

Touching objects can be addictive. Which is to say that it can be both pleasurable and repulsive at the same time. Walter Benjamin once noted that *all disgust is originally disgust at touching*.

Haim Steinbach's *basics* (1986) is among the first examples of his wedge shelves, triangular units with the precise dimensions of 90, 50, and 40 degrees used to display everyday things. Here, two Parabears in fatigues and a teddy bear in black vinyl sit in a line, facing out.

At first, they appear to be banal souvenir-shop novelties in thematic costumes—the sort of toy one prefers to give rather than receive. And yet, Steinbach’s presentation stuffs these plush send-ups to the military and masochism with libidinal energy and cathectic charge. It’s true, we don’t just *own* our teddy bears, we sleep with them.

Arranged side-by-side, these bears uncover our latent psychic connections to objects. We recognize friendly buddies or militarized bullies. We project a dark encounter between cub-scouts and deviants or a punning celebration of homomascularity. Jacques Lacan is there, but so is Richard Bulger and even some Quentin Tarantino. Steinbach works with our most basic attachments to ask why objects touch us the way that they do.

For her video installation *touch parade* (2011), A.K. Burns re-enacts a series of five “plastic love” YouTube videos. These acts might seem mundane to uninitiated viewers—crushing eggs underfoot, pumping car pedals, putting on layers of rubber gloves—but they are sexual fantasies, performed in plain sight, and uploaded by compulsive object-touchers from around the world.

Burns is interested in the continuities and incongruities between what makes these acts (and objects) legible and illegible, legit and illicit.

The artist carefully organizes the arrangement and placement of her five monitors so as to physically approximate the height of their corresponding imagery: the gloves are installed waist-high, while the feet pump pedals low to the ground. Since our bodies relate like to like, this display allows us to *almost* touch these objects — which either feels satisfying or creepy, depending on what you're in to.

touch parade by A.K. Burns and *basics*
by Haim Steinbach are both on view from
October 5th to 28th, 2012.