

Press Release

Peter Fischli David Weiss

November 22, 2023–February 3, 2024

Public Reception: November 21, 6pm–8pm

Sprüth Magers, London

Sprüth Magers

Peter Fischli and David Weiss have a unique, whimsical perspective on the mundane material of everyday life. Since they began working together in 1979, the artistic duo set out to document and investigate their surroundings, juxtaposing the ordinary with the spectacular. Sprüth Magers is pleased to announce an exhibition of famed works of central importance to Fischli and Weiss' oeuvre in the London gallery. Revolving around the recurring figures of Rat and Bear, the show traces the brown rat (deemed a pest and ugly) and the panda bear (considered endangered and adorable) throughout the artists' three decades of collaboration. Across video, slide projection, photography, kinetic sculpture and several works on paper, Fischli and Weiss playfully and humorously employ the animal costumes as vehicles for probing Western dualistic thought and its dependence on opposing principles.

Even before entering, the show declares itself a production by and with Rat and Bear, who are suspended from the gallery's ceiling and visible through its street-level window. Inside, viewers find themselves having to maneuver around the dangling, rotating, and dramatically lit life-sized puppets of *Rat and Bear (Mobilé)* (2008/09) – fashioned after the costumes worn by the artists for their first film, *The Point of Least Resistance* (1981), which is on view in the upstairs gallery. Stumbling across a costume supply and fascinated by Hollywood, Fischli and Weiss posed as movie directors to rent the outfits. The film – shot on Super 8 – follows the odd couple of plush animals through Los Angeles as they embark on an exploration of the art world's idiosyncrasies. In its course, a faux detective story involving a murder unfolds to a soundtrack that mixes pop songs and imitates popular film scores of the time. Providing the conceptual and material groundwork for the artists' future joint practice, *The Point of Least Resistance* adopts cinematic archetypes centered around a duo's comic opposition to open artistic and philosophical examinations of false dichotomies like fiction versus reality or labor versus leisure.

In drawings and diagrams from the series *Order and Cleanliness* (1981/2003), the "authors," Rat and Bear, map their inquiries into the banal and the existential. Developed as ongoing conversations, this collection accumulated while the duo worked on a particular idea and reflects Fischli and Weiss' preference for the interrogatory over the declarative as well as their penchant for phenomenological collecting. This body of work is complemented by eight performative photographs in

which the duo lightheartedly explores *Principles in the Everyday* (1981); dressed in all white and all black – shadow images of Rat and Bear – they pose in different arrangements along with words describing contrary states and systems. In one image, the figure in black wears a sign that reads “High Spirits” (*Übermut*); on his hands and knees, he has placed his head inside a sizable sphere with the word “Fatigue” (*Müdigkeit*) written on it. Behind the sphere, the figure in white sports the word “Remorse” (*Reue*) above his obscured face.

The room-filling installation, *Untitled (Questions Projection, small)* (1981–2001), comprises multiple projectors showing handwritten questions in German, English, Italian, and Japanese. Informed by the queries of *Order and Cleanliness*, it delves further into what Fischli and Weiss understood to be “popular opposites.” Combining the amusing with the earnest, varying texts covering the walls – crossing over and under one another, appearing only for a few seconds before being replaced by the next – allude to an inner monologue. As in all works on view, Rat and Bear examine the facets of daily life, attempting to bring “light into the darkness” and to find logic in a chaotic world. Probing the framework of reality itself, the eccentric characters function as integral ciphers for the entirety of Fischli and Weiss’ collaborative projects.

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Peter Fischli (*1952 in Zürich) and David Weiss (1946–2012) began working together in the mid-1970s, continuing their collaborative practice until Weiss’ death. Together, they have taken part in many international biennials, including the Venice Biennale (2013, 2003, 1988), the Venice Architecture Biennale (2012) and the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2010). Retrospectives have been held at Tate Modern, London (2006), Kunsthaus Zürich (2007), Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2008) and at Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and Museo Jumex, Mexico City, MEX (2016). In 2003, they were awarded the Golden Lion at the 50th Venice Biennale for *Fragenprojektion (Questions, 1981–2002)*. Their works were included in documenta X, 1997, and their film, *Der Lauf der Dinge (The Way Things Go, 1987)*, was shown at documenta VIII, 1987. Fischli and Weiss have also presented solo exhibitions at the Glenstone Collection Potomac (2012), at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (2010) and at Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2010), as well as numerous group exhibitions.

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