

PETER WÄCHTLER

PLAYING LA POLPIDULA

JANUARY 25 - MARCH 27TH, 2020

OPENING JANUARY 25TH FROM 6-8PM

The work of Peter Wächtler is removed from the coercion of time. His project circulates around the labor of handcraft and the use of fictional histories as genre. Hand-drawn animations, sculpted figures, large format watercolors, written and spoken words accumulate to form narratives that tend towards the tedious, tense and absurd aspects of storytelling. Borrowing from distant and compacted views, with an insistence on familiarity without specificity, his material habitus resonates with our internal stock imagery and cultural foundations.

Untitled, 2013 is Wächtler's first work using the analogue technique of cel animation. With a loosely connected coupling of sound and image, a rat spends his days in claustrophobic, squalid quarters made of stone and brick. Day after day, the exhausted rat arrives home late evening. Tripping over a carpet, a bowling ball slides off a nearby table to land on his head. After shaking off the impact, he lethargically climbs into bed. The rat tosses and turns, the sun rises. Dragging himself out from beneath a blanket, he places the heavy ball back on the table and slogs off to face the day. The dejected scenario repeats on loop. Wächtler's overlaid reading pendulates from the absurd to heart-felt and personal with a sermon-like conviction. Each confession starting with, "How I..." is deposited in English with thick German inflection. Initially, we believe the artist is talking about personal experience but second-guess the authenticity of the account as the reading is littered with disconnection and contradiction. "[Wächtler's] work vehemently amps up the sense of palpable investment - then punctures that impression at the points of maximum intensity, of which there are plenty. What is thus rendered ironic is not so much the notion that any actual artistic form could capture the artist's boundless subjectivity, but the inflated, idealized image of the artist itself."¹ The culmination of Wächtler's prose concludes with a sincere rendition of Bruce Springsteen's 1980 ballad, "The River".

A group of six busts cast in plaster approximate bourgeois history portraits of archetypal figures following the sculptural tradition committed to the celebration of virtue, achievement and heroism. Inherently domestic, the nondescript vehicles have been sculpted from Wächtler's imagination and might be found in a wood paneled study, a university library or the corridor of an 18th century mansion. The poses transition from courageous to mundane. The details of this team are absent, leaving the viewer to fabricate the circumstances of the life once lived. Their achievements and human capacities are as exchangeable as their thoughts and personalities. The figures carry the load of signifying cultural value but the accreditation for this distinction remains opaque.

The architectural model of a crudely constructed terra-cotta castle is a displaced history building, a marker of territory and a symbol of defense. The tall walls and sturdy construction, once the definition of war and impenetrability is an object in-between sculpture and lost relic.

A series of new watercolors depict a crouching figure tying the shoelaces of his boots. Drawn from life in Wächtler's studio using a rigged model, the artist renders an unsharable personal experience. The movement borrows from the panning of a movie camera. The prolonged moment is captured in the round and presented in six frames. The overextended pose is reorganized in a linear presentation within the gallery, creating a flattened experience of a circular view. Facial features never visible, we lack awareness of the mood or condition of the character. The repetition of this banal action is magnified by a steady stream of passers. Like the rat's beleaguered experience of the everyday, the unknown figure's quotidian effort mirrors the sincere struggle for authenticity of the lived encounter. Dependably, the range of characters constructed by Wächtler are affected by a multifold of emotional and intellectual idiosyncrasies.

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Peter Wächtler (b. 1979 Hannover, Germany) lives and works in Berlin. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich (2019); Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2019); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2017); MUKHA, Antwerp (2017); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2016) and Renaissance Society, Chicago (2016), Lars Freidrich, Berlin; Dependance, Brussels; and Reena Spaulings, New York, among others. Peter Wächtler publications of short stories include: *The Set*, Published by Etablissement d'en face and SIC Brussels, 2011; *Come On*, Published by Sternberg Press, 2013; *Jolly Rogers*, Kunsthalle Zurich and Bergen Kunsthalle (eds.), Published by Sternberg Press, 2019.

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1. Jakob Schillinger, "Interiority Complex: The Art of Peter Wächtler" *Artforum*, (November 2014).