

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Jennifer Piejko, "Intimism Isn't Over: Frances Stark at the Art Institute of Chicago," *Blouin Artinfo*, August 2, 2015

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Intimism Isn't Over: Frances Stark at the Art Institute of Chicago

BY JENNIFER PIEJKO, MODERN PAINTERS | AUGUST 02, 2015



Installation view of Frances Stark's "Bobby Jesus's Alma Mater b/w Reading the Book of David and/or Paying Attention is Free," 2013.

(Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise)

A mien of grandeur and refinement wafts from Frances Stark's show at the Art Institute of Chicago. Off to one side, a warmly lit hallway invites the close inspection of a lone, delicate oil painting, trimmed in an ornate frame. Notes from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* hold an unpredictable tempo, adrift from an adjacent screening room. The gleaming floors reflect the shine from neat single rows of Plexiglas boxes and glass screens in various constellations across multiple rooms. Several bodies of work overlap, crossing paths across various rooms and configurations.

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Introduced as a retrospective of the artist's digital and video production, the varied technologies on view exhibit a range of distillation and adaptability, spanning the entire spectrum of digital production value. Fluffy kittens in piles look nostalgic on the fuzzy screens of box monitors, though her series of cat videos dates to 1999 at the earliest, while the material presence of square, numbered photos pulled from Stark's Instagram account ([@therealstarkiller](#)) — alternately one-handed snaps depicting abstract quotidian compositions of Post-it notes, painterly portraits of fruits and flowers, and lines from Dorothy Parker's poem "Philosophy" — take on real weight in their modular, acrylic installation. *Osservate, legette con me* (Observe, read along with me), 2012, a multiscreen, Mozart-soundtracked work running in a darkened room at the exhibition's center, shows a stream of chat-room lines between Stark and various pen pals ping-ponging on opposing walls, flirtation hitting proposition at brisk speed. Affectionate drawings of figures borrowed from past paintings, works on paper, and an assortment of her recent graphic "Clever/Stupid" series of posters break up the gloss and dim backlight.

The artist took over the Art Institute's Instagram account ([@artinstitutechi](#)) in the week before the show opened. She used this opportunity to highlight gems in the museum's deep storage: a Peruvian figure from 180 bc, 1,000-year-old Mimbres sculpture, and centuries-old canvases from Jacopo da Empoli and Lo Spagna. In another nod to the museum's archives, the exhibition is titled after a painting movement at the turn of the 20th century, Intimism — French paintings, small in scale, of quiet domestic tableaux — like the single one hanging here, also borrowed from the museum's collection. The work shows us a different kind of sharing and making public of banal, intimate scenes and observations, long before we redefined privacy as an opt-in setting rather than a default expectation. Intimism isn't over — if anything, there is more documentation than ever of all of us being "real," however labored over the image we may choose to show. It is only by engaging closely with these works that we see that they are not depictions of an endlessly refined feed of still and moving images but both the raw material and the finished product of an online persona in its various guises and un-erased glitches.