studio and apartment building with his neighbors as models. An unceremonious and semi-public location it has become not only a laboratory for examining multiple aspects of voyeurism critique and self-imaging, but also the center of a unique microcosm. Ostensibly uninvolved in the contemporary art discourse, his models have reciprocated the artist's communication resulting in years of continuous relationships. The artist emphasizes that his artwork is not produced at the expense of the protagonists in his photography projects.

The diptych "**Couple-Couple**," (40x50"), is a couple-portrait showing a male and female worker in two parts, each stoically poised in front of a painting of a nude of their respective gender. The painted nudes take self-portraits with a digital camera in a mirror in a picturesque and phantasmagorical interior, reminiscent of Leipziger School painting in an ironical way. The photo protagonists don't interact with the artwork. They look somber or contained, maybe concentrated on the photo process; contrary to the painted self-portraits with voluptuous motifs full of clichés they stand next to. Stein plays with antipodes between the two images. The opposite of what one would like to convey is integrated, i.e. the austerity and the self-ironical. The artworks clearly

depict self-portraits while the protagonists seem disengaged. The format of a diptych explodes the possibilities of mirroring and switching-roles. The paintings are connected through narrative elements, while the photo models are a couple in reality.

The large-scale series of five "**Couple-Self-Made**," (60"x70",) shows four young women and one man in prosaic pajamas, representing the gender ratio of pornography models in the commercial market. Each look up in the midst of hanging a pornographic Pop Art poster style painting showing a model of the same gender photographing her- or himself in a mirror in a quasi acrobatic and static position. Sometimes a camera is stuck at the place of those painted models' genitals. The motifs appear emotionless. The paintings are austere composed with orthogonal orientation.

Exuding contained, subtly disquieting energy, Stein's work is not without humor. By venturing into the realm of pornography, Stein doesn't allow the viewer to bail out. It is confrontational to involve the viewer viscerally in a journey of reflecting our visual relationship with the other and the self. Stein's work let's us peel off the layers of these relationships leading us to circular questioning. The vantage points of the photographer, model, art viewer, and painted motif converge both in the axial compositions as well as in the process of Stein's work. The painted model, appearing as the pornographic object, is taking a photo of her or him self in a mirror. We are looking at a self-portrait. The size of the photos "Couple-Self-Made" is identical with the size of the photographed paintings. The painted camera lens shooting at itself in a mirror is located on the same level of the viewer's eyes and of Stein's analogue large-format camera lens. Legs depicted in the paintings describe central axes of the photography against a backdrop of layers of spatial walls defining the staged scenes. The lens positioning of his camera implies the viewer's regard, assigning him or her a part in the ever-switching role-play: The subject becomes object; the object turns into a projection of the self. Or is it a dream reflecting the reality it takes place in? The surprisingly unremitting oscillations between the voyeur's vantage points break the process down into levels of imagination, projection, the real, and the present. Transposing realities remains an ongoing play in Stein's oeuvre.