

URS FISCHER: MARGUERITE DE PONTY

OCTOBER 28, 2009–FEBRUARY 7, 2010
SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH FLOORS

Urs Fischer creates artworks that give physical form to fantasy. Encompassing the wonder of the sublime, gestures of brute force, and interventions that subtly alter the viewer's perception, Fischer's work is captivating whether it is immediately impressive or mischievously unnoticeable. Like a practiced magician, Fischer succeeds in transforming materials into unpredictable inventions, fusing slapstick humor with explorations of scale and distortion. While his oeuvre does not reveal a recognizable stylistic unity, imagination plays a central role in all of his work.

Fischer was born in Zurich in 1973 and currently lives and works in New York. This exhibition marks his first large-scale solo show in an American museum, as well as the first time one artist has installed all three of the New Museum's gallery floors. Rather than a traditional midcareer retrospective, Fischer has elected to create three new and immersive installations, one on each floor. The fourth floor is populated by five aluminum monuments; like massive twisting cocoons, they seem to have a life of their own. Their physical presence is appealingly enigmatic, betraying Fischer's interest in distortion and decay, found in the work of predecessors such as Franz West and Dieter Roth. Fischer's pieces, however, characteristically involve an elaborate process of transformation to reach their final presentation. These large aluminum sculptures started out as small pieces of clay that the artist squeezed and molded in his fist; they were then scanned in three dimensions, enlarged approximately fifty times their size, and cast in aluminum. Titled *Marguerite de Ponty*, *Miss Satin*, *Ix*, and *Zizi*, the four standing sculptures—as well as the title of the exhibition—all take their names from French poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé's pseudonyms. These different voices represent Mallarmé's foray into fashion writing, yet take up a larger discourse of fact and fiction, irreality, and time—all of which relate to the exhibition.

Amidst Fischer's biomorphic monuments, a pink lamppost appears to melt, held up by some invisible force. Like a Salvador Dalí painting realized in three dimensions, it seems suspended between solid and liquid: the skin of a deboned object. Fischer has also produced a piano and a pair of crutches that seems to collapse in the same manner; to achieve the desired effect, Fischer cast every detail of the objects in silicone and arranged them carefully in his studio, propping them up and letting them flop over as he liked. He then recast them again in aluminum, which is what gives them their contradictory presence: both brittle and limp.

At first glance, the third-floor installation appears sparse. However, on closer inspection, every inch of wall and ceiling has been replaced with an image of itself. Fischer has reinvented the ancient tradition of trompe l'oeil—French for “trick the eye”—painting, which garnered its name during the Baroque period of the seventeenth century. Traditionally, trompe l'oeil painting was used to open up architecture: to create the semblance of a window or vaulted ceiling where there was none. It was also playfully employed by painters to befuddle their viewers; for example, to give the false impression of objects and papers tacked up on a wall. While trompe l'oeil uses paint to create the optical illusion of three-dimensional objects, Fischer does not paint, nor does he fabricate an alternative reality for the space. Instead, he had every wall and ceiling detail meticulously photographed in very high resolution, capturing the spectrum of blue to brown light, scuff marks, and minute inconsistencies in the wall paint.

Using an intricate mapping system, the photographs were tiled together to create wallpaper. Instead of the wall, the viewer sees the corresponding image of the shadowed wall, turning the area that is usually intended to recede from the eye into the work of art itself, an incongruity that makes the piece both alluring and illogical.

By comparison, the second floor is a spectacle of images. Arguably Fischer's most ambitious installation to date, this project consisted of an inventory of fifty-one objects selected by the artist, approximately 25,000 photographs, and more than twelve tons of steel. Fischer had each object photographed from every side in great detail, and then silkscreened the images onto fifty mirrored chrome steel boxes of varying sizes. Laid out like a city grid, the highly reflective boxes project a dizzying array of images, all of which are enlarged to varying degrees. Like a collage that engulfs, disorients, and dwarfs the viewer, the mirrored surfaces of the boxes create an optical maze and a dazzling labyrinth of curiosities.

