

## **Softside, new work by Joe Smith**

February 2 – March 16, 2013

David Petersen Gallery is pleased to present *Softside*, a solo exhibition of new work by Minneapolis-based artist Joe Smith. The exhibition is a combination of three distinct, yet interconnected, bodies of work that includes painting, photography and sculpture.

In 1859, Scottish activist and writer Samuel Smiles published the book *Self-Help*, a DIY instruction manual for middle class mobility. Nearly 100 years later, in 1952, Charles Schulz introduced the philosophizing but blanket-toting Linus van Pelt to his popular comic strip, *Peanuts*. With the exhibition *Softside*, Joe Smith's new work has nothing to do with these rather obscure references. However, it does acknowledge the incongruity of employing external resources for self-improvement through his continued exploration of the complexities, contradictions and possibilities within an expanded field of painting. February 2 – March 16, 2013

Suspended from both the gallery's walls and a beam that traverses the space, blankets and bed sheets are coated in layers of clear varnish, painted monochromatically, or re-sewn to take new geometric shapes. In various states of reflexivity, these paintings exist simultaneously as image, action and object, freeing them from interpretation to invoke myriad references - blankie, barrier, skin, protection, flag, dirty laundry, sponge, stains, etc. Free from the structure of stretcher bars, and tacked with pins, staples or snaps, the paintings hang with both modesty - clinging to the wall - and self-assurance - seeking liberation from it. Such subjectivity is inherent in Smith's work and conflicting readings are both expected and welcomed.

Further developing this dialogue between action, image and object, the exhibition contains selections from two series of photographs. Past paintings have been sanded down to near oblivion to become a new surface for seemingly random studio objects. Self-help books rest on a studio floor, its paint peeling from the surface in an act of autonomy. The objective composition of these images, rendered in a frontal, documentary format, is contradicted by the ambiguity of the image, the family snapshot scale of the photos, and the overwhelming presence of the paintings that have little visual or material relationship to the smaller works. The presence of self-improvement manuals in the artist's studio, or the documentation of destroying old paintings, inaccurately suggests a mid-life crisis wherein the ways in which the artist can further his self/career is through external assistance or looking outward. Instead, Smith reframes the cliché of a predicament by aiming the camera back at the manuals and past work, thus looking towards his own practice to create new meaning while still acknowledging the desire for personal betterment. The cohabitation of Smith's photographs with the large-scale paintings, like the combination of self-help guides and security blankets, creates a relationship that is both symbiotic and parasitic, a dysfunctional dynamic that disrupts the possibility of any subjectivity taking precedence over another.

Joe Smith (b. 1970) received his MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1998 and has been the recipient of several grants and fellowships, including The McKnight Fellowship for Visual Artists, the Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant, and The Jerome Travel Grant. He has exhibited in numerous venues, including Midway Contemporary Art, Occasional Art, and The Soap Factory in the Twin Cities, and The Suburban and Julius Caesar in Chicago. He currently lives and works in Minneapolis.