REVIEWS

NEW YORK

Jack Goldstein

The Jewish Museum // May 10–September 29

THE PUSH-PULL BETWEEN remove and affect ranks among the most important legacies of late 20th-century art production, eclipsing earlier formal concerns over the dialectical tension between abstraction and figuration. From Pop art to punk rock, artists amplified found imagery through re-presentation and manipulation. Yet the Pictures Generation of the 1970s and '80s—so named after Douglas Crimp's influential 1977 "Pictures" exhibition—would drive this strategy to its end point, challenging issues of authorship and interpretation through its bald appropriations. One of the era's most mythologized figures is the Canadian-born Goldstein, whose economical first American retrospective reaches New York after its controversial Southern California venue switch from Jeffrey Deitch–run Los Angeles MOCA to the Orange County Museum of Art last year—a fitting rejoinder to the artist's contrarian reputation.

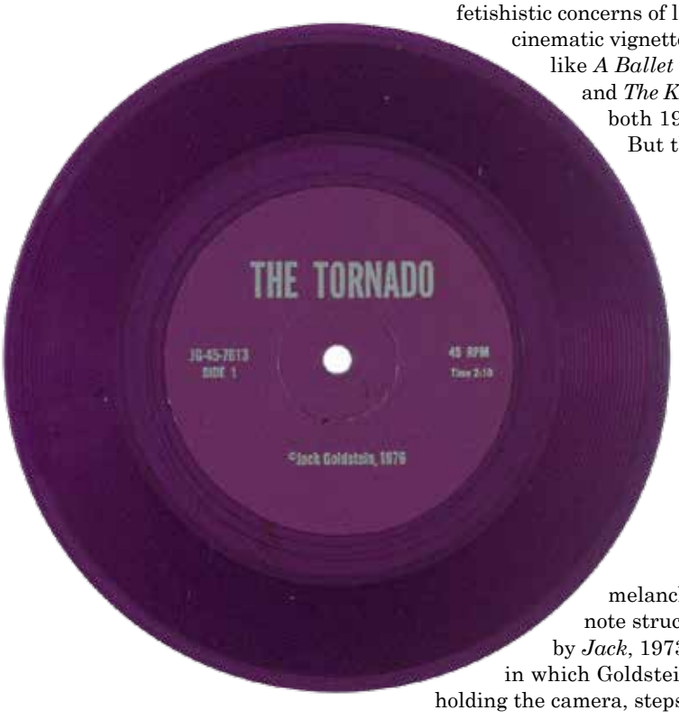
As a CalArts MFA student in the early '70s, Goldstein quickly traded the precariously balanced Minimalist aesthetic of his early sculptures for an approach more aligned with John Baldessari's famous Post Studio course and the resources of Hollywood. (The exhibition gives short shrift to these efforts, though Alexander Dumbadze's catalogue essay provides thought for further discussion.) Recent surveys, like Douglas Eklund's 2009 "The Pictures Generation, 1974–84" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, have revived interest in Goldstein's 16 mm color films from the mid '70s made on Hollywood soundstages, and recorded collages of canned

Jack Goldstein
Detail of *Untitled*, 1985. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 84 in.

ESTATE OF JACK GOLDSTEIN AND COLLECTION OF B. Z. AND MICHAEL SCHWARTZ, NEW YORK

sound effects. This show, however, gains strength through a presentation of Goldstein's more obscure early films.

The short actions, mostly shot in his studio, highlight Goldstein's presence as performer and director. The dark, evocative *Nail*, 1971—his attempt to remove a nail from a board with his teeth, his face in close-up silhouette against a moody blue background—presages the almost fetishistic concerns of later cinematic vignettes like *A Ballet Shoe* and *The Knife*, both 1975. But the melancholic note struck by *Jack*, 1973—in which Goldstein, holding the camera, steps away from a friend calling his name over and over for 11 minutes against the backdrop of a mountain range—foreshadows the turn in the artist's production (and his eventual suicide).