Together, the three floors offer viewers the intermingling of art and fantasy. Reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's penchant for mirrors and holes as thresholds to parallel worlds, Fischer plays with scale and perception. He engages syrupy colors and sensational—even frivolous—feats like a floating cake sculpture and a mechanical tongue. Carroll toyed with conventional rules of language and logic, achieving “literary nonsense,” the effect caused by an excess of meaning, rather than a lack of it. Influenced by Surrealism and Dada, Fischer's hallucinatory world is an artistic counterpart to nonsense. Like Carroll's psychedelic adventures, Fischer's work is similarly joyous and dark, simple and complex, spectacular and austere. The exhibition is viscerally enticing and conceptually amorphous. It is saturated with paradox and imagination, offering visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in a Fischer's own carefully choreographed theater of the absurd.

—Jarrett Gregory



Urs Fischer, self-portrait, *The Heart of the Ocean*, May Yohe & Putnam Strong, *Zero Year Curse*, *Tavernier Blue*, *Hope Diamond*, 2006. Inkjet print on paper, 31 1/4 x 24 3/4 x 1 3/8 in (79 x 62 x 3.5 cm). Courtesy the artist; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York; Sadie Coles HQ, London; and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich

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Photo: Benoit Pailley

Urs Fischer, *Cumpadre*, 2009. Fishing line, croissant, and butterfly; dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York; Sadie Coles HQ, London; and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich

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Media Partner *Interview*

Public Programs

NEW MUSEUM FIRST SATURDAYS FOR FAMILIES

Urs Fischer: Mesmerizing Environments

Saturday, November 7, 10–12 p.m.

Immerse yourself in Fischer's universe, which is both spectacular and fragile, and then create a unique object that will transform the seventh-floor Sky Room (and later your bedroom or living room) in a unique and surprising way.

Fourth-Floor Gallery and Sky Room

FREE

Urs Fischer: Melting Forms

Saturday, December 5, 10–12 p.m.

Fischer's sculptures and installations present new perspectives on quotidian items and consumer goods, giving physical form to fantasy. Inspired by Fischer's work, sculpt an ordinary object and transform it into an extraordinary work of art.

Third- and Fourth-Floor Galleries, and Sky Room

FREE

For information on all exhibition-related programs at the New Museum, please visit newmuseum.org/events.

URS FISCHER'S FILM SELECTIONS

Urs Fischer selects a series of film pairings to be screened in the New Museum Theater.

Thursday, October 29, 2009

5 p.m.: *Touki Bouki*

7 p.m.: US premiere of *Cosmonaut Polyakov*

Saturday, January 9, 2009

2 p.m.: *Up the Yangtze*

4 p.m.: *Yves Saint Laurent 5 Avenue Marceau 75116 Paris*

Friday, January 22, 2009

5 p.m.: *Cosmonaut Polyakov*

7 p.m.: *Up the Yangtze*

Friday, February 5, 2009

5 p.m.: *Touki Bouki*

7 p.m.: *Yves Saint Laurent 5 Avenue Marceau 75116 Paris*

EACH PAIRING \$6 MEMBERS, \$8 GENERAL PUBLIC

The New Museum offers half-price same-day admission with purchase of a ticket to any public program.

This exhibition is curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Director of Special Exhibitions.

A 480-page catalogue, *Urs Fischer: Shovel in a Hole*, accompanies the exhibition. Co-published by the New Museum and JRP Ringier, the book includes the most complete selection of Urs Fischer's works to date as well as 450 color reproductions, and texts by Massimiliano Gioni, Director of Special Exhibitions at the New Museum; Bice Curiger, Curator at the Kunsthaus Zürich; and Jessica Morgan, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Tate Modern. The catalogue is available (\$69.95 / \$55.96 Members) at the New Museum Store or online newmuseumstore.org.

Free iPod audio tours of “Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty” are available at the Visitor Services Desk in the lobby.

Visitors can participate in free, docent-led public tours of the Museum's current exhibitions Wednesday–Friday at 12:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 and 3 p.m. For information on group tours, please visit newmuseum.org/learn or call 212.219.1222 x235.

New Museum First Saturdays For Families take place on the first Saturday of every month from 10–12 p.m. and are free to the public. Tickets are given on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please visit newmuseum.org/learn/school_and_youth or call 212.219.1222 x235. Please note that during the exhibition “Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty” strollers will not be allowed in the galleries. Please leave strollers at the coat check.