

23.04.2016 - 12.06.2016

# PETER WÄCHTLER



## ENGLISH

In Peter Wächtler's exhibition 9, image and sound of his video work *Untitled* (2014) take centre stage in the KIOSK spaces. Trumpets reverberate through the space and a boat glides through a flat expanse of water. Majestically, they announce the beginning and introduce the narrator who addresses us with his monologue 'from high up here'. The address takes the form of an expression of gratitude or a farewell speech, written, it seems, for an invited, more or less familiar audience. From the vantage point of a helicopter, we slowly follow the winding river that leads us into the city while the narrator launches a stream of anecdotes. He steers the wheel in search of meaning and sense, and meanders from one fantasy to the next absurdity, to finally run into a nine-page oration.

The anonymous narrator lures the audience into a conspiratorial bond. He shares highly personal, exclusive information, only to leave us behind, at an ironic distance, with an incoherent plot and an uncanny sense of anti-climax. To some extent, we can identify with the character poetically evoked by Wächtler, yet his eccentricity and deadpan humour keeps us at a distance. His memories are presented in exaggerated form – either deadly serious or as something resembling slapstick. We are activated by an urgent message like 'Skip all the comparison, be your own example!', but at once everything is put into perspective by a 'bumsie bumsie shoo bee doo bee, whatever'. The long-winded speech presents itself as existential and grave in its rhetoric, but simultaneously puts a teasing focus on the most banal human behaviour.

There is also a disconnection between text and image, between action and non-action: personal, everyday micro-narratives are combined with anonymous macro-level visuals of a big city. Through these subtle discrepancies, our attention is drawn towards the visual nature of the language itself: its rhythm, emphases, and structure. Moreover, the script is not performed by a native speaker. Wächtler's accent clearly comes through in the English version, and we hear another speaker, another interpretive level, in the Dutch version.

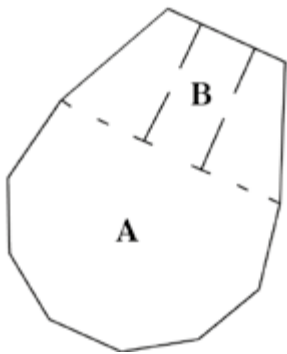
Wächtler calls forth a visual language and verbal images. His narratives are translated to various media such as drawings, animations, sound pieces, or, as is the case here, film and sculpture. The complex, fantastic plots create an atmosphere of humour, satire and alienation. He adapts the formal characteristics of different cinematic or literary genres and simultaneously undermines their original pedagogic, emphatic, or entertaining function. Even though he renders his narrative in the first person, it remains uncertain to what extent the characters are based on fiction, authentic memories, or mere anecdotes. They are limited in their communication. They are conflicting, peculiar, passive or to the contrary, very decisively.

Like the *Untitled* video piece, the exhibition title does not communicate an unambiguous meaning. What the number 9 evokes is rather a series of unrelated formal and cultural associations. This is also the case with the painted cardboard sculpture titled *Barn*: it might be one of those innumerable self-made sheds and shacks one sees on any train ride through Flanders. It represents an anonymous, generic construction type that can also be a very individual form of self-expression in its concrete realization. Like the Dutch language that resounds in the space, the barn breathes a familiar sense of the local.

Wächtler's work is part of the digital present and of its urban and exhibition contexts, but also distances itself from these, or, at the least, attempts to measure its distance from them. 9 plays off various scales against each other: the functional, industrial shed is scaled and translated to

a handmade model. The Dutch narrator offsets the grave and international ring of the English version. From a helicopter, the camera captures the most encompassing view of the metropolis, while the words attempt to draft the most concrete image of a single individual.

This narrative laconically stares back at us like a mirror in which we see, all too painfully recognizable, man's struggle for recognition and a sense of purpose. What is revealed through its exaggeration is the inherent absurdity and vulnerability of this struggle. The protagonist is at a crossroads in life, he finally stripped of his 'camouflage jacket', 'reptile skin', and 'bed sheet button-down shirt' and stands there transfixed, naked and vulnerable.



PETER WÄCHTLER

9

ROOM A

*Untitled*

2014

HDV

26', 26'' (English version)

26', 28'' (Dutch version)

Dutch speaker: Etienne Wynants

Translator to Dutch: Wouter Meeus

ROOM B

*Barn*

2016

corrugated cardboard, paint

86 x 40,5 x 24,5 cm

All works courtesy of the artist and Dépendance, Brussels; Lars Friedrich, Berlin and Reena Spaulings, New York.

Next to the exhibition, a selection of Peter Wächtler's animation films will be shown in KIOSK's screening room at different times during the evening openings.

**KIOSK**