

Victoria Miro is pleased to announce the first gallery exhibition of Canadian artist Stan Douglas.

Since the 1980s Stan Douglas has reappropriated key moments from history, precisely examining political, social and racial shifts, in an effort to deconstruct and reimagine their presupposed and foregone outcomes. Douglas appropriates the fantastical and hyper-real from Hollywood; murder mysteries, Westerns and film noir. He frames these minutely researched narratives within the borrowed literary constructs of Samuel Beckett, Herman Melville and Franz Kafka.

Working within film and photography as his preferred medium, Douglas constructs life-size, cinematic mise-en-scene, which immerse the viewer into a complex, unknown and unfolding story. The scenes he creates are at once familiar and yet unknown with an air of mid-moment foreboding.

Midcentury Studio comprises a series of large-scale stark monochrome photographs, each depicting a single scene from a much larger narrative. The series follows an orderly sequential chronology, yet Douglas defies straightforward story telling conventions in favour of more elaborate constructed narratives in a questioning of authorship and reality. Douglas often presents his work in such a way that there is an element of chance and random ordering, meaning that the viewer can enter the narrative at any point and create their own understanding.

In this, Douglas focuses on and questions the intricacies and contrasts present in the subjective understanding and processing of historical events, through his manipulation of narrative and aesthetic structures, he undermines the perceived true and authentic report.

Midcentury Studio evidences one of Douglas's most ambitious projects, taking up the conceit of a fictional photojournalist as central protagonist, who in stark hyper-real flash accentuated images, documents a series of events highlighting a historical nascent dystopia. North American post-war press photographic reportage, and the authenticity of spontaneous off-guard documentation, were the genesis of his research. Anonymity of the photojournalist, his use of authentic 50s era technologies, and authentically dressed actors to portray the characters, affords Douglas the chance to create a series which, whilst being rooted in the contemporary evokes the aura and preoccupation with melodrama of the mid-century through the guise of jugglers, actresses, magicians, carnival curiosities, paparazzi and crime scene reportage.

Through these individual casts of characters, Douglas carefully choreographs the underlying tension of the era. In Juggler, a middle-aged, primly dressed, pearl necklace wearing woman stands alone, outside in a dramatically lit garden, mid-toss as she juggles three butcher knives whilst stood on a

single foot. Both hands full with the hilt of a knife; the third hovers precariously in mid-air above her head. Douglas in his choice of suspending the image at that precise moment in time, leaves the viewer uncertain of the outcome, when gravity invariably takes hold. This chance and inevitability is also evidenced in Grips, which sees three hand contortions each grasping a cricket ball to various levels of safety.

In a decidedly overtly darker image, Hockey Fight presents a precisely measured conflict, in which a brawl has broken out amongst two spectators of an unseen hockey game. The image, shot from above in an unnerving, unfamiliar perspective, so that only tops of trilby hats and slicked-back hair can be seen, and cropped to obscure the identity of the mediator, leaves only two identifiable facial expressions to be seen amongst the mass; that of the grimacing, contorted fighter laid on his back, and the calm, focused interest of a female onlooker.

Douglas' preoccupation with failed utopias and the obsolete of the post-war North American period, is not about a redemption of past occurrences, but rather, as the artist says, a way to reconsider them, to understand why these utopian moments did not fulfil themselves, what larger forces kept a local moment a minor moment: and what was valuable there - what might still be useful today.

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