

Dirk STEWEN
Paper Eye Collection

January 15- February 21, 2009

Opening Reception Thursday January 15, 6-8pm

Gallery Two

For immediate release

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is very pleased to present *Paper Eye Collection*, an exhibition of new work by German artist Dirk Stewen. For his second solo show with the gallery Stewen continues his exploration of form and material, meaning and emotion, creating compositions that resist strict classification as sculpture, installation, collage, or photography. Juxtaposing found text, watercolors, confetti, thread, streamers, his own photographs, gentlemen's accessories, and various other sculptural elements, the works that comprise *Paper Eye Collection* are evocative and compelling compositions that seduce the viewer with layered references and suggested narratives, and reflect upon the process of artistic creation itself.

At once hard-edged and precise and simultaneously subversive and alluring in their unorthodox use of material, Stewen's works demand interpretation and draw the observer into a visual dialogue. Combining elements that are vaguely illicit—thin black wooden rods and metal hardware, with more traditional materials like watercolors on delicate paper and lushly vibrant color photographs of pristine locations—Stewen creates unexpectedly stunning combinations. Each object in Stewen's compositions has been stripped of its original function and repurposed, "giving the viewer the possibility to rediscover its materiality" and focus on its formal properties: ladders become grids that define the space, vertical rods balance horizontal sequences, and suspenders create an abstractly figurative silhouette. The formal precision of Stewen's works divorces the individual elements from their original context, allowing them to recombine into a new and more poetic narrative. The elusive significance of this new narrative draws the viewer in.

Stewen has called the viewer his "accomplice," and for the works that comprise *Paper Eye Collection* he elaborates further on this engagement with his audience by incorporating paper eyes that meet and match the viewer's gaze. Sometimes large and colorful, sometimes hidden against the black background, these eyes float against the backdrop of Stewen's ink paintings, or as parts of collages, catching and holding the visitor's stare. The result is surprising and arresting; the viewer feels caught in an act of voyeurism, as they realize that they are being observed themselves. Just as Stewen blurs the lines between media in his assembled pieces here he blurs the distinction between subject and object, observer and observed, incorporating the viewer one step further into his work.

While the eyes in Stewen's pieces interact with their audience they also communicate with each other and a grouping of three works installed in the gallery's entryway seems to be holding a non-verbal conversation. Each of these three pieces is comprised of a pair of collages; one incorporating a pair of eyes and one without, and each pair balanced with a slim black wooden rod. These three works, made up of elemental shapes—rectangles, circles and lines—reference Max Ernst's work "Deux Assistants," a brass sculpture of two small imagined helpers. The title and reference to Ernst's work make the narrative more explicit, transforming elegantly minimal abstractions into figurative installations.

"Untitled," 2007, installed in the gallery's main space similarly references an important art historical figure. Here it is Honore Daumier, a nineteenth century artist known for his caricatures. The piece is an arrangement of various works on paper, inkjet prints and photographs, framed and unframed, flanked by colored wooden elements and steel rings. In the center two large, almost comically exaggerated eyes stare out, each sewn into their own inky black page. A found text, which appears as part of the work, praises Daumier's genius, and suggests that "a work of art should leave us speechless. It has little value if words are adequate for its formulation." Stewen playfully challenges this assertion by including as many textual elements as visual items in his composition.

In the side gallery Stewen presents "The Painter," 2007 a multi-part installation that again incorporates a text on Daumier. Describing a work by Daumier of the same title, the piece layers references to Stewen's own past works with an examination of artistic process itself.

Stewen's recent notable exhibitions include *Wir nennen Hamburg*, Hamburg Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany, 2008 (group); *The Exhibition Formerly Known as Passengers: Dirk Stewen*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, 2008 (solo) and previously, *Passengers*, 2007-2008, an ongoing group exhibition at the same venue; *Pale Carnage*, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, and Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland, 2007 (group); *Das Stipendium*, Kunstverein Hamburg, 2006 (group); and *Formalismus, Moderne Kunst, heute.*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2004 (group); among others.