

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Aaron Horst, "Frances Stark at The Hammer," *Contemporary Art Review. LA*, October 28, 2015

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.la

# Frances Stark at The Hammer

October 28, 2015  
Text by Aaron Horst



Frances Stark, *The New Vision*  
(2006). Paint, pen, and pastels  
on paper, 23 1/2 x 20 1/2  
in. Image courtesy of  
greenpraxi, London. Photo:  
Kevin Schilling.

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Frances Stark is to the cat video what [Stevie Nicks is to the selfie](#): an early practitioner. She is receiving her due as part of the Hammer's mid-career survey, *Uh Oh*. Stark's early works in this office-productivity-destroying genre operate in the same vein as most home video, characterized by lax editing, a roving frame routinely misplacing its object of focus, and incidental music. Stark's videos are funny; positioned in an institutional context, they become demanding, then tedious (depending on your threshold for pain, or pleasure).

The difference between confession and oversharing often hinges on the venality of the former vs. the banality of the latter. Stark is more adept than most at repurposing the banal so thoroughly that it begins to occupy the realm, instead, of the curious. She liberally mixes text and self-referentiality, interweaving references to her own career, writings, text messages, and online chats throughout her work.

Text in Stark's hands is something of a pregnant paucity, sometimes potent with distilled meaning, often marooned in latent potential. Several works on paper consist of Stark writing out a sentence or phrase repeatedly, with the text flowing vertically and each letter more or less in line with its double. The remainder of the sheet, often upwards of two-thirds, remains blank—tastefully so (it's really nice paper). Stark's figurative works on paper likewise cull from a mixture of tasteful absence and muted shock: particularly the spiraling genital-bodily pun of *Structure That F(its my opening)* (2006), and the flash of *The New Vision* (2008). Throughout *Uh Oh*, sex and sexuality bubble in and out of other themes: digital costuming (*Nothing is Enough*, 2012, and *My Best Thing*, 2011); analogue costuming (*Chorus Line*, 2008); canonical literature (*Untitled (Tropic of Cancer)*, 1993).

Self-indulgence, foregrounded, is precisely the point. Stark works within a lineage including Sophie Calle, Tracey Emin and Chris Kraus in probing the strangeness and hilarity ebbing in and out of intra- and interpersonal dynamics. This major pillar of Stark's practice is responsible for as many hits (*I Went Through My Bin*, 2008) as misses (*Untitled (A Trade with Nick & Oliver)*, 2005). Stark's overextended oeuvre has it all: winning quizzicality, internal contradiction, the beauty of a turn of phrase. Rather than the easy valiance of defying institutional-retrospective structure, Stark's works here mutate and permeate into other realms: the literary, the biographical and, beyond, the everyday.

Frances Stark: *Uh Oh* runs October 11, 2015–January 24, 2016 at [The Hammer Museum](#) (10899 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90042).



Frances Stark, *i went through my bin* (2008). Collage on paper, 39 x 55 inches. Image courtesy of the artist. [Galerie Berthelin](#), Berlin/Chicago and [perennial](#), London. Photo: Karin Schilling.



Frances Stark, *Structure that F(its my opening)* (2006). Sculpture on paper with silk on panel, 39 x 55 inches. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Purchased with funds provided by the Acquisition and Collection Committee. Photo: Brian Forrest.

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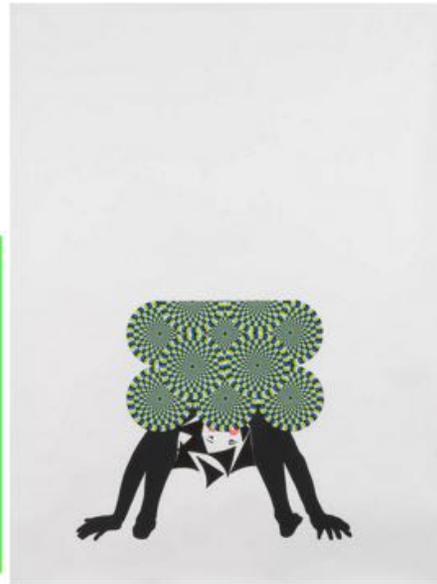
Frances Stark, *Radio Jesus!*  
*Alma Mater Give Reading the*  
*Road of David and/or Putting*  
*Attention to Free* (2010).  
 Multichannel projection with  
 audio, video music, and  
 telephony of real posters, 7:30  
 min. Purchased jointly by  
 Museum of Contemporary Art  
 Chicago with funds provided by  
 Marshall Field's in exchange  
 and Hammer Museum, Los  
 Angeles. Installation view,  
 Carnegie International (2010).  
 Image courtesy of Marc Fox  
 Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo by  
 Brian Costello.



Frances Stark, *Full After Full*  
 (2010). Mixed media on canvas  
 on panel, 60 x 89 inches.  
 Collection Nancy and Joachim  
 Beckhe. Image courtesy of  
 greengrass, London. Photo:  
 Robert Wedemeyer.



Frances Stark, *My Best Thing*  
 (2011). Digital video, color,  
 sound, 105:00 min, Hammer  
 Museum, Los Angeles. Image  
 courtesy of Gavin Brown's  
 enterprise, New York.



Frances Stark, *China printing*  
 and print (2006). Paper collage,  
 graphics on paper, 16 x 28  
 inches. Collection of The  
 Heckscher-Wagner and Ethel  
 Wagner, provided gift to the  
 Whitney Museum of American  
 Art, New York.