Goldstein's later works would engage what Crimp termed "the psychologization of the image" through dramatization of freeze-frames. The artist assumed a hands-off directorial role in performances with professional actors and athletes, films produced with industry professionals, compilations of sound effects pressed onto colored vinyl, paintings of photographs or abstract systems executed through airbrushing or by assistants, and, finally, an "autobiography" composed of lifted philosophical citations. Here, the layout privileges the undertheorized corpus of Goldstein's records and paintings. The records—what the artist called "images of an eroticism without the body"—are relegated to the background as low-volume ambient sound. The '80s paintings, on the other hand, offer moments of surprise, though they failed to thrive in the Neo-Expressionist market and suffered from the critical backlash against painting by Goldstein's anti-aesthetic champions. An untitled painting from 1985 of a photorealistic volcano, rendered in hot pinks and blues, retains a stubborn three-dimensionality with a not-quite-perfect scarlet-painted stretcher bar and silver edge. In retrospect, Goldstein's work reveals much more than a cool, distanced attitude; tinged with sentimentality, it emphasizes the sublime narrative power of pictures even as it subverts it. **—Wendy Vogel**

Jack Goldstein
The Tornado, 1976. 45 RPM record, purple vinyl.

NEW YORK

Stuart Sherman

JTT // June 24–July 19

DESPITE HAVING A perfect skill set for the booming postwar advertising industry, this artist managed to avoid it completely. Sherman (1945–2001) was a semantic ninja with the natural ability to coax playful and endearing imagery from ordinary objects. Unfortunately for the ad world, he was more interested in a countercultural lifestyle. Sherman started his career with the avant-garde Ridiculous Theatrical Company and the Ontological-Hysteric Theater, then delved into poetry, filmmaking, and, eventually, fine art. This exhibition of Sherman's proposals for sculptural projects from the 1980s—drawn by production artist Thomas Zummer—shows how his unique mind was able to merge a love of associative wordplay with the methodology of a "creative department"—something virtually unheard-of in the realm of contemporary art.

The 21 framed works on display range from elegant to silly, yet they always attack their subjects from odd angles. *Beached Wave*, 1985–89, is a perfect example of Sherman's brand of deadpan humor, which prefigured that of artists like David Shrigley by decades. This tidy sketch shows a single wave sculpture from the front and side, placed strategically on the coastline in comical juxtaposition to a real ocean.

While this proposal seems an object unlikely to be realized, other images, like *Subway Entrance*, 1985–89, a grassy staircase leading downward into a fake subway station, actually have potential as clever public projects. *Prayerful Hands*, 1989, finds Sherman eliciting an almost allegorical tone, where images start to resonate on a broad social level. This sketch of two hands in prayer—grotesquely fused to create a single, conjoined hand—echoes both the supernatural and the restraining forces of organized religion. It seems clear that Sherman was well attuned to his generation of '80s artists like Robert Gober and David Wojnarowicz, who chose to question the Moral Majority through subversions of religious iconography. Like Wojnarowicz, Sherman also died tragically of AIDS, after showing his sculptural work (fabricated by Zummer and others) in only a handful of gallery exhibitions. But his trove of sketches for unrealized objects proves that he had the potential for a long, illustrious career that could have worked as a giddy foil to Gober's dour imagery. It is possible that this exhibition may stimulate further investigation into this unorthodox art director, who quietly flourished while working on the outer edges of contemporary art.

—Ryan E. Steadman

Stuart Sherman
Prayerful Hands, 1989. Colored pencil and ink on paper, 12 x 9 in. Drawn by Thomas Zummer.

FROM TOP: ESTATE OF JACK GOLDSTEIN AND GALERIE DANIEL BUCHHOLZ, BERLIN AND COLOGNE; ESTATE OF STUART SHERMAN AND THE FALES LIBRARY, NYU