

CLOSE UP

JON DAVIES ON STAN DOUGLAS



The scene is familiar from hundreds of scandal sheets and films noir: three men gamble in what is no doubt a den of iniquity in a big, bad city. The man on the left grips his cash tightly, the veins on his haggard face bulging; the shirt cuffs of the man in the middle are so crisp and white that they misdirect your eye from the dice he throws—caught by the photographer in mid-air, about to decide the men's fortunes. Every detail screams actuality, but the image is, in fact, a constructed fantasy. Fascinated by postwar press photography, Stan Douglas conjures up a fictional shutterbug, ostensibly active from 1945 to 1951, and creates elaborately antique *mise en scènes* and a striking body of elegant black-and-white prints. The images in Douglas's *Midcentury Studio* (2010–11) series range from crime-scene shots à la Weegee to demonstrations of magic and deception. A few feature a pointing hand that extends into the frame, doubly drawing our gaze to the unusual attractions staged for our delectation. Through Douglas's maniacal attention to detail, the project becomes about a decisive historical moment: when photography began to transport all the glamorous and grotesque details of the modern world into our living rooms.

Jon Davies is a Toronto-based writer and the assistant curator of public programs at The Power Plant. Stan Douglas's series *Midcentury Studio* was on view from March 23 to April 23 at David Zwirner in New York.

Stan Douglas *Dice*, 1950 2010 Digital fibre print mounted on Dibond aluminum 1.87 x 1.50 m COURTESY THE ARTIST/DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK