

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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sculpture



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled (Rotterdam)*, 2003. Hand-carved and painted polyurethane, 59 parts, dimensions variable. Photo: © Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Peter Fischli and David Weiss

October 23, 2024 by Susan Canning

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In these days of AI, fake news, and reality TV, the more than 400 polyurethane sculptures created between 1993 and 2014 by Peter Fischli and the late David Weiss appear rather old school. And yet, every single hand-carved and painted thing included in “Polyurethane Objects” (on view through October 26, 2024)—from plywood, peg boards, pallets, and pedestals to tools, bowls, brushes, paint cans, cleaning supplies, and other items—is a meticulously crafted facsimile of the real thing.

Canning, Susan. “Peter Fischli and David Weiss.” *Sculpture Magazine*, October 23, 2024.

Installed in a large space lit only by skylights, this paradoxical display could easily be mistaken for a construction site or a deinstalled exhibition. Leaning against the wall, stacked up on the floor, or scattered about and gathered into informal groupings, this assortment of materials and everyday things invites curious exploration, even as its purposeful disarray undermines any presumption of knowing reality when one sees it.

Fischli and Weiss's strategy is both contrary and subversive. Every detail that accompanies the experience of moving through this installation of carefully rendered objects works hard to undermine the gaze. Just how do the artists get plastic to look like plaster, to resemble the swipe of a brush, the scuff of a shoe, a half-cleaned bowl? By separating looking from the physicality of touch and form from function or purpose, these handmade things can only affirm their authenticity as sculptural objects. Joined together into still-life compositions, they trace the process of composing and making, forming a memory of the invention, toil, and moments of rest that take place in the studio.

While the obsessive intensity and immersive illusion of these assembled accumulations inspire questioning and doubt, they also encourage unexpected, intimate, and wryly humorous exchanges. Invited to discern what lies behind, beneath, or within, one discovers a doll or toy, boots, a small chair. Incongruously placed next to simulated boxes, pedestals, and planks of wood, such mundane, perhaps abandoned items affirm the value of the coincidental and propose looking with naiveté or a sense of play. Other details, like the carved renderings of Tylenol and energy drinks, discarded cigarettes and lighters, explore the cravings, tedium, and pain that accompany rigorous practice; half-eaten peanuts and an open carton of milk set on a tray seem hardly adequate for sustaining so much labor.

We are left to wander about, never knowing where the installation begins or ends. The arrangements of mostly untitled sculptures, all with varying dimensions, are assigned numbers and dates but gain meaning only through chance and informal encounters, which, in turn, inspire contemplation of how these things interact with reality and illusion. Presented neither as casts nor as Duchampian readymades, but always as artifice in the service of art, Fischli and Weiss's polyurethane objects, placed in a space and given meaning by their associations and surroundings, are worlds newly made, where over and over again each viewer can consider the fluid and mutable exchange between art and life.