



L. Peter Fischli / David Weiss, *Untitled (Sleeping Puppets)*, 2008–09; two rag puppets, two breathing machines; 13 x 100 x 48 inches

R. *Big Corner*, 2009; reinforced clay; 13¼ x 13 x 13⅞ inches; © Peter Fischli / David Weiss, images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

NEW YORK

Fischli & Weiss Matthew Marks Gallery

Now entering their fourth decade of collaboration, Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss have consistently delivered a mix of the serious and the silly. Their subversive installations of the eighties and nineties—hand-made objects that looked like mass-produced domestic toss-outs or trash—were mysterious and disorienting. The artists ushered in a new domain of conceptualism steeped in semiotics, which they embodied in immaculate craft that simultaneously undid itself, like a self-refuting ouroboros consuming its own tail.

If Fischli & Weiss were once the go-to guys for irreverent genre-bending art, moving easily between sculpture, installation, photography and film, they've been somewhat off the radar in more recent years. Yet, in the wake of more aggressive pranksters like Maurizio Cattelan, more dazzling magicians like Roxy Paine, or less-droll phenomenologists like Olafur Eliasson, the duo nonetheless continues to forge a unique path, due in large part to a practice grounded solidly in the studio.

At Matthew Marks, Fischli & Weiss' strongest traits—their rigor and silliness—are amply displayed. *Sun, Moon and Stars* is installed handsomely in the gallery's cavernous West 22nd Street space. Comprised of nearly 800 full-page advertisements pulled from magazines (presented in side-by-side pairs across 38 glass-topped display tables), the installation reads like a library of contemporary Western consumerism.

The image pairs were chosen for relationships of content and form. An ad for Polo kids wear is paired with one for the Euro Teddy 2007 conference, accentuating the knit caps and scarves worn by the child models and teddy bears. Another pairing likens a lace haute-couture gown to a spray of Krug champagne. Elsewhere, tables are dedicated to a theme, like the

one where cosmetics, chocolate and yogurt drip from the mouths of pretty models, or a group that relies on black images with a horror bent. If the project's methodology feels a bit facile, a stroll among the tables generates a stimulating analysis of visual culture and its mercantile applications.

In the gallery's West 24th Street space, another profusion of objects/signs—the exhibition *Clay and Rubber*—draws together sculptural works created by the duo over the past twenty-five years. Simply displayed on white pedestals, these include a dog dish, a piece of pipe, bricks, stair steps and a dresser drawer, among other aggressively quotidian "subjects." The real dialogue isn't about (or between) the objects and what they are but how they are made, either hand-formed in dun-colored, unfired clay or carefully cast in black rubber, thus slipping back and forth between the thing and its representation.

Lastly, in the small West 22nd Street annex, two toy animals in nubby fabric lie on their backs, heads resting on a pile of blankets. These characters are Rat and Bear, recurring stand-ins for the artists and their collaboration since at least the late seventies. Under dimmed lights they doze soundly, their round bellies rising and falling softly, accompanied by the faint sound of snoring. The animatronics are barely perceptible, even from a few feet away. There is something poignant, even a little sad in the extreme subtlety of the mechanical effects. The work doesn't clamor for attention, which in today's market feels slightly like resignation. Or perhaps it's simply the grace of two mature artists who, at this moment in art, would rather be napping.

John Ewing is a freelance writer and editor and the copy editor of Art Lies.