

Try Hard

Alex Stern

Mar. 16 - Apr. 27, 2023

168 Suffolk St.
New York, NY 10002
www.trotterandsholer.com

Wednesday to Saturday: 12:00 - 6:00pm



For **Alex Stern**, making art is unavoidable. *Try Hard* explores the idea of art as vocation - an existential requirement. Stern grapples with the feeling that, for him, being an artist is not chosen, but a state of being. As someone in recovery, art for Stern is not a creative act, but a pragmatic ritualized approach to survival. The stakes for Stern are high. His approach to time is captured in his repetitive lines.

The exhibition title *Try Hard* speaks to the vulnerability and even discomfort associated with total faith in the work. When trying is explicit the artist is left exposed to their audience. But for Stern to not try is a denial of truth. Ideally, for Stern art is an orthopraxic enterprise. He is attached to process, and aspires not to dwell on the result. Yet, it would be dishonest to say that he is unconcerned with the quality of his finished paintings. The tension between the work and the *work* is perhaps universal; *Try Hard* explores the pursuit of balance between the two.

For Stern, this focus on praxis is also connected to his Jewish identity. The space that routine and consistency occupy in Stern's life is devotional and informs his highly controlled linework and painting style. His approach to art and life spring from a foundational value system. While many faith traditions have a strong focus on the end, heaven or enlightenment, Jewish theology is very focused on practice, ritual and communal connection. While Stern doesn't consider himself actively religious, these modes of being in the world have inhabited his psyche.

Stern embraces imperfection, but he governs it. Each painting consists of multiple paintings, declaring the work's depth and value. The concealed images, along with each work's density, weight, and multiplicity, are essential to their worthiness. The lines obscure a deeper infrastructure. The images are what he deals with, and the lines are how he deals with them. Stern makes peace with chaos through his work. The compositions may be unexpected, but they are never haphazard. His exposed metal stretcher bars betray the illusion of painting, giving the viewer a sneak peek behind the curtain, but even in this exposure it is really Stern's effort that is exposed. His investigation of painting, of the process of artmaking, is laid bare to be seen and judged by an audience.

Try Hard presents paintings from different periods and bodies of Stern's work. This exhibition strives to look at his practice holistically and openly. It is an admission of effort over time.

Try Hard will be on view at 168 Suffolk Street from March 16 through April 27.

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