

AUG 6 REVIEW: LYNN STERN: ECHOES OF LIGHT | OBSCURA GALLERY

REVIEWS



Lynn Stern, Force Field #21-131, 2021, 34 x 43.5", archival pigment ink print, edition of 6.
Courtesy of Obscura Gallery

Written by Yu Lam Yau

In *Echoes of Light*, showing until August 9 at Obscura Gallery, Lynn Stern continues her decades-long engagement with abstraction, form and composition. Working in the liminal space of the in-between, the almost, the barely-there, Stern handles ambiguity with a confidence that speaks to her authorial maturity and ever-experimental attitude.



Lynn Stern, *Passage #04-31a*, 2004 (printed 2011), 45 x 34 inches, archival pigment ink print, edition of 6. Courtesy of Obscura Gallery

At first glance, the shadowy contours that sweep across each frame are not easily decipherable. Even on closer inspection, the monochrome layers seem to alternate between what looks like charcoal sketches and views of a fogged-over landscape. This apparent shapeshifting is Stern's expertise with the scrim and natural lighting at work, as she sculpts shapes and texture into compositions that are both ostensibly familiar and highly stylised. Using simple geometric cubes and everyday objects, Stern's subtle staging creates silhouettes that don't announce as



Lynn Stern Quickening #17-02, 2017-2019, 38 x 41 inches, Archival Inkjet Pigment Print.

Courtesy of Obscura Gallery

much as they suggest; that don't shout as much as they whisper. Even the objects in Quickening #17-02, which are some of the most distinctly defined in the collection, are outlined in flickering opacity, with any harsh vertices quickly fading into the expanse of cloth.

This oscillation between clarity and obscurity is Stern's signature. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Force Field #21-131 and Mystic Light #13-03, where Stern tests the edge of photographic abstraction. Reduced to hazy smudges on a surface, the glass objects behind the scrim evade recognition, leaving the image, in a way, subjectless. They are wraithlike in their presence, hovering just beyond reach in palimpsestic shades of grey on grey. It is this push and pull between emergence and coalescence that imbues each image with a luminous dynamism, suspending them in a constant state of becoming.



Lynn Stern *Quickening #17-02*, 2017-2019, 38 x 41 inches, Archival Inkjet Pigment Print.
Courtesy of Obscura Gallery

The *Passage* series, perhaps the most intelligible pieces of the collection, is a distillation of Stern's deft navigation of nuance. Even at her most spare, Stern is able to set the stark white cloth aglow with a quietly shimmering energy, sublimating solid material into pure light and shadow. In her hands, the fabric gains momentum. It beckons and compels from beyond the veil, hinting at something nascent; something latent.

Unhurried in her approach, there is a distinct sense of freedom in Stern's experimentation. Freedom from pressure to define her work through a representational lens, or to give it definitive meaning. The images' lack of immediacy requires effort from the viewer, yielding as much as is put in. They show that the abstract



Lynn Stern Unveilings #82, 1985, gelatin silver print 8 x 10 inches, edition of 7 plus 2 APs.

Courtesy of Obscura Gallery

tion is not a shortcut to impact, but instead a true immersion in form, as Stern leads us into a meditative study of the infinitesimal gradation from one shade of grey to the next. Stern's commitment to her vision saturates each image with a sense of depth and connection to the medium that makes it easy to understand why light has been, and will continue to be, a mainstay of her practice.

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