

ARTFORUM

New York

Lewis Stein

ESSEX STREET

55 Hester Street

October 29, 2017–December 22, 2017



Lewis Stein, *Untitled*, ca. 1968, billy club, nail, 34 × 1 × 1".

After reading Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Structure of Behavior* (1942) while studying architecture at MIT, Lewis Stein developed an interest in dance and subsequently took classes at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1967. During a summer workshop with Anna Halprin that year, participants went on a field trip to Mendocino. When prompted to build structures on the beach, Stein dug a hole. Shortly afterward, the artist began the subtly anarchistic body of works on display here, whose functions are associated with the regulation and policing of space.

The objects, all *Untitled*, generate a pervasive atmosphere of malaise. This could be attributed to how these items are used for control and, simultaneously, the impotence rendered by their display as art. Some of the pieces include a wooden billy club, ca. 1968, which hangs by a nail at the entrance to the gallery. There's also a set of stanchions and red velvet rope, ca. 1971, interlocked in a configuration that outlines an enclosed space in the center of the gallery. A chrome-plated rail, ca. 1972, stands in front of a working push-button door buzzer, ca. 1976. And a functioning sodium streetlamp, ca. 1979–80, with its original steel extension arm, is installed on a wall only eight feet from the ground, suffusing everything with its warm light. Isolated and stripped of their abilities to punish, regulate, or restrict, Stein's works present a kind of realism predicated on the physiological response to stimulus—a rare opportunity to be intimate with a set of specific spatial relationships that govern conduct.

— Tabitha Piseno