

New York photographer Lynn Stern summarizes three decades of work with her exhibit **'Frozen Mystery'** showing at the Gabarrón Foundation.

Intimacy and abstraction

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Three decades after the nudes and interiors of her first series, Lynn Stern's images of human and animal skulls and objects veiled by fabrics demonstrate that the artist has almost invariably maintained the goals she set for herself when she decided to use photography as an art medium.

For Stern, the object is a means – a 'medium,' we should say, given how mysterious her black-and-white images are. What stand out are points of light that emphasize the range of grays, as well as textures – created by interposing a fabric between the lens and the object – that evoke conte crayon drawings.

This is the fundamental conclusion that the visitor reaches after visiting Rooms Two and Three at the Gabarrón Museum, where one can contemplate a selection of the artist's works from series such as *Extended Landscapes*, *Interior Light*, *Unveilings*, *Animus*, *Dispossession*, *Veiled Still Lifes*, and more. The curator of the exhibition, Donald Kuspit, and the artist, Lynn Stern, were present at the opening yesterday. The exhibition will remain on view until January.

Stern explained that she has never been interested in the literal representation of scenes or objects; rather, what appeals to her eye is a certain quality of light that looks uniquely beautiful in the silver gelatin black-and-white process. "Instead of emphasizing the object itself, which is the norm in photography, I emphasize its surroundings: the nothingness, the emptiness that surrounds it." Stern finds it important to note that it was always this way for her, even in her earliest interiors and landscapes. "For me, a wall is not a wall, but rather a vehicle for light". The artist qualifies this with "as long as it is indirect light, not sunlight," which is present only in one of her first landscapes.

Constants

Intimacy and abstraction are, according to Kuspit, two of the constants that have defined Lynn Stern's career, "Her work takes you to an inner place, to the intimacy of the photographed object. It is what Freud would define as a deeper level of consciousness."

Additionally, Kuspit finds similarities to one of the main assumptions of minimalism. “The ‘less is more’ that Mies Van der Rohe elevated to the level of art generates powerful effects with very simple structures,” says Kuspit. The curator also compares some of Stern’s work to the gesturalism of abstract expressionism and to the American movement of ‘pure painting’.

In keeping with this tendency to form links with painting, which underlines Stern’s whole career, the artist acknowledges the influence of certain painters. One of them is Francis Bacon, whose gaping mouths are evoked in some of her screaming skulls.

Tradition

Stern’s passion for Bacon is at the core of her work. Perhaps unconsciously, her imagery in this exhibition also evokes the work of other artists. The whole exhibition takes you back to the Spanish mystic tradition, to artists such as Zurbarán (Stern’s work overflows with the spiritual nature of white) and also to his recent followers such as Cristino de Vera, though Stern claims not to know the work of this artist. Lynn Stern’s skulls do not always refer to traditional *vanitas*. Often, they are frozen at the peak of a screaming moment. Despite it all, her photography is silent.