

January 18, 2023

Brad Stumpf
Shadow Plays

Harkawik

November 18, 2022 - January 20, 2023

by Jody Zellen



Thirteen modestly-sized paintings comprise Chicago based artist Brad Stumpf's exhibition *Shadow Plays*. The paintings are beautiful, personal and intimate. Formally, Stumpf combines thickly applied paint that defines spaces—walls, desks and objects—with more sparsely painted areas representing pieces of paper. These are filled with subtle pencil drawings—flying birds, couples in bed or riding bikes, in addition to affectionate nude depictions of a woman (his wife) and himself. Conceptually, the pieces are about the nuances of home and everyday life. Stumpf arranges and lights still lifes inside wooden boxes that rest on table tops and are filled with an array of props including small drawings. He then carefully paints these scenarios, flattening the space to fit the two-dimensional picture plane.

For *Beating in Sync* (2022) he juxtaposes a white bird with a small blue (matchbox sized) toy car. Both bird and car are expressively rendered with thick brush strokes and wide areas of color. Dangling above the bird and car are four yellow butterflies hanging from strings. Stumpf portrays the scene a glowing yellow as if illuminated by the setting sun. Centered in the composition is a white piece of paper (painted, not collaged) taped to the back of the box which features a pencil drawing of two figures lying head-to-head, their bodies extending horizontally toward the edges of the frame. Though more ambiguous, the painting references the shadow boxes of Joseph Cornell and celebrates the beauty that can be inferred from a collection of random things.

Our Hearts Half Submerged (2022) is a painting of the exterior of a blue house with a triangle shaped roof set against a lightly washed pink background. The house rests at the back of a table (another one of Stumpf's intricate constructions) behind an orange conch shell placed in the foreground of the composition. Across the facade at either edge of the house are drawings of a naked man and woman holding their hands out toward each other. Centered in what could be construed as a 'picture window' are more nuanced drawings of the couple with prominent orange dots where their hearts would be. Stumpf enjoys creating enigmas and his juxtapositions are poetically suggestive rather than didactic.

In *To Be Eclipsed By You* (2020), the still life within the box includes domestic objects like two coffee mugs situated at the base of the box, one sitting on top of a piece of white paper with interlocking stain-rings. Above the mugs is a pencil drawing on dark orange paper resembling the jagged lines of an EKG, and below that, two pages torn from a spiral drawing pad have been push-pinned to the back of the space. These feature two tiny figures (one male, the other female) riding bicycles on what appears to be a wide concrete expanse. Next to this, Stumpf again includes the detailed drawings of the couple with the orange hearts from *Our*

Hearts Half Submerged, only in this painting a larger orange circle covers and partially obscures another circle that is painted a darker blue. As the title suggests, Stumpf muses on the myriad meanings and presentations of 'eclipse.'

In his quiet and charming paintings, Stumpf focuses on the relationship between painting styles—simply and thickly rendered household objects—and more lovingly detailed pencil drawings of figures. For each work, he creates an elaborate maquette that is carefully lit, filled with specific objects and then faithfully reproduces it as a painting. What he has to say about house, home and relationships is illustrated with both humor and honesty, making these paintings an inviting pleasure to view.

<https://artillerymag.com/gallery-rounds-brad-stumpf/>