

Arnie Cooper, "Self service: LA's Hammer Museum showcases the works of writer/artist Frances Stark," *Wallpaper*, October 13, 2015

# Wallpaper\*

## Self service: LA's Hammer Museum showcases the works of writer/artist Frances Stark

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*Behold Man!*  
2013. Photography: Andy Keate. Courtesy of the artist and greengrassi, London

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If you're a fan of Frances Stark, the Los Angeles-based everything artist who paints, draws, produces videos, makes power point presentations and writes books, you're probably familiar with the extra-long titles she uses. Consider, for example, her 2009 exhibit at Nottingham Contemporary entitled, 'But what of Frances Stark, standing by itself, a naked name, bare as a ghost to whom one would like to lend a sheet?'

Ali Subotnick, curator of Stark's current show at Los Angeles' Hammer Museum says the oversized titles are comprised of the quotations from her favorite writers. 'Since she herself is a writer and poet, I think the length comes from her love affair with language and a gesture of inviting her viewers into her head, and revealing her influences—with

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just enough mystery that they look closer at the art work,' she says. That is why the description of the Hammer show, 'UH-OH: Frances Stark 1991-2015' seems oddly abbreviated. Stark came up with the title, says Subotnick, to demonstrate the connection between the human voice and instinct, or as Stark puts it, 'connecting utterance with perception.' 'I think of it,' says Subotnick, as more like "uh-oh" I've gone too far since she's very open and can over share.'

Google 'Frances Stark and chatroulette,' and you'll quickly encounter her feature length digital animation, *My Best Thing* (2011) a re-enactment of the verbal and text exchanges (sex chats, if you will) the then 44-year-old had with two Italian men back in 2010. This is just one of the exhibit's 125 works, which comprise the most extensive survey to date of Stark's 'poetic compositions and autobiographical reflections.'

No doubt, Stark has been criticized for being self-obsessed. But Subotnick points out that more often she finds inspiration from other artists, writers, musicians architects and friends like Bobby Jesus, the friend of a man she met at her son's skate park, who served as both her muse and protégé. Her video installation, *Bobby Jesus's Alma Mater b/w Reading the Book of David and/or Paying Attention is Free* (2013) makes its Los Angeles debut at this show.

Says Subotnick, 'Stark is a close reader and an incredibly generous viewer/reader/listener and in an ideal world, her viewers treat her work in the same manner. Paying attention to details is key to understanding the work but I also think it can be appreciated on many levels, so viewers can take in the surface and engage on an immediate level. Others, however, will dig deeper and unpack the layered references in the work.'

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