Double Stark Portrait in Swirl, 1985-86
Photographs created by the Stern Twins outrageously assault all given standards of production and appearance, technique and aesthetics. Instead of finely made prints of carefully composed imagery are prints that are scratched, stained, torn, smudged, faded, battered, and misshapen, with images of blatantly mundane or purposefully obscured subjects. The images are out of focus, radically cropped, doubled, fragmentated, excessively enlarged, and disruptively manipulated. Compositions, moreover, are layered, taped, irregularly arranged, and highly idiosyncratic. The sense of disorder that runs rampant within the compositions is accentuated by the seemingly haphazard mode of pushpin display or the disjunctive, funky means of framing. Exhibition installations also cut against the grain by being odd assemblages of diverse works. Compositions which are both framed and unframed are typically hung in a stacked, cluttered manner upon the walls.

Of primary significance is the Twins' focus on the constructive factors which comprise and define photography. "We want to show the insides or guts of photography." They do, for example, in Ian Churchill (1985-87) by emphasizing the paper itself, the use of a toner to modulate surface color, and the variant possibilities of light exposure—the basic process by which images recorded on negatives are made to emerge or disappear. In the Horses (1985-86) and Seascape (1987) series it is a focus on the exact or reverse repetition of the same image that is pronounced. Such image duplication combined with attention to the process of multiple printing again gives prominence to photography as the subject matter of the works.

While exaggerating constituent aspects of the photographic medium, the Stern Twins reveal in the potentialities of manipulation, especially as this is allied with the dynamics of creation and destruction. Indeed, the constructivist aesthetic that prevails in the work must be viewed in terms of an equally strong deconstructivist attitude, for the compositions question the structures that typically give form, presence, and meaning to photographs. They uncover and challenge nearly all that is taken for granted about photography. Of particular note is the Stern Twins' refusal to consider photography as the archetypal medium of reproduction wherein reproduction connotes sameness and exactitude. For the Twins, whose identical likeness gives them an innate understanding of doubling, a key aim is to show difference within sameness, and to probe beneath the surface of duplication as a process and issue. By refusing to treat photography as mechanical reproduction, the Twins further confound concerns about originality and uniqueness that have plagued the art world since the emergence of photography in the nineteenth century.

Doug and Mike Stern were born in 1951 and grew up in suburban New Jersey. They began their collaborative photographs while still students at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and have enjoyed a rapid rise to success due to showings of their work at the Institute of Fine Arts, Boston (1985), the Whitney Biennial (1987), Documenta 8 (1987), and the Saatchi Collection, London (1988). The Stern Twins are represented by the Stux Gallery, Boston and New York.

Sidra Stich
Senior Curator

Works in MATRIX:

1. Double Chair, 1985-87, toned silver print/tape, 96 x 94". Lent by Barbara and Eugene Schwartz, New York City.

2. Boots with Metal and Film, 1983-87, toned silver print/film/netal/tape, 72 x 60". Lent by Julian Schnabel, New York.


4. Hands Detail, 1985-87, toned silver print, 45 x 45". Courtesy Stux/Boston.

5. Ian Churchill, 1985-87, toned silver print/tape, 82 x 83". Lent by the artists.


7. Blank Group #2, 1986, silver print/tape, 96 x 41". Lent by the artists.


10. Skull on the Head, 1985, silver print/tape, 10 x 8". Lent by the artists.

11. Lisa (Framed), 1987, toned silver print/tape, 19-1/2 x 18". Lent by Herb and Lenore Schorr, Ridgefield, CT.


18. Burgundy #1, 1986, toned silver print/tape, 24 x 41". Lent by Beverly and Harris Schoenfeld.


23. Double Chair Fragment, 1985-86, toned silver print/tape, 15 x 30". Lent by the artists.


Selected one-person exhibitions:

Stux Gallery, Boston, '95, '87; Stux Gallery, New York, '86, '87; Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL, '87.

Selected group exhibitions:


Selected bibliography about the artists:


Masheck, Joseph. "0f One Mind: Photos by the Starn Twins of Boston," Arts, Mar. '86.


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