



## Movin' On Up

Posted on: September 8th, 2009 by: [Zack Seckler](#)

**Brian Paul Clamp, Director of the wonderful [ClampArt](#) gallery in New York City, shares a revealing story of discovering, and ultimately representing, the work of photographer [Amy Stein](#) for us. It's an important story that sheds light on the often talked about yet seldom discussed process of how photographers find representation at prestigious galleries. If anyone has similar stories of how they found gallery representation please share in the comments section.**

**Produced by Anna Beeke.**

As a gallery owner, one of the questions I get asked most often is how I choose the artists I exhibit and represent. It is difficult to provide a concise answer, since it differs case-to-case, so instead I will offer an example of the process by which work by a specific artist made its way onto the walls of ClampArt.

On September 10th, 2009, Amy Stein's series, "Domesticated," will be open at my gallery in Chelsea. I first saw prints from this body of work at Review Santa Fe in 2006—over three years ago. Review Santa Fe is a prestigious annual portfolio review event to which prominent gallerists, curators, book publishers, magazine editors, and the like are invited to review photographers' portfolios. The event is vetted, so the quality of the work is generally quite accomplished. Amy Stein applied to the event, was accepted, and flew down to Santa Fe just one day after graduating from the School of Visual Arts with her MFA. Stein sat down at my table with her portfolio of prints, and we had a twenty-minute discussion while she presented her work. I remember being struck not only by the quality and sophistication of Stein's concept and imagery, but also by the manner in which she presented herself and her ideas. Both Stein and her work struck a chord, and I made note to keep my eye on this up-and-coming artist.





Many artists optimistically (and unrealistically) believe portfolio review events such as Review Santa Fe (Santa Fe, NM), FotoFest (Houston, TX), Photolucida (Portland, OR), and Rhubarb Rhubarb (Birmingham, England), to name just a few, to be analogous to a lottery, where, if they are lucky enough to meet the right arts professional, they will soon be catapulted to the highest echelons of the fine art world. While this has been the case in a few highly unusual instances, most of the time these are events where a lot of valuable networking occurs, and artists are able to plant seeds that may later flourish after a good deal of determination and old-fashioned hard work. Such was the case with regard to Amy Stein and me.

In June later that same year, I attended the Affordable Art Fair in New York City. Dan Halm, Director of External Affairs at the School of Visual Arts, had curated a booth of work by recent graduates for the event. This particular year he chose selections from Stein's "Domesticated" series for the fair. SVA's booth was definitely one of the strongest that I saw, and I clearly remembered Stein's distinctive imagery from Review Santa Fe. I liked the presentation to such an extent that I ended up purchasing a piece by Stein titled, "Pelt," in which a dead cat is being stretched and pinned to a board in preparation for taxidermy.



It was after this point that I began to notice Stein's name popping up everywhere. She had wisely added me to her email list, and I would receive periodic announcements of her ever-increasing accomplishments. Her photographs were included in various benefit auctions that I attended, and she began receiving an array of awards and honors. (Not coincidentally, I was one of the judges or jurors for a few of these honors, and was at least partly responsible for Stein's inclusion on the 2007 list of the world's top fifteen emerging photographers for American Photo magazine; for her securing the 2007 Critical Mass Book Award; and for her work making it into the Griffin Museum's annual juried show in 2007, which led to her first two-person show later that year at the same institution). Further, Stein began to exhibit her photographs extensively, and soon she secured representation by galleries outside of New York in California and Europe. Taking my clients to various art fairs, we began seeing Stein's prints on display, and it was clear that premier private collectors and prestigious public museums were already aggressively collecting her photographs. I began advising clients to acquire her work, and bought a second piece for my own collection, sensing that many of the editions were already beginning to sell out.



Another important point to note is that during this whole process, Stein regularly visited ClampArt, familiarizing herself with my stable of artists. Her face became a regular one at my gallery's events, and we began a warm acquaintance. I appreciated her perspective on the art I was exhibiting, and took note of her awareness and knowledge of the art world at large.



At some point in this flurry, Stein also initiated an intelligent blog, which quickly received a considerable amount of attention, and I found myself following what she had to write. By 2008 I was beginning to entertain the idea of asking Stein to allow me to represent her work in New York, seeing that she was also hard at work on other series of photographs building upon her already successful "Domesticated" project.

Then finally, just a few months past, an unexpected turn of events led to the opening of the September/October slot in my gallery's exhibition program - - arguably the most desirable time window of the year, marking the kick-off of the fall New York art season. Nervous about filling the gap so quickly, Stein's work immediately came to mind. She had proven herself in just a few short years as a serious artist devoted to her practice, and I knew she had a fully realized body of work ready to exhibit that had not yet received a solo show in New York City. To my delight, Stein was thrilled by the invitation, and the exhibition was planned quickly without a great deal of complication.

The process by which an artist's work finds its way into a commercial gallery is often long and circumvented. Stein was gracious, politely tenacious, and smart. Professional relationships can often be analogous to marriage, and after three years of "dating," I was certain that I liked Stein as a person. This was someone with whom I would enjoy working on a day-to-day basis; someone whom I could trust; and someone who clearly has a bright future, so that after one successful show I will not be left in the lurch with no further compelling work to promote.