

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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ARTFORUM

Peter Fischli and David Weiss

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 1062 N ORANGE GROVE
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It seems surprising that this is Peter Fischli and David Weiss's first major solo exhibition in Los Angeles since 1987, given how central the city was to the Swiss artists' early collaborative work. Weiss moved to the city in 1979 and Fischli soon followed: Together they spent much of the next three years there, featuring L.A. in their first film, *The Point of Least Resistance*, 1981. The city also played home to the artists' earliest experiments with an unusual sculptural medium. Taking a cue from its then-widespread use by Hollywood set designers, in 1982 Fischli and Weiss began carving and painting polyurethane resin into quotidian trompe l'oeil sculptures; it was an approach they returned to often over the next three decades. Liberated from any burden of authenticity or functionality, the resulting objects—what critic Boris Groys has called "replicants"—are free to be banal, philosophical, cosmic, and very funny, somehow all at once.

This presentation of *Untitled*, 1994–2013, makes use of the exhibition itself as a context for an elaborately staged reproduction of an artist's work site. Visitors move through an encyclopedic ensemble of paint-spattered brushes, studio paraphernalia, cigarette butts, and coffee cups, as well as unsettling non sequiturs—a doll's empty bed nestled against four car tires—and hokey one-liners. It's as though whoever was working here has just stepped out for a moment, but of course he hasn't. David Weiss's death in 2012 gives these pieces an unexpected poignancy, evoking the artist's long-standing interest in the unstable, even paradoxical relation between irony and sincerity. The room is as preposterous and silent as a cenotaph and what better roadside attraction than an untenanted tomb: morbidly corny and vacant, inauthentic, and yet despite—or because—of all that, capable of eliciting a powerful, even disturbing range of responses. Everyday objects take on the uncanny aura of grave goods—with viewer as tomb raider. Or is it archaeologist? Either way, the objects practically beg to be handled, if not looted. (Neither is allowed.) In a rare interview with Jörg Heiser in 2006, Fischli and Weiss described the "psychedelic" effect produced by picking them up. According to Fischli, visitors find each disconcertingly light, "a bit like will-o-wisps." Or, perhaps, phantoms.



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled* (detail), 1994-2013, hand-carved polyurethane and acrylic paint, 164 parts, dimensions variable.

— Alexander Keefe