

Eli Durst

The Community

March 3 – April 4, 2021



Foley Gallery is pleased to present *The Community*, our first solo exhibition with photographer Eli Durst.

Durst's black and white photographs from *The Community* have haunted me over the past year. Who are these people? Secret societies? Crystal gazers? Religious fanatics? And...the Boy Scouts?! Most images fall somewhere midstream between ritual and demonstration, inside nondescript meeting halls. Actions seem purposeful, mysterious, and ambiguous, all at the same time. We feel equally part participant and observer. Durst's skill lies in bringing normalcy to the activities, honoring the participant's desire to seek community. The temptation to participate is palpable, and that's what makes this work so unnerving. The luscious print tones balance the "Baltz-like" starkness of these cool interiors.

In his own words...

"The fundamental concept guiding my work is the idea that every photograph is both a perfect document and a complete fiction. I seek to blur the line between documentary tradition and conceptual practice, taking subjects that are often represented in a documentary style and infusing them with an ambiguity and strangeness that asks the viewer to reconsider their understanding of reality and its relationship to the truth. I use black-and-white photographs to construct an alternate reality that bears an uncanny resemblance to our own, thereby defamiliarizing the everyday and commonplace.

*In this body of work, titled *The Community*, what began as an initial desire to photograph the insides of church basements quickly expanded into a much broader series examining the fundamental search for community in America. The activities depicted range from Boy Scout meetings to New Age spiritual*

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practices to corporate team building exercises and were made in and around the types of multipurpose community spaces that are ubiquitous throughout the United States. These meeting places are utilitarian and functional, meant not to be glamorous but practical. While these spaces are largely interchangeable, there's a specificity to their 'genericness,' a familiarity in their universality.

As I began photographing different types of activities, I realized that I was less interested in faithfully documenting the realities of these different groups and more interested in the strangeness and confusion that resulted from juxtaposing images from completely separate times and places. I was intrigued by the figurative space that exists between the photographs, the moment when one activity bleeds into another, creating a symbolic space of communal introspection. Put simply, these photographs are about the search for purpose and meaning in a world that both demands and resists interpretation."

The Community is published by Mörel Books, London, and printed by SYL, Barcelona. Signed copies will be available for purchase during the exhibition.

The Community is on view from March 3 – April 4, 2021. Foley Gallery is open Wednesday through Saturday, 11 – 5:30 pm and Sunday, 12 - 5. To request images, please contact the gallery at hello@foleygallery.com.