

Christopher Stevens

Distant Relations

4 March – 10 April 2010

Private View:

Wednesday 3 March, 6–8 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday 10am – 6pm

Mummery + Schnelle is pleased to announce an exhibition of the work of Christopher Stevens.

Stevens's work has, for some years now, been concerned with the idea of 'everything'. This interest has its origin in the 19th Century *plein-air* tradition of artists drawing their subject matter from their local surroundings. But today this has become problematic. What now constitutes 'local' includes images spanning horizons that stretch from our own interiors to the farthest regions of space. The appearance of reality itself has multiplied to include high-speed and time-lapse, x-ray and infrared, the cinematic, the virtual and the prosthetic. Stevens is haunted by the thought that there may now be more images in the world than there are things that they depict or represent. How can we find meaning in this plethora of visual material, a way through this forest of signs? Instead of offering specific answers to these questions, Stevens is more interested in looking at how we attempt to understand the totality of this landscape. He sees something definingly human in our need to order and make sense of that which is beyond our grasp.

Stevens has said that his ideas come to him through the act of painting and this activity is fundamental to his practice, but the different elements of Stevens's work have become increasingly diverse and now include drawing, photography and film. Importantly, however, all these elements remain interdependent, something that the exhibition "Distant Relations" seeks to demonstrate. It brings together a number of works that could be read as a series of events occurring on a journey, or fragments of an overheard conversation. Two of the largest paintings Stevens has ever made, *Anatomy Lesson* and *Hollywood Dawn*, depict small accumulations of paint blown up to monstrous proportions and lit in the dramatic manner characteristic both of the Baroque and the most lurid of modern horror and sci-fi movies. Alongside these, photographs, videos and smaller paintings present a series of vignettes: a worm being eaten by ants, a solitary patch of grass in a car-park, a micrograph of dye emulsion on photographic film, a frayed edge of stair carpet, a plastic frog and princess in a snow-globe, a goat, rain, a moth endlessly trying to escape from a jam jar. There are also three drawings taken from time-lapse videos of cloud formations, which attempt to make visible the air that surrounds us.

In one sense what Stevens is doing in his work is what Georges Bataille described as the task of the 'operation' he called *formless* (*informe*), namely the voiding of categories, a bringing low and undoing of the whole system of meaning defined as a matter of form or classification. He is also pointing out that an image is never a simple reality and that image production in art is an alteration of resemblance that can take on a myriad of forms. In addition, it is important to note that Stevens's incursions into photography and film have enabled him to see painting not just as the material used to create an object, but also as both a way of thinking and an act that parallels our physicality as human beings. He thus aligns himself with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception as a concrete bodily encounter with the world.

Christopher Stevens was born in 1961 and lives and works in Brighton. Images and full biographical and bibliographical information about Christopher Stevens can be found on www.mummerschnelle.com.

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