

Brad Stumpf: Shadow Plays

1819 3rd Ave ▪ Nov 18, 2022 - Jan 20, 2023



Harkawik is pleased to announce “Shadow Plays,” the first solo exhibition of Chicago-based artist Brad Stumpf, comprised of 13 modestly sized panel paintings made during the pandemic and after. Full of kinetic energy where the hand of the painter meets coiled string’s bound repose, the slump of paper page struggling against a square of tape, or the dual movements of a vessel and body within one, Stumpf’s paintings are first and foremost uncomplicated containers of love. Executed in bursts of ochre, periwinkle and manila, they are overflowing with propositions, frames-within-frames, monuments, squats and sunny interiors, and the sorts of bodily encounters, from the casual to the profound, that are enabled by them. His central tool, apart from a keen sense of color and commitment to refinement through translation, is the tension created where confident dabbing meets frenetic pockets of “etched-in” details.

Stumpf’s interiors are carved willfully from the stuff in his immediate surroundings, and there’s nothing present that

doesn't break back down neatly into its component parts. In "We have the ability to touch everything," the "touching" in question is staged between paper stand-ins, characters who gesture at one another across a tiny proscenium. Here Stumpf employs a deceptively subtle tromp l'oeil gesture; his impasto technique creates another "axis" for the painting, wherein the paint's topology becomes, itself, a compositional tool. Without masking, wiping, or tracing, Stumpf carves out the edges of paper limbs, the crisp folds of paper, and the pink-on-pink silhouette of a laminate counter, leaving raised areas that reward close inspection. "Ability," flush with sweet contrivances, diverges from works like "Beating in Sync," in which hearts beat as lovers beat off, or "In Hopes of Touching Everything It Can," where contrapposto humping transforms an unremarkable bedroom wall into a disquieting trophy collage worthy of the King of Pop.

Stumpf's methodology—constructing elaborate maquettes, painting them from life, only to discard or repurpose them—recalls process-fetishists like Fischli & Weiss, and Angelinos Hirsch Perlman and Amy Adler. Materially however, they are more closely connected to the films of Chantal Akerman, John Waters, and Joe Swanberg, the ad-hoc assemblages of Nancy Shaver or John Bock, and the colorful tondos of Manny Farber. Despite his clear affinity for pangloss, Stumpf is a critic of sorts, carefully articulating what he is doing by way of what he isn't. *Shadow Plays* is as much a delight for the senses as it is a series of thoughtfully constructed object-lessons lying in wait, available only to the ready and willing.