

PHOTOGRAPHY & CONTEMPORARY COLLECTIONS

Charlie White

Getting Lindsay Linton

2000

Chromogenic development print

36 1/8 x 60 1/4 in. (91.8 x 153 cm)

Gift of Martin Z. Margulies

2005.16.28

Charlie White works primarily as a still photographer but creates each image as though he were shooting a film. His works often have a seemingly casual, even cartoonish spontaneity, yet are the result of careful staging of his subjects and the construction of complex sets and props, enhanced with precise digital manipulation of his images and prints. *Getting Lindsay Linton* is from a series of photographs in which White used a life-sized puppet named Joshua. In an interview with Lisa Anne Auerbach in the 2001 book *Charlie White: Photographs*, White

said he “conceptualized” Joshua “as a literal manifestation of ontological insecurity.” How viewers then respond to this alien, even grotesque figure and the situations he is placed in by White challenges the viewers’ empathy and reflects their own insecurities.

Audiences have been engaged and repelled, even angered, by this work. Nearly life-size, and hung at eye level, the pictorial space of the image merges with that of the viewer in the gallery. White carefully positioned the arm of one of the abusive men across the front of the group, creating a kind of barrier preventing the viewer from entering and interceding. According to White, the ongoing torment of a shower of milk was meant to suggest impending and escalating violence rather than the completed action of a physical blow. This creates a tension and an impossible desire to intercede that is more powerful than if he had shown the aftermath of a violent act, which would leave the viewer as a voyeur rather than a participant observer.

Although the staging of this work and the artificiality of the puppet figure, Joshua, is obvious, this picture still provokes a strong emotional response in the viewer. Both male and female viewers are appalled by the obvious cruelty of the tormenting of a woman by this circle of brutish young men, yet some empathize with both the victim and the attackers. Curiously, the unrealistic figure of Joshua may be the means of creating the contradictory responses. His role as tormentor, passive observer, or even another victim remains ambiguous, but like the passive viewers in the gallery, he is automatically implicated by his inaction.

