

Chicago Tribune

June 2, 2008

By Alan Artner
May 30, 2008

Ben Gest's exhibition at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago in 2006 showed him a master of deceptive, constructed photo images that lie somewhere between snapshots and paintings. Now, at the Stephen Daiter Gallery, he embarks on a new series, again largely devoted to single figures, in which the dominant theme is more dramatic because it centers around struggle.

Of course, the "struggles" pictured are often mild, as when one elderly woman walks a dog or another bends to put on stockings. Only once in the show, in fact, is the incident depicted overtly stressful, as one small boy apparently bullies another. The others are devoted to such activities as driving, reaching for a pet or reading to a refractory child. But in each case the anxiety subtly tells.

This happens in part because of how Gest pieces together each picture from many digital grabs, allowing him to minimize this and exaggerate that. The result is that many aspects of each image are slightly "off," and the sum of these pictorial oddities creates as much tension as the incidents themselves. These photos demand--and repay--sustained viewing.

At 311 W. Superior St. 312-787-3350.